



Warm Email Prospecting for Freelancers

More Trigger Event Ideas

I wanted to come back to the topic of trigger events, because this is one of the areas where I get asked the most questions.

So in this lesson, we're going to talk more about what makes trigger events so powerful when you're prospecting with email. I'm also going to give you 18 *additional* ideas of powerful trigger events to look out for.

Again, a trigger event is simply a big event or change within an organization (or even in that organization's industry) that creates an opportunity for you as a self-employed professional to get your foot in the door.

One good way to look at this is to realize that when it comes to any of the services you provide, your prospects are always in one of only three states:

1. They're either enjoying status quo
2. They've entered a window of need
3. Or they're searching for solutions

Status Quo

Window of Need

Searching for
Solutions

Let me explain each of these in more detail.

Let's take a company's website that's been left intact for two years. Everything's running fine, or so the company thinks. But that quickly changes when a new marketing director is hired and she realizes that the number of unique weekly visitors coming into the site is really low. The conversion rate from visitor to inquiry is also unacceptable. And the design and architecture are outdated.

This marketing director has now entered a window of need.

Sales trainer and author of the book *Shift*, Craig Elias, calls this state the "Window of Dissatisfaction." And he notes that this is your biggest window of opportunity as a service provider. That's because according to Elias, you are FIVE TIMES more likely to win the business when you're the first viable service provider who approaches a prospect while they're in that Window of Dissatisfaction.

If they don't realize they have a problem (meaning they're in status quo) or if they're already researching options, your chances go down significantly. But get the *timing* right and you'll dramatically increase your chances of starting some dialog with the prospect—and possibly get hired.

OK, I have an exercise for you. And for this exercise, you'll want to download the "client trigger events" worksheet in this lesson. In fact, let's go through it together. So if you don't have it in front of you now, pause this video and come back to it once you have that worksheet printed out.

The first thing you want to do is to list the last five clients you've brought on board. If you're still getting started and don't yet have five clients you've worked with, that's fine. Just list the ones that have hired you.

Next to each client, write down the *core reason* they hired you. Not the trigger event, but the *reason* behind the event. There was obviously a reason they decided to pay for your services. What was the reason for each client? What was their main need? In other words, the event or situation that created a Window of Dissatisfaction for that prospect.

In the example I gave you a minute ago, the core reason that prospect entered a Window of Dissatisfaction was a website that wasn't attracting enough visitors or converting enough of the visitors that were coming in.

Next, list the trigger event that made this Window of Dissatisfaction "visible" to those outside of that organization. In other words, the "red flag" that indicated a potential opportunity.

Going back to the previous example, the trigger event was the hiring of a new marketing director. As an outsider, you probably have no way of knowing that this company's website is suffering. But if the company hires a new marketing director, that could spell opportunity for you. Because historically new blood in an organization means new priorities and new projects.

The marketing director may not have been hired because of the poor-performing website. But the event in and of itself is a good excuse to contact the prospect. If you're successful in generating some dialogue with her, you may at that point learn that there is an opportunity to help them with their website.

Finally, in the last box, write down the first project you received from that client.

The reason I'm having you run through this exercise is that now that you have the client, you have full visibility into what created that Window of Dissatisfaction. You may not have connected with that client *because* of the trigger event. But now that you know the full story, you can probably take a stab at a trigger event that, at the time, may have pointed to a potential opportunity in that organization.

So, by analyzing what happened back then with each of these clients, you can start training yourself to see potential opportunities with other prospects.

Let me give you five more examples from my last five clients, most of which are still clients of mine.

Client	Core Need	Trigger Event	First Project
Company A	Ready to start prospecting aggressively for new business	Completed a new round of funding	White paper
Company B	Lack of quality credible content to generate qualified leads	Hired a new director of marketing	White paper
Company C	Company embarked on a new strategic direction	Hired a new VP of marketing	Rewrite company's entire website
Company D	New, aggressive push for sales growth	Issued a press release about its recent growth, growth plans and expanded sales team	Write 10 pieces of new marketing collateral
Company E	Need to rebrand all marketing/sales communications	New ownership	New website and marketing collateral

In my "Company A" example, it wasn't just the new round of funding they received that created a favorable situation for me. It was the fact that this company had a pressing need to start generating new business. Sure, the round of funding was the "visible" part of the core need—the tip of the iceberg, so to speak. But it was their aggressive business development plan that sparked the need.

So it's good to know both—the visible trigger event AND the core need. Because even though the funding was the only piece of information I initially had when I approached them, once I started talking with the prospect I realized that there were some aggressive plans in place. In other words, I knew for sure that the funding was a valid trigger event for my services.

Many of the Best Trigger Events Are NOT Published

Here's another important point to note: many of the best trigger events are NOT going to be published in your local business chronicle or appear in the local news. I realize that many of the examples I showed you in a previous lesson are the types of events that would be public and easily found. But the fact is that some of the best trigger events occur and stay under the radar.

So where do you learn about these unpublished events?

- Through your network of friends, relatives and colleagues
- And through social media networking

In some cases you'll hear about these potential opportunities in conversation. But you may have to look for them. In other words, your colleague may not tell you, "Hey, I just found out that XYZ Company just hired a new VP of marketing. You should contact her to see if you can help her." Instead, the information may come to you in passing. Your colleague may mention it as part of something else she's talking with you about.

This is why it's so important that you go through this exercise I just walked you through. Because by being more aware of what's triggered project opportunities for you in the past you're going to be better able to identify good opportunities much more easily in the future.

And don't just wait for these potential opportunities to fall on your lap. Create a series of questions that will help your friends, relatives and colleagues think of opportunities for you. Here again, going through the exercise in this lesson will help you craft the kinds of question you're going to need to ask.

For instance, instead of asking, "Hey, Anita, do you know of anyone who needs a website designed?" You're better off asking something like this: "Hey, Anita, in recent conversations you've had with friends and colleagues, have you heard anyone complain about their current website and how they need to get it reworked so it looks more professional?"

That's the kind of question that will get you responses. And that's because we tend to remember conversations and situations more than we remember lists of people. So if I'm on the receiving end, I'm more likely to think of someone I may have talked to recently who complained about their website quality. Certainly much more likely than if I were asked about knowing someone who may need a new website design.

Even better, if someone were to ask me, "Hey, Ed, have any of your students or readers recently mentioned that they really need to rework their website so it looks more professional?" Now you've given me a situation AND a specific audience to focus on. Chances are, I'm going to either think of someone right away or will come across someone in the next week who will fit that description.

18 More Trigger Event Ideas

OK, so let's get to those 18 new trigger event ideas I promised you. As you listen to these, keep in mind that the key with trigger events is to be creative. Sure, you can use this list as a guide. But don't limit your search based on these ideas. As you think through these, I bet you'll come up with more ideas of your own.

So, keep an open mind. Stay receptive to what you see and hear out there. And it won't be long before you're adding your own unique twists (or entirely new ideas) to this list.

#1: Recent Activity or Changes on a Prospect's Website

For instance, you're a videographer, and while going through a prospect's website, you notice that they're producing more videos. Or you're a freelance writer and you notice that a prospect seems to be publishing a lot more white papers. These are all great reasons to reach out and see if you can help them make the process a lot easier or help them take those assets to the next level.

As you can imagine, there are many different variations you can take on this idea. I'm just giving you some examples. So as I go through these, try to think of how the idea could apply to your own business.

#2: New Industry Developments

Another powerful trigger event is industry developments. In other words, factors outside of the organization that still impact your prospect. Things such as new regulations, competitive pressures and other macro factors that create that need—either directly or indirectly—for your services.

For instance, one of my clients sells software systems to food and beverage manufacturers. When the president signed a major new food safety law, I quickly saw an opportunity to reach out to this client to see if I could help them write a few articles on the new legislation and how technology could help their customers improve compliance with these new requirements. It worked. I landed several projects worth thousands of dollars.

#3: Seasonality

Seasonality is an important trigger in some professions. For instance, if you're somehow involved in trade shows—either from a marketing perspective or from an event planning standpoint, trade show season presents a number of opportunities to reach out to key prospects.

If you're working in a field where, for instance, year-end creates a surge in client demand, you need to pay particular attention to those spikes and the opportunities they present. Accounting and bookkeeping come to mind as professions that have definite seasonal spikes.

Or say you're a photographer and you do a lot of family or personal portraits. Why not reach out to some of your key clients or prospects about an offer to do a "mini session" at a reduced fee just so they can get a few good pictures for their Christmas card? I've seen many photographers use this strategy to create an incredible amount of new business in October and November—months that could have otherwise been hit or miss.

#4: The "I'm Going to Be in the Neighborhood" Strategy

Here's one trigger-event-based strategy that can be very profitable when done right. I got the idea for this a few years ago, when a tree-trimming company left a note in my mailbox to let me know that they were going to be in the neighborhood later that week to do some work on a neighbor's yard. Because they were already going to be onsite, they were offering to trim the big tree in my front yard for 30% off the regular price.

How can you apply this same strategy? Say you're a designer and you're working on a display or banner for your client, which they need for a big book fair they're going to be exhibiting in. If it's something other exhibitors could benefit from, why not offer to do the same thing for them for a reduced fee?

Or say you're a photographer attending a small one-day conference in your hometown. Why not approach the conference organizer about doing professional headshots for all attendees at a reduced fee? I once saw this done at a local conference. The conference organizer included the offer in one of her reminder emails to all conference registrants. And the photographer did, if I remember correctly about 20 headshots that day during the breaks. Not bad!

#5: New Person Hired

One of my most effective trigger events has been the hire of a new person responsible for contracting with marketing professionals such as myself. In my case, that person is usually a new director of marketing or a new VP of marketing. The reason this can be a great trigger event is that if it's a newly created position, this individual is now charged with delivering what's often an incredible amount of work. Yet they don't have the internal staff to get that work done. So that's where an outside professional can help.

Even if the role the person is filling is an existing one, there's still a high potential for opportunity. In many cases, the new person doesn't like the service provider that's been in place, so they quickly start looking for a replacement. If you approach them at the right time, you could be first in line—especially if you can also leverage a mutual contact, like we discussed in a previous lesson.

#6: A Past Client Moves to a New Organization

This happens all the time. You work with a client for a few months, then the work dries up for whatever reason. They're very happy with your work, but maybe the work you produced was just a one-time need.

At any rate, a year later you notice that your main contact takes a job at a different organization. That's a great opportunity to reach out to them and see if and how you can help. In many cases, if you've done great work for them before, there's a chance to work with them again in this new role and with this new organization. They already know you and your work, so there's less risk involved in hiring you vs. an unknown.

This is why it pays to stay in touch with past clients and to be active in LinkedIn. This is exactly the kind of information you can have LinkedIn notify you about so you can leverage it while that Window of Dissatisfaction is open.

#7: Prospect Spins Off a Division or Business Unit

Depending on what you do for a living, spinoffs can make a great trigger event. For one, when a company or division is spun off on its own, it's often run like a small business. Staff is limited but expectations are high, which often means they have to hire outside help to get key projects completed. That's especially true today, when businesses are doing whatever they can to stay lean and mean.

#8: Layoffs or Downsizing

Layoffs are bad for the employees being let go, but they can also present an opportunity for independent service professionals who can come in on a project basis. I've seen many cases where a company downsizes only to hire a few contractors and freelancers the following week in order to complete a few important projects.

I'm not suggesting this is always a good thing. I'm merely pointing out the realities of the current business environment.

#9: Prospect is Expanding a Key Department

Sometimes an organization will try to expand a key department rapidly. Maybe they're trying to develop early-mover advantage in a key market or with a key product. So they ramp up their sales or marketing department. Or their development team. Or some other internal department.

Staffing these departments quickly can be difficult. So if you come in at the right time and can help fill an immediate need, you've just saved that department time and money.

Similarly, you want to be on the lookout for job openings for full-time positions. It doesn't happen all the time, but occasionally a company will post a full-time job only to end up filling it with a freelancer or contractor.

I've seen this happen a couple of times. One of them was a friend of mine, a public relations freelancer, who was able to land a great, stable gig with a client who was originally looking for a full-time PR director. She was able to offer them a better deal with more flexibility for both parties.

Again, the key is to always keep your eyes and ears open. Look through job boards such as Monster.com on a weekly basis. In the U.S., Craigslist is another great resource. But don't stop there. Scour social media sites and talk with friends and colleagues. Studies have shown that something like 80% or 90% of new jobs are never formally advertised. Instead, they're filled through word of mouth.

#10: Your Prospect Makes a "List"

Depending on your profession, this can be a powerful trigger event. Although it's also the kind of trigger event that many others are going to jump on, so you won't be alone when making your pitch.

Essentially, this approach is all about reaching out to prospects that make a publisher's "best of" list. For instance, the top 50 law firms in Atlanta for 2012. Or San Francisco's 40 under 40 to watch. Or the top 100 growth companies in the Southeast. Or the 50 hottest technology products of 2012.

You get the picture. The challenge sometimes is finding a credible way to tie the services you provide to the organization's selection to that list. And again, depending on what services you offer, this may or may not be an effective trigger event for you.

#11: Your Prospect's Product Wins an Award

Here again, depending on your profession, reaching out to a prospect who has just won an award for one of its products or services could be a great way to introduce your services. A product award could lead to new demand for that product, in which case the company may need to hire outside professionals to fill in gaps.

I don't think this is a particularly strong trigger event in many cases, but I mention it anyway because it does create opportunities for freelancers, consultants and independent pros in some fields.

#12: Your Prospect Hires an Agency or Firm

Here I'm talking about when a prospect hires an ad agency or a consulting firm to handle the kind of work you do. Most service professionals may see this as a negative, but it can actually become an opportunity. If you don't mind doing some work for a third party, you can reach out to this firm and see if you can help them with this new client.

By the way, many agencies and service firms publish new client wins on their website or via press releases, which often get picked up by the local business chronicle. So if this is of interest, those are the places to check.

#13: Your Prospect Fires Their Agency

This is an obvious one, but it's not one I see many freelancers take advantage of. When an organization fires a firm they've been working with, that's an opportunity to reach out to that prospect. True, you're not going to find out about firings through the paper. However, this is a perfect example of something you can learn about through your own network of contacts.

Just recently, one of my clients fired their public relations agency. I knew they were looking to replace them, so I approached a couple of my freelance PR friends. It turned out that both of them were too busy with current clients. But I know for a fact that this client would have considered replacing their PR firm with a freelancer rather than with another traditional firm.

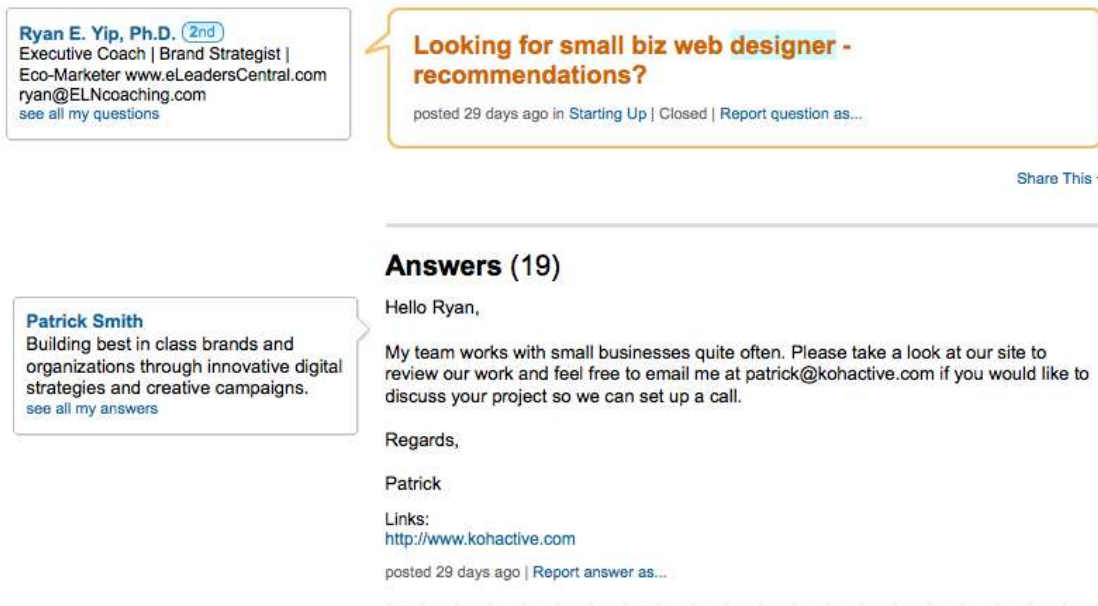
#14: Direct Calls for Help Online

I see this happen frequently. Someone in a LinkedIn group will post that they're looking for a great designer. Or a good local videographer. Or a tech-savvy writer. And they ask the group for any recommendations.

And it's not just LinkedIn. You'll see this in online forums, Twitter and Facebook. So keep your eyes and ears open. And let your colleagues know you're looking. That way, if they come across an opportunity like this they can point you to it.

By the way, this is why it pays to join and become fairly active in several LinkedIn Groups where your ideal prospects hang out. Another great place to hang out in LinkedIn Answers, which you can get to by going to www.Linkedin.com/answers. You'll see thousands of questions being asked by professionals from all around the world. In some cases, they're looking for service provider recommendations directly. Use the search field in LinkedIn to find who's looking for professionals in your field, and use this as a trigger event for your email pitch.

Here's an example of someone looking for graphic designer recommendations, which I found by typing the key phrase "designer recommendation":



The screenshot shows a LinkedIn post in a group. On the left is the profile of Ryan E. Yip, Ph.D., with his title and contact information. The question is "Looking for small biz web designer - recommendations?" posted 29 days ago. Below the question is an answer from Patrick Smith, who offers to review work and provide contact information for his company, Kohactive.

Ryan E. Yip, Ph.D. (2nd)
Executive Coach | Brand Strategist |
Eco-Marketer www.eLeadersCentral.com
ryan@ELNcoaching.com
[see all my questions](#)

Looking for small biz web designer - recommendations?
posted 29 days ago in [Starting Up](#) | Closed | [Report question as...](#)

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Answers (19)

Patrick Smith
Building best in class brands and organizations through innovative digital strategies and creative campaigns.
[see all my answers](#)

Hello Ryan,

My team works with small businesses quite often. Please take a look at our site to review our work and feel free to email me at patrick@kohactive.com if you would like to discuss your project so we can set up a call.

Regards,

Patrick

Links:
<http://www.kohactive.com>

posted 29 days ago | [Report answer as...](#)

#15: Your Prospect Is Advertising More Aggressively

If one of the prospects you're keeping an eye on is suddenly advertising more aggressively or getting wider and better publicity, this could mean that they're on an aggressive growth track. Which could translate to a number of opportunities for you.

So keep an eye out for organizations in your target market that suddenly seem to be everywhere. They sponsor everything. They get quoted all the time. What are they up to? Does this new activity represent an opportunity to reach out to them?

When I was heavily involved with the Technology Association of Georgia, I remember a midsize company that came out of nowhere and was suddenly advertising everywhere. They became a platinum sponsor of the association. They sponsored all kinds of social events. They were at all the fundraisers. And they bought ad space in all of the regional technology publications.

I was pretty booked up with work at the time, but I remember thinking that if I were looking for a client, I would have used this surge in promotional activity as a reason for reaching out to them.

#16: Your Prospect Is Quoted in the Media

This happens all the time. I'm reading an article in an industry publication, and the writer quotes two or three marketers who say they're going to do more of "X" next year. For instance, do more online video, or white papers, or lead nurturing, or social media marketing.

If that's something you do for clients, this is a trigger event for you. And it doesn't need to be an article. A colleague of mine once landed a great client because he heard the client speak at a panel discussion where he mentioned that they were looking to step up their content marketing efforts. My colleague introduced himself afterwards and told the panelist he could help him. Two months later, they hired him.

By the way, while I'm thinking about it I should point out that some of these trigger event ideas I've been discussing don't directly scream "Window of Dissatisfaction." In the example I just gave you, the panelist didn't come out and say, "We want to do more content marketing but we don't have the staff to get it done. I wish I knew a writer I could trust."

Instead, he just pointed out an initiative they're going to start soon. But my friend saw a potential opportunity. He figured that if they're going to start doing this, they may need some help. So he approached them thinking that there MIGHT be some dissatisfaction—whether the prospect was already aware of it or not. As it turned out, the dissatisfaction was still somewhat latent. It hadn't shown itself yet. But the seed was there. So by approaching the prospect early enough in that window, he was first in line when the prospect's need became real apparent.

#17: Product Line Seems to Be Growing Very Rapidly

A rapidly growing product line could indicate growth and expansion, which tends to create a need for developers, engineers, copywriters, marketers, PR freelancers, translators and other professionals. So be on the lookout for product launches and increased activity on the sales and marketing side of the house.

#18: Prospect Has a Big Event Coming Up

A big trade show, a customer conference, a big fundraiser—if it's a big event for your prospect, it's going to create opportunities on several fronts. So you need to think about how you could help prospects leading up to these events and during the events themselves.

Think outside of the box. If you're a writer, how about approaching the prospect about using their customer conference to interview a few of their customers for success stories. I did this a few years ago and walked out with more than \$5,000 worth of work from interviewing a few of my client's customers at their annual customer conference.

Or if you're a designer, how about offering to create a series of really slick PowerPoint templates for the presenters. Bring ideas to the table. Make a few suggestions on things you can do to add value during, before or after the event. Who knows? They may take you up on some of the ideas and hire you to do the work.