

Come Blow Your Own Horn

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Jeff Davidson
Marketing consultant



By DON OLDENBURG
Washington Post

Some tips from the experts on marketing yourself. Page C6.

If success is the religion of the '80s, the gospel is self-promotion.

At a time when communications skills and a good public image can land an actor the presidency, or an accountant a key to the company's executive lounge, marketing consultant Jeff Davidson is one of a growing number of apostles of personal public relations.

Co-author of "Marketing Your Consulting and Professional Services" (John Wiley & Sons, \$19.95), Davidson unabashedly sells himself and his services. He says in a studied, confident voice, "I practice what I preach."

Davidson is convinced that self-promotion is a sensible reaction to intense professional competition among baby-boomers. "People in their thirties face greater competition all their lives — getting in college, looking for jobs, choosing mates," says Davidson, 34, from his office in Falls Church, Va.

"There's greater competition across the board for that generation than for those before and afterwards, because the others don't have the numbers."

"We've entered an era when very good, competent people aren't getting jobs. One remedy is to stand out, to self-promote. If you do, you're going to get the nod over some co-worker."

Self-promotion was a foreign phrase for Davidson 10 years ago.

"There was a time when I didn't know how to get my name into print," he recalls. Like

someone trying to remember blurry details of a bad dream. He now numbers the stories by and about him at several hundred. (And now he can chalk up one more.)

In 1976, as an employee at a small Connecticut consulting firm, Davidson killed some time during a lull in the work schedule by trying his hand at writing a work-related article.

A B-student in English composition with no aspirations to writing, the University of Connecticut grad stuck to a simple formula story: 10 Tips for Survival in Small Business. *New Englander* magazine published it.

Although the magazine paid Davidson nothing, the lesson he learned was priceless.

"I liked seeing my byline," he says. "And I really liked it when I came home and showed my parents. They looked at me like I was the prodigal son returning. Until that time, my family and everybody I knew thought only superstars got their names in print."

Davidson had stumbled upon what PR whiz-kid and author Art Stevens calls "a uniquely American phenomenon" in "The Persuasion Explosion" (Acropolis Books, \$12.95): "Public relations is the shaping of perception, through communication, for the achievement of positive goals. Anybody who needs to relate to the public in order to sell himself or herself — or his or her services or skills — has to get a message across."

Davidson plugged away, generalizing ad-

vice from his consulting reports to corporate clients into how-to articles. By 1980, he'd seen 10 of his stories published. That more than doubled the next year and was up to 50 in two years.

"And now it's about one or two a week — I can't keep track anymore," says Davidson, adding that many of his how-tos are simple rewrites of 10 basic themes that he tailors for various industries.

"You don't meet tons of people writing articles to advance their careers," he says. "I've even advanced my career by writing articles about writing articles to advance careers."

"The average person doesn't realize that the media needs them," explains Davidson. "The media need cannon fodder for stories. I looked in the paper and saw what others had sent in. I started listing everything that I could do for a news release on me."

He sent out releases on his speaking engagements, which had multiplied because of the image of expertise his articles created. He wrote about awards he had received as an authority in his field. He took industry surveys and mailed releases on their results. When he'd won a consulting contract, write for a new publication or travel abroad, out would go a press release.

"I had enough things going that I could send out at least one a month to various publications," says Davidson. "I wrote a news release when *Local Consultant* published its 200th article. You do it for the 300th, for

the 400th — it's like Hank Aaron hitting home runs. It's news."

Most news releases get thrown away. But the number of column inches that even one can get, as opposed to paying for an ad, is really quite a bonanza.

Strategies for producing effective self-promoting releases, says Davidson, include working with charitable organizations, highlighting civic involvement and making connections with the right people — publicity by association.

And always send releases to your small hometown newspaper, he says, because "it'll print anything." Davidson adds that promotion, at some point, feeds itself, and you find you're joining organizations for the publicity, creating events for the news value.

"What does one mention in a newspaper do for you? Say you have two lawyers, two consultants, two doctors or two of any profession who are alike in all ways. One of them is always in the newspaper, and the other isn't. Who is going to do better?"

"All things being equal, the career person who is going to get ahead is not going to get ahead because he does great work. That is a given. We expect that."

"What will get him ahead is the edge he creates. It may not be fair, but I don't make the rules. I'm just trying to use the rules."

But self-promoters, warns Davidson, can overdo it. "At some point, it changes from interest to irritant. You've got to know when to say, 'Enough already.'"

Professionals who want to promote themselves should realize "there's no free lunch," says Davidson.

Seven Tips on Self-Promotion

Washington Post

Marketing yourself, says Jeff Davidson, author of "Marketing Your Consulting and Professional Services," requires a restructuring of thoughts, plans, even patterns of behavior. "You've got to develop an effective publicity plan."

A sampling of self-promotion tips from Davidson and other experts:

■ **Goal-setting.** "Decide what you want to achieve," says Davidson, "and then plan your campaign toward that end."

William Parkhurst, author of "How to Get Publicity" (Times Books, \$14.95), advises, "Be realistic, be specific" and keep in mind your personality and your audience.

■ **Leveraging.** Get the most action out of the least resources, says Davidson. "In marketing your career, your practice or yourself, you don't have to appeal to 1,000 people. There are 15, at most 20, people you need to know — the director of the association representing your field, and its publications director; a mentor or two; the local editor of your newspaper; leaders of voluntary and community associations . . ."

■ **Exposure.** Speak before groups, volunteer, serve on boards. Get known across the broad spectrum of the community. Art Stevens, author of "The Persuasion Explosion," advises self-promoters to write at least 10 articles a year for publication.

■ **Leaving your mark.** "These days," says Stevenson, "almost everyone has a brochure. You need one, too, whether it's your business card, newsletter or clever stationery."

■ **Coining your own phrases.** "Nothing seems to convey greater expertise to the public," says Stevens, than identification with a particular slogan or word you've invented.

■ **Appearance.** "It's unfortunate that Hollywood and Madison Avenue dictate standards in terms of personal image," says Davidson, "but being in a media society, people do respond to the well-dressed man or woman."

■ **Sales knowledge and ability.** The fundamentals of interpersonal selling are necessary. "Everyone should read what salesmanship is all about," says Davidson. "What are closing techniques? How does one overcome objections? The average sale is made after the prospect says 'no' six times."