

ACTION PLAN MARKETING

The CONTRIBUTION Factor

The Key to Growing Your Business with Less Struggle



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The Contribution Factor

The key to growing your business with less struggle and effort

By Robert Middleton – Action Plan Marketing

We all want to make a contribution. In fact, it's the thing we want more than anything else. When we're making a contribution, we feel that we matter, that what we do makes a difference, an impact. When we contribute, we feel fulfilled, successful and powerful.

If you're a consultant, coach, trainer, speaker, writer, therapist or other professional service business owner who is focused on helping individuals and organizations develop, grow, change, evolve, improve or transform, your business is all about making a contribution.

When you started your businesses, all you wanted to do was to make a contribution – to your clients and to the world. And you spent a lot of time studying your profession so that you could make this contribution real. You wanted to be as good as you could be. And you knew that if you strived for excellence, your impact would be greater and that you'd be both successful and fulfilled.

But has it turned out like that?

Perhaps you've done well working with clients, helping them produce results, and even getting paid well for those efforts. But pretty early on in your business you may have realized that the most challenging and daunting activity was not making a difference with your clients but in attracting new clients. Maybe clients came in slower than you expected and you had no sound strategy to attract more of

them. And because of this, you're not now making the contribution (or the money) at the level you know is possible.

For many self-employed professionals (also known, by Action Plan Marketing as Info-Gurus), their primary marketing strategy is to do great work for their clients and then *pray for referrals!*

But, other than referrals, very few Info-Gurus have the know-how or skills to bring in new clients consistently. Even ones who have been in business for some time tend to resist, if not detest, marketing and selling activities. Therefore, it's not unusual that many very talented Info-Gurus, who are committed to making a contribution, find themselves thwarted. They find themselves working with a limited number of clients and don't have a reliable strategy for attracting more of them.

This often leads to frustration, struggle and discouragement.

And this isn't the case just for new business owners. It's not unusual for established Info-Gurus to also struggle with marketing. Perhaps they do all right; they make an okay living and enjoy working with and contributing to the clients they do have. But underneath, they have the nagging feeling that they could attract more clients, if only they could find a way to market their services more successfully.

The question is, how?

It's not that Info-Gurus don't work at marketing themselves. If you're like most, you've spent quite a bit of time reading, researching online, taking courses, and experimenting with various marketing activities. It's just that most of these activities haven't produced very consistent results. Perhaps you've generated some new clients here

and there. But you still don't feel you've mastered the process of attracting new clients.

And it's not that Info-Gurus are afraid of hard work. I'm sure you love to work when you know what to do and how to do it. But when you're faced with the prospect of a lot of marketing effort with very little results, it's easy to find excuses to avoid marketing: "I don't have time; it's not effective; I don't want to waste my time; I don't want to start unless I know it will work; The only way to get new clients are through referrals." These are all sentiments I've heard hundreds of times from Info-Gurus.

So what's the solution to the marketing puzzle? Are there strategies to market more effectively that will attract new clients more consistently? Are there hidden marketing secrets that few people know? Or is it simply a matter of building basic skills over time? And are there simple marketing activities that don't take up too much time or effort to implement?

Yes, there are certainly ways to attract clients more effectively and consistently. There are definitely marketing secrets that most are unaware of. And yes, you do need to develop some skills. It also takes some time and effort to learn and apply them. The good news is that marketing success is not primarily about strategies and tactics.

More important than techniques, is a *whole different approach or mindset* to attracting clients. It will ring true for you once you hear it. However very few people have applied this approach in a systematic, organized way.

The most important things to understand are the underlying principles that make marketing work. Successful marketing isn't a

matter of randomly stringing together a bunch of marketing activities and hoping for great results. There needs to be a “glue” that holds all of these strategies together.

I call this marketing glue, “The Contribution Factor.”

When you understand the fundamentals of this powerful marketing principle, all your marketing will become easier and more effective. The Contribution Factor can be applied to the marketing of any product or service, but it is especially effective for Info-Gurus like you, who want to market their professional services, as I’ll explain later in this report.

The Contribution Factor is based on the simple principle that when you give, you receive in return. This may be one of the oldest principles of all time. It shows up in the Bible: “As you sow, so shall ye reap.” and in Hindu and Buddhist texts as the “Law of Karma.” But very few people really understand how to apply this principle effectively to marketing their business.

Nevertheless, it’s the secret to marketing success.

When we think of marketing, the first thing we focus on is ourselves. After all, we are the “product” that our clients ultimately buy. So it would seem to make sense that we should put all the focus on who we are, what we can do, our expertise, the services we offer, etc. We rarely put our attention on our prospective clients, who they are, what problems they are dealing with and what they need.

But this is exactly where we need to focus. That’s the key.

The Contribution Factor is based on providing value to our prospects at every stage of the marketing and selling process.

What we need to offer (not talk about) is our attention, our expertise, and our resources. In return, prospects reciprocate. They move towards us, wanting to know more, seeing us as valued resources (as opposed to someone trying to sell them something).

Applying the Contribution Factor to your marketing attracts exactly the right people as clients. These clients are looking for the contribution you offer and they are willing to pay for it. No pushing, force, or manipulation is required; that's counter-productive.

I've developed a system of Seven Marketing Principles that has the Contribution Factor at its very core. It's a system that makes marketing much easier and even fun.

This report will give you an overview of these principles and demonstrate how you can begin to apply them in marketing your services. Once you've read this report, you'll see marketing in a whole new light and understand what it takes to build a solid marketing foundation to attract all the clients you'll ever need.

Principle 1 – The Game of Marketing

I've always seen marketing as a game. The object is to move a prospect from being a stranger to being a client. I've developed an in-depth model for this game called Marketing Ball. I won't go into the details of Marketing Ball here, but will outline several of the stages that a prospect needs to pass through before they become a client. I'll also explain how the Contribution Factor works to win at this game.

A prospect typically moves through the following five stages before they are even ready to sit down and explore doing business with you: Affiliation, Attention, Familiarity, Information, & Experience.

Affiliation – It makes all the difference if you have a prior connection to a prospect, whether that be through a friend or a professional organization. It's much harder to market to strangers. But it's relatively easy to develop affiliations. Once you've made these connections, they are well-positioned to accept the contributions you have to offer. Building affiliations is your first marketing activity.

Attention – In an initial conversation, whether over the phone or at a networking meeting, you need to be clear and concise about how you help your clients (as opposed to what you do). Your marketing message is based on contribution: "I work with these kinds of clients who have these issues, and here's how I help them."

Familiarity – Once you've made initial connections, the secret is to build long-term relationships. Again, the key is contribution. Find ways to be of service to individuals and organizations. Provide resources and referrals, get involved, and participate.

Information – At some point, people are going to want to know more about what you do and how you can help them. Don't just give them a laundry list of your services, use the Contribution Factor in all your marketing materials as well. Articles, reports, and case studies are all more interesting and offer real value, which increases your credibility.

Experience – When prospects show more interest, give them a taste of what you can do. Introductory programs or workshops, teleclasses, and sample sessions all utilize the Contribution Factor. Don't just tell people what you do, show them, educate them, enlighten them. Once prospects have a real experience of how you can help them, they are very close to becoming paying clients.

As I said above, this approach to marketing is especially appropriate for Info-Gurus. As a consultant, coach, trainer, speaker, therapist, etc., you already have many of these skills. You just need to use them in a systematic way to play the game of attracting more clients. We'll explore several of these stages of the marketing game in more depth as we cover the principles that follow.

Principle 2 – Marketing Mindset

Just as if not more important, than playing the game of marketing, is how you play the game. I'm talking about the mindset or attitude required to win at marketing. Even if you know how to play the game, it's still a challenge. Success is not guaranteed and rejection or failure is a real possibility. And that's just the challenges of the external game!

The inner game is even more challenging. Negative and self-defeating mindsets often stop people before they even get started. You need to learn new concepts and skills; initiating and developing relationships is often more complex than you may realize. Just fitting marketing into a busy schedule is difficult, and it's easy to settle for excuses instead of committing to results.

To change one's mindset takes an unusual amount of courage and honesty. When we're stuck in constrictive mindsets, we forget contribution and making a difference. However, when we embrace expansive mindsets, we're inspired to go beyond our comfort zones, to reach out and make connections.

The great news is that our thoughts about the difficulties of marketing are always more harsh than the reality. When you make a contribution, the centerpiece of your marketing, it's easier and

more fun than you might imagine. After all, what you're doing is authentically sharing the value of what you have to offer. And this is exactly what your prospective clients are looking for.

Principle 3 – Marketing Messages

A marketing message is at the heart of your marketing. It's not just a clever phrase you use to get attention. It's the foundation of what you stand for in your business. The theme of your particular marketing message should permeate all of your marketing communication. And again, your marketing message needs to incorporate the Contribution Factor.

Your marketing message isn't about you or what you do. It's about your clients and what they get. Just understanding this vital distinction can *multiply* your marketing effectiveness. After all, people will always be more interested in what *they get* than in *what you do*.

"I develop marketing plans for professional service businesses," may be accurate but it fails to hit a nerve. "I work with professional service businesses who want to make a big contribution but aren't sure how to grow their business," will stimulate much more attention and interest.

Principle 4 – Marketing Conversations

In the very first interaction with a prospect, you have the opportunity to make a contribution. Perhaps you meet at a professional group, shake hands and ask each other what you do. Your marketing message will be a good conversation starter; but your marketing message isn't the most important thing at this point. It's tuning in, and really hearing the other person.

Yes, marketing starts with listening, not with talking. It begins with attention and interest, not with an in-depth rundown of everything you offer in your business. Remember, this is the very first stage of building a relationship that may lead to you working together. You need to be curious and interested rather than aggressively promotional. That just turns people off.

Good marketing conversations lead to familiarity, liking and trust. Yes, it matters what you say. And it matters even more that you demonstrate giving-in-action to those in your network. Think of the people in organizations who contribute the most, care the most and provide the most value. Invariably, they are also the most successful people. Everyone wants to do business with people who live by the Contribution Factor.

Principle 5 – Marketing Information

Where so many Info-Gurus fall down is in the lack of substantial marketing materials. They often fail to notice that when they have the attention, interest, and trust of someone, it's time to provide more information. And as was mentioned above, not just "sales material" that explains how your services work, or a laundry list of all the things you can do. This communicates very little and makes it hard for a prospect to know if you can really help them or not. What's missing is the Contribution Factor.

You want to apply the Contribution Factor to all of your marketing materials as well. That is, give real value throughout this material. I've found that articles, reports, in-depth web content, audio programs, teleclasses, and introductory workshops all educate my prospects and make them more predisposed to doing business with

me. Materials that provide value result in prospects asking how you can help them further.

Take a look at your current marketing materials and I predict that they fall very short of the mark. Most marketing materials don't have enough information or convey enough value to stimulate prospects to take the next step towards working with you. If this is the case, you need to start improving the quality and quantity of your materials immediately. Start with in-depth case studies of successful clients to your web site. Then offer a good article or report to entice web visitors to sign up for your email newsletter (you do have an email newsletter, don't you?). All of this takes some time, but once it's in place you have the Contribution Factor working for you 24/7.

Principle 6 – Marketing Strategies

There are many excellent and effective marketing strategies you can implement to attract more clients. A marketing strategy is a specific, focused approach you use to play the game of marketing. In every case, you are moving prospects from affiliation to experience and into selling conversations.

Networking is great as it gives you direct, personal contact with prospects. Presentations and talks given to a myriad of professional or business groups are also very effective. A web site with plenty of value-based content can even attract clients from around the world. All of these are great strategies, and are even more effective if you use several in tandem. Their impact multiplies.

The key to the effectiveness of each of these strategies? The Contribution Factor, of course! Each marketing strategy you use needs to be geared to offering value as you build relationships. You

can even apply the Contribution Factor if you use the strategy of cold calling. One of my most successful clients offered a relevant report to those he called. Then he asked if he could add them to his email list. Before too long, the trust and credibility he built resulted in many new clients. This is the Contribution Factor in action.

Principle 7 – Marketing Action Plans

The Contribution Factor and all of these marketing principles are only as good as their application. Once you've done the groundwork of developing your marketing messages, marketing conversations, marketing materials and marketing strategies, you need a track to run on. You need step-by-step plans to integrate marketing activities into your day-to-day business life.

Many find this the most challenging of all – Not creating the plan itself, but finding the time to make it happen. What will motivate you into putting your marketing into action is also the Contribution Factor. Just think... you have a great service that has the potential to make a big difference to your clients. If you don't get the word out, who will? Nobody, that's who! But remember, marketing isn't about pressuring someone into doing business with you; it's about providing value now.

And isn't that what you've always wanted anyway?

Every step you take to implement your plan will be another significant step towards making a bigger contribution. Your visibility and credibility will grow with every marketing action you take. Your network and relationships will all expand, making a contribution as they do. And as you provide information and experiences to your prospects they will receive value that will make them seek you out for even more value. Yes, even referrals will increase.

The Contribution Factor is the key

The Contribution Factor isn't just another marketing tactic to apply to your business. It's the underlying principle that will take the struggle, the effort, the despair out of your marketing. Yes, it will take some time; it will take some work. But it will do what you've always wanted marketing to do – attract more of the right kind of clients that will enable you to make a lasting contribution (while making great money at the same time).

Where do you go from here?

In this report I've outlined the essence of the Contribution Factor. Understanding this will give you a marketing foundation that very few Info-Gurus understand, let alone apply in their business.

If you'd like some guidance and support in applying the Contribution Factor to your business, I'd recommend as a first step to check out the Action Plan Marketing Club.

The Action Plan Marketing Club is an affordable, yet comprehensive service that provides the information, guidance, and support for you to attract all the clients you'll ever need and to make the contribution you were born to make. Complete details can be found on the Action Plan Marketing website at this URL:

<http://www.actionplan.com/actionplanclub.html>

For those who are more advanced with their marketing skills, and want to take their business to a whole new level of success and contribution, we offer the **Marketing Mastery Program**. This is an intensive one-year program. You can learn more about this program at this URL:

<http://www.actionplan.com/apmmm.html>

About Robert Middleton

Since 1984 Robert has been working with self-employed professionals to be more effective marketers of their services.

He has worked with thousands of clients as a marketing coach, consultant, designer, writer, and workshop leader.

His online bestseller, The Info-Guru Marketing Manual has helped thousands of self-employed professionals attract clients with less struggle and effort. His Web Site ToolKit provides a complete template for building a client-attracting web site. His email newsletter, More Clients, has been published weekly since 1997 and goes out to almost 50,000 subscribers with hands-on marketing ideas.

Robert's approach to marketing and building a business is different than most marketers. Although he understands that financial success is important, the path to that success is through making a profound contribution. Robert has been a student of some of the best marketing gurus in the world as well as a student of those who understand what it takes to live a life that matters.

Robert lives with his wife, Saroj, and cat, Bindu, in the redwood forest of the Santa Cruz mountains, in Boulder Creek, California.

You are welcome to pass on this report to your friends, or better yet, direct them to the [Action Plan Marketing](http://www.actionplan.com) web site.