

Marketing for Private Investigators

By Paul Purcell

Given the current state of the US economy, we at InfoQuest wanted to do what we could to help our fellow investigators across the country. Therefore, we put together an introductory list of successful marketing steps that have served us and close colleagues well. **This extremely short version is our “article” version.** For the full report – which we distribute for free – please visit our website at www.thecasefile.com/ebook.htm.

With the current “financial crisis,” all of us with investigative agencies are feeling the crunch as everyone is hanging on to their money with an iron grip. But, for those who know how to look, the jobs are there to be found. However, finding new clients is just like working a case. It’s all in how you use your **S.M.A.R.T.S.:**

Salesmanship – People really do need your services, but how do you make them realize it?

Media – How many forms of “advertising” do you use? How many can you use for free?

Association – Beyond your PI association, who do you network with and how?

Reinvestment – Do you only work one type of case or have you added to your repertoire?

Time Management – Do you work too much to market? Do you market too much to work?

Service – Can you improve what it is you do and generate both new and repeat business?

Salesmanship

In this instance, salesmanship is communicating in such a way as to help those who truly do need your service *realize* they do. It’s a win for both of you. Let’s look at some points to consider:

- Tough financial times actually mean an increase in theft, fraud, infidelity, and workplace violence.
- Focus on the potential client’s need. Your prices and other benefits are important, but in the eyes of the client, their need is of primary importance. Focus on that first.
- Never compare yourself to the competition. Leave them out of the discussion entirely. Focus on you and the unique benefits and abilities you can offer the client based on their specific need or case.
- Be honest with yourself. Do you have a way with people or not? If so, put it to work and market. If not, do you have another agent who is more charismatic and could bring in more cases?
- If you need some material to improve your interpersonal relations and the way you deal with people, your local library should have copies of works by Dale Carnegie, any of which could help.

Media

In our own focused marketing discussion “media” refers to the multimedia communication tools at your disposal that you may or may not be using. Many of these are actually free and easy to use.

- If you don’t have a website, get one! At the very least go to www.blogger.com and set up a free blog. Offer educational posts related to your area of expertise. Also, mention your location and your investigative specialty frequently in your posts and profile. When clients look for an investigator with your capabilities in your area, the search engines should show you fairly high on the list.
- Also take advantage of the free social and business sites: www.linkedin.com, www.twitter.com, www.squidoo.com, www.facebook.com, and if you’re really social, www.myspace.com. (Be sure to download the full report for links to tutorials and newsletters telling how to use each of these to their fullest potential.)
- Write a column for the local paper offering “consumer tips” related to your area of investigation. Identity theft prevention is an important topic these days, as is “employee theft prevention.”
- Print newspapers are feeling the financial crunch too, so it’s easy to negotiate ad costs (especially if you’re writing a column for them).
- Create an email newsletter and send it to current and former clients. Watch the spam laws though and make sure the clients want you to contact them. A good email newsletter opt-in system can be found at www.constantcontact.com.

Association

A sizable portion of your marketing is dependant upon who you associate with on a regular basis. Sure, it refers to being a member of an investigative association, but it means so much more.

- Network with fellow investigators to swap cases falling outside your area of expertise.

- Speak at target audience functions. For example, if white collar crime is your specialty, speak to business owners and tell them how to prevent some of the more common forms of embezzlement.
- Join business sharing or referral groups.
- Offer to speak for free at business or civic group “lunch and learns” or their regular meetings. Are you a member of any civic groups?
- Though money is tight right now, in most areas it’s a good return on investment to be a member of both your local BBB (www.bbb.org) and Chamber of Commerce. Each can help you promote your business among its members in its own way.

Reinvestment

What are some ways to use the skills and equipment you already have to expand the services you offer?

- Do you have extensive camera equipment? Offer to do inventory or household cataloging.
- Criminal investigators might find work reviewing cold cases for police depts. also feeling the crunch.
- If you do domestic surveillance, you’re one step away from doing workman’s comp surveillance. Also, you could sub-out surveillance work to other agencies.
- Can you take an inexpensive local course to help you add a new investigative service?
- If you’re looking for new training and/or equipment, check with your local Small Business Administration office (www.sba.gov) to see if they have any applicable programs for you.

Time Management

In a profession based on billable hours, time really is money. How well do you manage yours?

- Use a good day-planner and on-screen calendar such as found with Microsoft “Outlook.”
- Group investigative activities by geographic area whenever possible.
- Confirm all case work and client appointments to avoid wasted trips.
- Keep home life and business life separated; especially if you work from home!
- Create a free account at www.simpleology.com to learn time management and focus techniques.
- Look for secure ways to outsource labor. For example, <http://www.wrightstyping.detectivehelp.com> will type your reports and free you up for greater money-making activities.

Service

What are some of the simple things we can do to wow the client and either keep them as a repeat customer or get referral business from them?

- After taking a case, immediately send a confirmation letter to the client (where suitable and appropriate), reiterating the key points of the case and thanking them for their business.
- Even if nothing is happening, touch base with your client. Communication is reassurance.
- Your final report should be a work of art in and of itself, and all reports should be of equal quality. Paper Direct (www.paperdirect.com) is one of many sources having quite a selection of brochures and presentation folders. Even your local office supply store should have enough to make your reports more professional looking.
- After receipt of final payment, follow up with a conclusion letter and thank the client for their business.
- Read our companion article “PI Should Also Mean Professional Image” found on our website.

Remember, this short article is just the tip of the iceberg. **For our full – and free – report** (containing over 60 outside sources), go to www.thecasefile.com/ebook.htm.

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