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Now is the time to develop a self-marketing strategy

Posted on September 21st, 2009 Written by [Wanda Kenton Smith](#)



We're bombarded with marketing tips for our products and services. We read about how to market in a downturn, how to tighten purse strings, how to market online, why we need to continually advertise, etc. I've written hundreds of articles, columns and white papers about all these topics through the years.

My topic this month, however, is a different type of critical marketing activity. I'm talking about your most important personal asset that requires serious, thoughtful marketing priority. Now, more than ever, is the time to market yourself.

No doubt it's the toughest market many of us have ever experienced. NMMA president Thom Dammrich has said, through anecdotal reports, that the marine industry has lost 50 to 75 percent of its jobs since 2005. That means somewhere between five and eight out of 10 workers in the boating biz were displaced in the last few years.

I'm not surprised. From CEOs to guys working on the line, most everyone I know in the industry has been significantly impacted by the economic maelstrom of the last 18 months. Personal colleagues by the dozens are standing in unemployment lines, having lost their jobs as a result of layoffs, downsizing or business closures. A few are part-timing it, while others have started their own fledgling businesses.

Many fortunate enough to remain employed have taken severe pay cuts and are working harder than ever, under intense pressure. Many are wearing multiple hats to pick up the slack of the dearly departed (a smart strategy employees might offer to their employers to add value to themselves). One veteran colleague I know is the very last man standing in his entire company.

As difficult as things are, now is no time to feel sorry for ourselves. We simply can't afford to fall into the hopeless trap of becoming victims of these terrible circumstances. Rather, we must take a deep breath and suck it up, then take the necessary time to develop an all-important marketing and career strategy for ourselves.

I recently interviewed two top human resources professionals about career reinvention for Waypoints, the sailing industry e-magazine. As I reanalyzed the story, I realized that much of what the experts recommended crosses over standard human resources initiatives and embraces the essence of grassroots marketing.

1. You must be brutally honest with yourself. Do you need an attitude adjustment? If you have a defeatist mind-set, you'll unwillingly feed on that negativity; it can and will eat you alive. People, including prospective employers, can sense a losing, negative attitude in a heartbeat. It's ugly and unattractive. You can't help but hear it in the voice inflection or negative self-talk. Hostility, anger, depression or disappointment screams through body language, so before you begin your self-marketing activities, figure out how to flush out the bad karma and pump up the positive energy. It's not easy when you've been kicked in the gut. But you must get your game face on and project confidence and positive enthusiasm in order to throttle your career forward. Nobody wants to hire a pessimistic Eeyore, much less work with one.

2. Have you invested in the fundamental tools required to market yourself? Do you have a well-written, professional resume? Has it been written exclusively for the marine marketplace, or have you considered crafting it to appeal to employers offering jobs elsewhere in industries that offer career synergies? How you organize, communicate and position yourself via the résumé is paramount. Your résumé often is your first impression, so ensure yours sells you, your experience and your skills as best as possible. If you don't have expertise in this area, seek professional guidance

3. Who can you call on to assist you in your career search? What are you doing to network within your professional and/or local community? One highly respected colleague who was laid off told me she immediately put together a list of 50 professional contacts and worked through them to network. She stayed in touch, shared what she was doing, asked for referrals and introductions, and eventually landed a great new position.

Another former industry resource specialist/buyer who had hung her hat at two leading manufacturers was another casualty of a layoff. Unsure of her direction, she chose to invest in a professional career coach who has helped her prepare for and position herself for a new career outside the marine industry.

4. If you have a particular company of interest, research the key decision-makers in your area of expertise. While most midsize companies or larger have an HR department or someone assigned as the gatekeeper, savvy self-marketers know their best chance for success is to get directly in front of the decision-maker. Check out their Web site and press release archives. Do an online search. Ask your own contacts if they have connections there and if they will forward your résumé.

One of the best new strategies I've personally employed this year – and highly recommend – is becoming actively engaged in LinkedIn, a fast-growing business networking site. This is an ideal venue for making professional connections and for supporting colleagues through introductions, tips and leads. Just remember it's a two-way street, so be sure to return the courtesy when colleagues ask for your assistance.

Matt Durfee, CEO of Navigator Executive Advisors, offers wise networking counsel. "People often make the mistake of building and maintaining a network only when it suits their immediate needs," he says. "A lack of interest in helping others, or failing to sustain and grow a healthy networking pipeline when there is no apparent self-serving reason to do so, is shortsighted and often breeds lasting resentment that stymies future requests for assistance. Simply stated, no one likes to feel like they are being used; effective networking, when earnestly nurtured over the long term, can prevent that from happening. Besides, just because you may have landed a new job today doesn't mean it won't go away tomorrow."

Another easy way to raise your visibility and establish your expertise? Start or contribute to online discussions via posts on business networking forums. You'd be surprised at the connections you can make in this manner.

Besides online initiatives, go to venues where you can casually connect with prospective employers. Attend boat or trade shows, along with targeted social or professional events. Don't just hope you'll score and stumble on an opportunity; execute a specific strategy to get introduced. In addition, volunteer and join industry associations, boards or committees where you can expand your contacts, sphere of influence and reach.

5. Stay abreast of late-breaking developments. Executive recruiter Neal Harrell of Brooks Marine Group recommends taking 15 minutes daily to scout the Internet and marine publications for news as well as job postings.

6. Stay sharp and on top of your game. That may include updating and enhancing your skills, like earning valuable certifications or learning new software programs related to your field. Harrell recommends everything from online forums and professional networking sites to trade schools or e-classes. In short, stay current to stay marketable.

My parting thoughts are echoed by Dammrich in my Waypoints piece. "I believe people should always be doing things to prepare themselves for their next job, whether that next job is with a current employer or a new employer," he says. "Even as new-boat sales rebound, hiring is likely to be very slow. I never encourage anyone to wait around and hope. Hope is not a strategy. People should constantly be enhancing their value and, if you are out of work, your full-time job should be finding new work."

With the chill of winter fast approaching amid the lingering frigid business climate and job market, there is no time like the present to market yourself.

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