



FINDING DATA TO ENHANCE AND REFINE CREATIVE THINKING

Ellen Freedman, CLM
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Last month my article “*Are You Putting Your Creative Thoughts Into Action? Are You Addressing Important Issues?*” really struck a nerve for many of you. I received a lot of positive feedback by phone and email. Writers live for such feedback, especially when we know it will impact behavior. I try to remember to share the feedback I receive with our PBA editor, Patricia Graybill, so she can bask in the glow she quietly helps create.

I want to extend a special thanks to Norristown attorney Barbara Zulick who wrote in part, “I read your most recent article during lunch and it was great! It was so well written and right on point. So many of us just cruise along without a plan. It takes guts and determination to plot a course and stay that course, as I know you have. I felt very encouraged to continue my efforts to run an efficient practice.” I also greatly appreciated the enthusiastic voicemail from Media attorney James McHugh who stated in part, “You wrote what I’ve been saying and doing for 53 years as an attorney. You’re the greatest. God bless you!”

I thought it might be helpful to follow up on a particular area mentioned in the article which I know is difficult for many attorneys, as well as their administrators/office managers. Last month I wrote that one reason creative thoughts don’t translate into action, or even a plan, is that no one follows up with the research necessary to refine the idea, or further detail the goals and objectives necessary to achieve it. Finding strategically meaningful and helpful information is essential. Creativity springs from internal resources in the mind and heart. Strategic information, by contrast, does not come to us in a flash of brilliance. It needs to be found.

Often this is a point where outside assistance can be essential. There are people and organizations “out there” which exist in order to mine “big data” or perform other strategic analysis. They know where to go, what to look at, and who to ask. Nonetheless, it isn’t always necessary to hire someone to assist, if you are willing to do considerable legwork on your own.

Let's focus on a few examples of how to obtain strategic information. Let's posit that a "spark" of creative thought during quiet time leads you to recognize you want to represent a different category of client. First, you need to identify the possibilities.

Start with information about industries. Information is readily available on local, state and federal sites. You can learn which industries are in growth mode, and which are declining. You can determine which are moving into your geographic area, and which are moving away.

By visiting company websites and Facebook pages, you can determine company strategies, what they're all about, and identify key players. If any are publicly traded, you can find significant financial information online. Key players can be further investigated by searching for their profiles on LinkedIn.

If you "Like" any of the companies, you will receive notification whenever they post an update to their Facebook page. Knowing who is promoted, hired, fired, what is bought and sold, company achievements and such will help you identify some of their challenges and opportunities for your firm to be of service. You can create an alert on Google or Yahoo which will bring you any news involving individuals or companies. That will tell you things they do not post on the company site or Facebook page, like lawsuits, financial losses, mergers or takeovers that fail, and so forth.

If you can connect with any of the key players on LinkedIn, you get a step closer to connecting for real. Even if you don't feel it is appropriate to send a connection request, take a close look at the discussion groups and organizations they're affiliated with. All provide opportunities for you to participate and thereby connect. Also, take a close look at the connections you have in common, to determine whether there is a relatively immediate and direct way to get a personal introduction, or more strategic information.

This type of intelligence will help you identify lots of potential clients, and narrow the field to a few on whom you can concentrate your focus and efforts.

Let's take our example to the next step. As one part of a strategic plan to target and pursue these more desirable clients, you decide that you want to start publishing articles in publications the targeted prospects might read, and finding opportunities to present seminars the targeted prospects might attend.

If you know a number of potential prospects personally, you may well know what they read. In all likelihood, though, you don't. Where would you start?



First, you could head to the nearest library or bookstore (brick and mortar or online) to find a copy of *Bacon's Newspaper/Magazine Directory*, published by Cision, formerly known as Bacon's Information. Magazines are listed by industries they serve. It shows editor names and contact information (names are often out of date if the publication is not online, but address and phone are usually accurate), publication closing dates, circulation information, and more. Look for anything which appears to be an industry journal. That's a home run where information is concerned.

With information in hand, you can write your article, and begin contacting relevant editors to get it published. More often, though, you should first contact an editor and pitch an article idea. Sometimes they have an upcoming issue with a theme, and may want your article modified to fit more suitably. Sometimes they are in search of something on a particular topic, and it will ingratiate you with the editor if you can oblige.

Another important source of information can be found within many of the magazines and newspapers identified as those which might serve your targeted prospect. Get a sample copy of as many as you can. Maybe even subscribe to a few with the widest circulation in order to gain a better understanding of the industry, and the players, in which your targeted prospects navigate. What are you looking for specifically?

First, check all the advertising. Big educational events are usually publicized in industry journals. Often they have web sites created for the events. There you can find information on the planning organization, key players, past speakers, and so forth, so you can begin the process of creating a seminar proposal and trying to get on the podium.

Research the key people involved in industry conferences on LinkedIn. Do you know any of them? Who do you know in common?

Next, look at the vendor advertising. Do you have any vendors in common? Vendor recommendations are reliable sources for back-door introductions. Few people think to value and utilize their vendors in this manner. They are often grateful to be asked, as it allows them to provide non-traditional service which ingratiates them with both you and your prospect.

This is a relatively simple example of how to find information which will help you refine a creative idea into a written plan with specific goals, objectives, and to-dos. There are a huge number of industry surveys on any number of things you might want to know. Remember, it's not a failing on your part if you can't find the information you need on your own. Instead, turn to an expert to



assist. It just makes you smarter for recognizing obstacles and navigating around them.

No doubt you've been reading a lot about "mining big data" and wondered what it meant. Now you know a little more about it. As I've said innumerable times, and in an article of the same name, "In the absence of good data, one cannot make good business decisions." Contact me if you need help. I'm here to serve.

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