

Professional Speaker

Establish Your Expertise Get Booked With Ease

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When it comes to professional speaking, that tired old joke about an expert being someone 50 miles away from home and carrying a briefcase just isn't funny. Anyone who is in touch with the reality of this business knows that expertise and the ability to communicate it are central to the value a speaker brings to clients—and to the speaker's survival.

2003-04 NSA President Mark Sanborn, CSP, CPAE, chose the theme, "Expertise to the Power of Eloquence." In addition, he appointed a committee to study the issue of developing expertise, resulting in an excellent white paper titled, "The Expertise Imperative," which you can read at the NSA Web site, www.NSASpeaker.org.

What is an Expert?

According to *Webster's New World Dictionary*, an expert is "a person who is very skillful or highly trained and informed in some special field." Expertise is defined as "the skill, knowledge and judgment of an expert." Are you an expert?

Possessing exceptional knowledge and skill on your topic or industry is definitely necessary, but it's not sufficient for success as a professional speaker. You also must be perceived as an expert, occupying in the minds of potential clients the position of the "go-to person" for the resolution of specific problems that matter to them. You must be able to help your audiences apply the knowledge within

their particular environments to create positive change. Further, you must be able to project trends, giving them what they will need both now and in the future. You must be able to attain documented outcomes. You have to exude credibility.

Tall orders, all of them. The good news is, you may already be further along than you think. Do not take any of your knowledge and skills for granted, failing to appreciate all the time and study it took to learn what you know. Don't fall into the trap of discounting as "anybody could" the special competencies and talents you have, just because they are easy for you. Build on them, develop them, expand them and practice them over time. On this foundation, you can build an enviable reputation as an expert by using these 10 strategies.

Ten Ways to Establish Your Expertise

1. **Specialize.** There's no such thing as a generic expert. Though you may know a lot about many things, remember that Jacks and Jills of all

trades are not perceived as experts in any. Do you have a smorgasbord of programs, confusing your clients and defeating your purpose? Narrow your focus. Develop a clear and concise positioning statement, a description of how you will solve a problem that already exists prominently in the minds and hearts of your ideal clients.

2. **Develop superior knowledge.** Absolutely know your field. Read everything about it. Exchange ideas with industry leaders. Keep up with all the research, including findings that contradict your approach. Synthesize and integrate contradictory information. Be prepared to back up your opinions with documented facts and statistics. Attend conventions and meetings related to your area, even when you are not speaking. Stay up-to-date with industry trends, landmark events and looming challenges of the audiences to whom you speak.

3. **Build your credentials.** Take advantage of opportunities to continue your formal education, completing training programs and degrees that help to validate your knowledge. Go for certifications related to your areas of expertise. Work toward worthwhile goals that potentially bring honors and rewards that help to cement your credibility. Very importantly, jump at opportunities for practical experiences that set you apart from ivory tower colleagues with academic credentials but little real-world wisdom.

4. **Write.** After all, "author" is the root word of "authority." When you author and publish a relevant, well-written and widely read book, your reputation as an expert gets a strong boost.

Don't have your book finished? Writing and publishing articles is another excellent way to position yourself as an expert. Talk to key members of your target market and ask them what publications they read regularly and trust. Create how-to articles for these magazines and journals, always sharing practical information your readers can use immediately. Not only will the

12 PROFESSIONAL SPEAKER

knowledge. This can sabotage your credibility in the areas in which you are an expert.

10. **Enhance the perception of your competence by being great at service.** A few years ago, a colleague and I conducted some research in a hospital, comparing the factors that impacted customer perceptions in the emergency room, inpatient units and outpatient services. One interesting finding was that across all three areas, customer perceptions of competence were strongly tied to their perceptions of service. In other words, no matter how qualified the doctors, nurses or other healthcare providers actually were, they were perceived as more competent when they were compassionate and helpful communicators.

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article display your expertise, it will also give you the added benefit of an implied endorsement from the publication your reader respects.

A third way to use authorship to establish authority is to create an e-mail newsletter that your subscribers look forward to reading and passing along to friends. Your e-zine must be more than a travelogue, a braggin' brochure or a series of sales offers. Create value for your reader by providing a feature article or useful tips that address a real problem and stimulate creative thinking. Opt-in e-mail newsletters are a cost-efficient way to visit your past clients and your prospects on a regular basis.

5. **Create a state-of-the-art, information-packed Web site.** Continuing your focus on the provision of value to your clients and prospects, you should design a Web site to display your expertise. This goes beyond publishing that impressive bio, though that is a good thing to do. More importantly, give people a reason to visit your Web site again and again by posting articles that provide a sample of your brand of wisdom and guidance.

6. **Conduct proprietary research.** When you have conducted credible studies that help you discover opinions, trends and customer reactions, you have valued information that your competitors don't have. When this information answers critical questions your clients are asking, you gain a competitive advantage. If you're not sure how to design

applied research, there are plenty of skillful and hungry people at your local university to help you. You can also hire a research coach quite inexpensively.

7. **Become a media resource.** Develop long-term relationships with writers, editors and producers who deal in your subject matter. Regularly keep them informed regarding interesting developments or latest trends through press releases. Be sure that the information you send is genuinely interesting and helpful for their readers, viewers and listeners...not blatantly self-serving drizzle. When they see your name on any communication, be sure that their experience with you causes them to say, "Oh, boy!" rather than, "Oh, no."

When they do call you, drop everything and respond promptly with accurate and interesting information. Make their jobs easier, and you'll hear from them again and again.

8. **Don't leave word-of-mouth advertising to chance.** When your respected, impressed clients become your advocates, you can't get more effective marketing. What Michael Jordan does when he lends his credibility and competence to everything from batteries to underwear, a testimonial from an esteemed person does for your marketing materials or your book covers.

When you know you've "wowed" clients, ask for their opinions in writing. Find out if they have colleagues who might also profit from applying the concepts you teach. You definitely get more of this priceless advertising when you ask.

9. **Don't be a know-it-all.** Those with true expertise are willing to express honest doubts and dilemmas. You don't have to have all the answers (though you'd better have lots of them!). Rather, become a lifelong learner and share that fact with your audiences.

Recognize that you are completely fallible outside your area of expertise. Don't become so self-impressed that you pontificate on things about which you do not have solid

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