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GUEST COLUMNS

April 11, 2001

Self-Promotion on a Zero Budget

Meryl K. Evans

meryl@onramp.net

Recently, I've received a few e-mails from people asking me for advice on how to get started in the Web biz. First, I had to get a grip because I couldn't believe they were asking *me* for advice. It's not that I don't have confidence in my abilities, but the fact that my freelance career is in the newborn stage.

When I stop to think about it, maybe I've been lucky to accomplish this much in a short time. I accidentally discovered a way to self-promote my work. I was interested in Web design and I had a friend who needed a Web site for her professional organization. I volunteered to do it to get some Web design practice.

Do you hear an "Ah-ha!" coming? Before I take you there, let's talk about catch-22. Most people just entering Web design or freelance get the old "Get experience before we can hire you." OK, how am I supposed to get experience if no one will hire me?

Back to the "eureka." What kind of business typically has little or no money to invest in a Web site? Let's say it together, "non-profit organizations." That was lesson number one. Build a portfolio by offering your services to charitable organizations. It's win-win because you get the opportunity to add to your portfolio as well as make a contribution to a good cause. The only drawback is finding the time to do it outside of your "pays the bills" job.

Oh, you're not a Web designer, programmer or code-head? No problem! Get out pen and paper or load up your favorite word processor. Start writing about a topic you know well. You've come up with another excuse saying you are not an expert in anything? It's time for my rebuttal and a confession. I'm only doing this for you to boost your confidence and to show you it can be done. The old, "if I can do it, you can, too!"

Here goes: I am a Jane of all trades. I kid you not. It's not a bad thing and I've managed to continuously add to my [writing portfolio](#). Guess what? I am promoting myself with this article. I noticed a trend. Whenever I publish an article with a popular online Web site, [my own Web site](#) experiences a traffic boost. I'll bet you that you'll go to my Web site when you finish this one. No, I am not high on myself. Whenever I read a story or discussion list, I often click on the author's link to learn more and see if there is anything else I'd like to check out. If you don't find this article worthy, then how did you get this far?

There are plenty of places that want your articles. Not everyone pays, but it's a good way to put you out there. One way I got started was entering Webreference's [open publishing initiative](#). They accept articles in exchange for software and free publicity for you. You can write your own bio and add links to your Web site. Thanks to Webreference, I got work with [Internet Business Forum](#) and added another resource to my portfolio.

If you want something bigger than a bio and you're brave enough, then offer yourself up for interviews or presentations. Internet Business Forum has a section on [interviews](#) and people are welcome to submit suggestions for interviews. If you're involved with a new product or service, then you can suggest an article on that topic and be interviewed as a subject matter expert. For

instance, I wrote an article on Flash and I interviewed several experts and returned the favor by including links to their Web sites. Again, it's win-win.

Is there a conference coming to town? They're always looking for proposals. Also, try checking around for user groups and offer up your services to speak about a relevant topic. I gave a presentation to a computer users group and my URL was in the footer of every page of the presentation. That's self-promotion for you.

There's something for everyone. To sum up, this is the advice I gave to people on how to market their way to a new career:

- Offering your services to nonprofit organizations
- Publishing an article
- Get interviewed or do a presentation

Give it a shot. One more note, I'm terrible at sales. These steps have helped me move forward without feeling like giving a sales pitch. Now, finish this off by reading about me and clicking on the link, but come back here to Stickyideas when you're done and want my services. ;)

[Meryl K. Evans](#) has managed to develop a freelance career in Web design and writing by accomplishing two of the three aforementioned bullets. She has yet sneak her way into an interview, but she's saving that for a rainy day. Nix that, make it "snowy day" since there are plenty of rainy days in Texas. E-her at meryl@onramp.net. There is no mailto because she wants real e-mail instead of ducking spam bombs.

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