

10 steps to a better ' _____ ' business

by Bob 'Idea Man' Hooey

The following ideas have proven effective for the Business enhancement success of 'any' business. Fill in the ' _____ ' with your field, and apply accordingly.

However, since I am *primarily* in the speaking and training business, I will share ideas drawn from what I am learning in my quest to make what I do more productive and profitable. Ideas to make sure I stay competitive in this growing field. I am sure you will be able to see how you can apply them to your specific areas of concern.

Use client testimonials:

People hire speakers and trainers based on several factors: They have heard us speak personally; someone they trust has heard us; or another speaker, trainer or client has heard us and says nice things about what we did for them. **They do not normally hire on the basis of a cold call.** They may if the timing is correct, but will still go back to one of the above three factors as a part of their decision process.

This applies to any business format, and is important, as it helps **minimize the risk factor** in the decision process to engage or do business with us. How can you ensure your clients talk about what you've done for them? How do you get them to do so? Who have you successfully served who would be willing to tell the world what a great job you did? Ask them! Visit <http://www.ideaman.net/clients.html> for examples.

Two points: 1) Do a simply outstanding job and keep in touch afterwards – remember out of sight out of mind and; 2) Ask them to give you feedback on what you did and how it affected or assisted them in their business. Ask for quantified answers, if you can get them, as they are more effective tools. Ask permission to quote!

Make your website a value added resource:

If you are not already on line, you are in a position to be left behind in your potential client's mind. The internet is beginning to replace the yellow pages as a form of research for client use. And it is also becoming a source of credibility as well as visibility. Start with making sure you are on line and that your website covers the basics: Who you are?; What you do?; What you offer?; What people say about you? Then move into the process of making your website a resource base that people will want to put on their favorites and return again and again. Have some articles or tips that will help us. Include some inspiration. Give me more information on the behind the scenes workings of your business or services.

If you visit my **IDEAS AT WORK!** site (<http://www.ideaman.net>) you'll see some of these examples; with my 'Collection of Wisdom' downloadable articles (over 100 from some of North America's top experts), my Business Enhancement Success Tools.

Visit our programs page [<http://www.ideaman.net/programs.html>] and click on the program title for full program details. I've found this to be one of the most productive things I've done to assist my potential clients since 1998 when we launched the ideaman.net site. The majority of my promotion directs people to my site, as it is a great sales tool. It works very well!

Build rapport with clients...teach or provide something new:

I got my start in the speaking and training business quite a while back, when I was a kitchen designer, by offering in-house and continuing education programs to assist my potential clients in their quest for a better kitchen. Along the way I wrote, "**How to Remodel Your Kitchen & Stay Married!**" as a tool to help them prepare and survive the marriage stretching kitchen renovation.

In any business, we are more successful when perceived as value-added or solutions-oriented. Make sure they see that you are there to help them and are committed to their success. I often thank my clients for allowing me to be a part of their success team in their training program or conference. It is a statement of commitment on my part and a reminder to me to always seek to add value and build on the relationship. Hey, and it helps with the referrals as well.

Promote your delivery timelines and other uniquenesses:

Do you have something special you do in relation to how quickly you can respond, a service, or deliver on a request? Is there a way to capitalize on something you do and do consistently well. Remember the Domino's Pizza lesson in revamping the Pizza delivery concept. Here's a tip for speakers and trainers: Are you available to fill-in for a speaker who cannot make it, can you market to your local convention market on this basis? Might not be a bad idea to become known to the local convention market and hotels with convention space. **They often get asked for referrals!** And if they know you, they might just promote you!

One of the ways I am servicing this market is in the use of my 'How to Host a Successful Meeting, Training Session or Convention' which uses some of the custom checklists and resource materials developed to help the meeting planner. This fall I intend to use it as a contact for the local hospitality market in the Edmonton region, where I now have a creative hide-away in the country.

Co-promote with strategic alliances:

Our global economy is getting more competitive on an hourly basis. **If they don't know you, how will they find you?** And how will they know to hire you? This is a challenge that faces every type of business professional, in that they must find an effective way to get thru the overload of 'messages' bombarding their potential clients, tell their stories, and entice or inspire them to make contact. Working together is a tool that is underutilized.

One of the interesting things is seeing former competitors joining forces to co-promote where previously they would not have even said good morning. This can be a very effective tool as you get to know other professionals in your field and what they offer. As a speaker, I have found that 'speakers promote speakers' and have had specific referrals that have turned into speaking engagements. I've also had the privilege of being able to do the same for fellow speakers within CAPS and NSA, and do gladly when I know they will do a good job for the client. Again, it is a matter of referral based on professionalism in the field.

On a simply accounting point of view it makes promotional work feasible as well. Speakers work together to produce co-op newsletters, Web-sites, advertisements in Meeting planner guides, brochures, boot camps, and anthologies which can be a nice augment to your product offering as well. A new idea would be to work together with other speakers for a CD-Rom business card that can be used by each one.

My upgraded 'Collection of Wisdom' Articles resource page [<http://www.eBusinessSuccess.biz>] is a form of co-promoting with fellow speakers, trainers and authors. It brings value to what I offer to my clients, readers and audiences. It also exposes them to additional expertise and experience beyond mine. I am proud to be able to share their wisdom.

Sell an inexpensive introductory product:

If you are in a position that you have a product line, make it easy for people to start dealing with you. Find something that they will enjoy using and get them on your client list. **Perhaps you can also offer something for free to get them hooked?** Not necessarily a 'loss leader' but something that is inexpensive and will demonstrate your ability to deliver when you say you will, and to introduce them to what you have to offer.

Use business discussion and news groups:

These internet based groups are a source of business research and if you are careful a source of subtle self promotion and awareness. A word of caution here, don't be overtly commercial as it will backfire on you big time!

Personalize with your picture:

People like to deal with real people. Even if your business is internet based, they like to know that there is a real person behind the product or service they acquire from you. As speakers and trainers especially, we are in the personal services business. Make sure it is a current picture and that it shows you smiling. It helps if they don't ask you where your son is when you show up! **Personalize your business – you'll be glad you did!**

Up-sell to all of your clients...add on, premium, extras, related items:

This is one of the three success secrets of generating additional business and increasing your bottom line. Design what you offer so you can provide a choice of at least three levels: **good, better, best and then offer it to each client.**

Give them a choice with at least 3 alternatives. Make sure each is value added and meets their needs.

Don't be afraid to ask for the order and the upgrade....remember a simple...'**would you like fries with that?**' has made MacDonald's very profitable. Look for ways to add other items to your product or service mix that will be a benefit to your clients. Can you offer consulting, facilitation, team training, executive debriefing sessions, panel moderation, company spokespersonship or multiple sessions that save your clients additional airfare and expenses? **If so, then offer them!** Remember your goal is to help them improve their life or business. What do you offer that will do that?

Bonus: Ask for referrals:

Here is the business building secret of the sales superstars, and in every field of business. "Who else do you know that would benefit or be interested in what I offer? Why is we often work dilligently to get their business and then, after we have knocked their socks off with our superb execution, that we fall short of asking them to share us with those they know and care about? **Ask, and ye shall receive!**

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Bob 'Idea Man' Hooley is a sought after productivity strategist, creativity catalyst and idea farmer (<http://www.ideafarmer.biz>), who regularly writes for North American consumer, association and trade journals, on-line magazines and company intranets. He is the author of nine books, a mini-book series, four success systems and an e-book series. Bob is a motivational, business and association keynote conference speaker and executive leadership trainer and coach (<http://www.leadersedge.biz>). He is a professional member of the Canadian Association of Professional Speakers and the International Federation for Professional Speakers.

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