

ENTREPRENEUR: MARKETING THYSELF!

By Mindy Ferrentino Wolfle



If there's one thing that links the members of the myriad professional organizations and networking groups on Long Island, it's our entrepreneurial spirit. Even those who are not self-employed embrace the essence of the entrepreneur. When we set out to accomplish our goals, we are directed and focused. We understand the needs of our external and internal customers, and the

inherent value of trust, strategic planning, community involvement and relationship building. We are go-getters and givers. Now I ask my entrepreneurial brothers and sisters, what are you doing to market yourself and your business?

I bet you've seen the bumper sticker that states "Electricity isn't a hobby...hire a professional Electrician." Are you approaching the marketing of your business as a hobbyist, or are you giving this aspect of your entrepreneurship the professional attention it needs? Surely, you've engaged an attorney to help set up your business and an accountant to make sure that your tax p's & q's are in order. You approached these critical aspects in a manner identical to methods used by large corporations. Now it's time to give that same kind of consideration to your marketing.

"If you're an entrepreneur, somewhere along the line you had a dream and you made it come true," says Debra Scala, Director of Marketing at Certilman Balin Adler & Hyman, LLP. "Chances are you spend your days and nights thinking about your business. You know the ins and outs, but who else does? And why should they care about your product or service?" According to Debra, who has taught "How to Market Your Business" at Hofstra University's School of Continuing Education and "Marketing for Non-Profits" in the Non-Profit Management Certificate Program, "Your good ideas need to be catapulted into the marketplace. That's where marketing comes in. So how do you get the word out?"

If you haven't already created a marketing plan, the time to do so is NOW. This begins with market research and addressing some simple, yet decisive questions. Consider the demand for your product or services; who is your competition; who are your target clients or customers; what are the financial, personal and professional risks you're willing to take; where will you get the most bang for your buck; and so on. There are numerous publications on the market, some

great and some not-so-great, plus dozens and dozens of websites to get you going in the right direction. Yet, Debra and I are in agreement about this salient point: you may seriously wish to look into engaging the services of a professional marketing consultant. Your marketing consultant should be a competent practitioner of “integrated marketing,” a combination of strategy, branding, technology, public relations, advertising, website design, and the other components of marketing, to deliver a consistent message for your business. Publicity is vital to getting your firm’s name on the lips of the Long Island business community and others whom you wish to reach and can be far less costly than a full-blown ad campaign. The Public Relations Professionals of Long Island (www.prpli.org) and the International Association of Business Communicators (www.iabc-li.org) can provide excellent resources for you through their membership and monthly meetings.

The value of networking and its role as a key component in your overall marketing plan is undeniable. Networking is absolutely mandatory for entrepreneurs starting out in business, growing their businesses, redefining their businesses, enjoying success or struggling to make a go of it. In other words, networking is key no matter what stage your business is in, no matter what your service or product is, and no matter how you’ve identified your strategic plan or marketing plan. You are the face of your business. Make your face and name recognizable and create networking circles where your integrity, your character and your relationships count.

Professional service marketing specialists can attest to the value of marketing, communications and public relations in the success of their firms and its professional members. As an entrepreneur, you too will recognize the value of marketing for the growth, esteem and longevity it can bring to your business.