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1. Introduction

This monograph begins in a somewhat peculiar fashion by telling you that it may be in your best interest never to develop and write a brochure or capability statement. This is because they are not generally effective for the purposes for which most people write them.

A “brochure” or “capability statement,” as used within the context of this monograph, refers to a description of the services provided by a consultant for clients, as well as the skills, experience, training, and knowledge the consultant brings to his work and the policies which govern the provision of the consultant’s services.

When most people start a consulting practice they usually don’t have a capability statement written yet, even though they wish they did and feel that they should. This is largely because capability statements seem difficult to write, particularly when you are the subject. Since that is the case, most new consultants keep putting off this writing task, saying that they will get to it later.

Along comes a prospective client who typically says something like, “Could you send me some information about what you do?” When this happens, the typical consultant, not having a brochure or capability statement, will write a letter which nicely dovetails his skills and capabilities with the prospective client’s needs. The result is a highly effective sales letter. The client reads it and says, “Yes, that’s exactly what I need! This consultant really understands my problems, and really seems to have the relevant experience.” And presto, our consultant has his first client.

Along comes the second prospective client and, still not having a brochure or capability statement, the consultant sends yet another of these perfectly dovetailed letters and now he has two clients.

This happens a third time, and a fourth, and so on. Now the consultant is very busy. Along comes the fifth prospect who says, “Gee, can I get one of those letters?” at which point our new consultant explodes, saying, “I’m too busy, don’t these people realize how good I am? I’m in such demand. I don’t have time to write letters to all these people. I must have a brochure or capability statement!”

So, no matter how busy he is, he decides to devote the next weekend to developing a brochure or capability statement. A rush of energy is harnessed to produce a definitive and much needed document.

The weekend comes and he sits down to write, with every intention of having it completed by Monday morning. These highly effective sales letters, of course, become a rough model for the writing task. Unfortunately, all of the careful dovetailing of services to needs falls apart, because he now has no way of knowing who is going to be reading it, or what their problems or needs are. The result is that he writes a very bland, very general brochure or capability statement, which is never going to be as effective as the sales letter and which, if used as a principal marketing tool, is probably going to hurt future business

rather than attract it. All of which may be the best reason not to write a brochure or capability statement.
And yet, properly written and appropriately distributed, such a capability statement has great value!

After all, not everyone you encounter is going to be someone who is going to need a letter or someone you can write a letter to. There is going to be the individual you run into causally that says, “Say, my brother-in-law is in the toy business. I think he could really benefit from your services. Could you give me some information?” In this case, when you don’t know the brother-in-law, and couldn’t know what to write to this prospective client, it is probably not worth your time to compose a special letter. Here is the ideal place for a brochure or capability statement.

Other examples of where you might use this brochure or statement include speaking engagements, attending a convention, meeting people when traveling, professional association meetings, and other casual encounters with people who want more information about whatever it is you do. You don’t have time to develop a one-on-one working relationship with them, so the capability statement becomes useful, but it should never be used as a substitute for direct personal marketing or for the personalized sales letter/proposal.

Often brochures and capability statements do not get written because they are difficult to compose, and that is because consultants are uncertain about just what it is that they should communicate to prospective clients. How can they now inform people about the availability of their skills? What do prospective clients really need to know? The unfortunate result is that they tend to want to produce resumes, portably the worst single tool which can be used to market consulting services.

One reason for not using resumes is that sending a resume may cause the recipient to think you are seeking employment, which you are not. Secondly, in many cases, resumes are directed to the Human Resources department, and they will send you a standard “Sorry, we’re not interested, but we’ll keep you on file” letter and then discard your resume because there aren’t enough file cabinets in the country to keep all those unsolicited resumes. The third problem with resumes is that they tend to provide the wrong kind of information. Clients don’t really buy skills. Skills are assumed to exist. Clients buy the consultant’s ability to get things done so that the client can solve problems or take advantage of opportunities.

Since that is the case, your brochure or capability statement ought to leave your client with the feeling that if you are given a difficult, complex assignment, you have the ability get the job done, marshalling whatever resources are necessary. These resources could be within you, they could be partially within you, and particularly within the minds of other people (your staff, the client’s staff, or other independent consultants). What people buy when they buy a consultant’s services is a problem solution or an opportunity generation which gets them from the point where they are to some further point with limited effort or work on their part.
2. **Writing the Brochure**

The best way to develop a brochure is to sit down, relax, and divide a sheet of paper into three columns. In column one, you list the really stellar moments in your life. Think of those times when you were just fantastic, when you were so outstanding and produced such great results for other people that everyone gave recognition to how wonderful and marvelous you were. Such stellar moments could have been in your capacity as a consultant, as an employee, as a volunteer, or just as a human being. It doesn’t make any difference where it happened. They all go in column one. Work at this until you can identify between ten and fifteen of these moments in your life.

In column two you identify the specified result or benefit which you produced that was of value to somebody else and resulted in positive feedback.

In column three you identify the skills and capabilities, which you used to produce those benefits listed in column two. You will notice that these skills and capabilities are probably not things you learned in a classroom, but are probably capabilities, which you have had from, very early in life. You may, for example, have recognized as a skill your ability to build consensus, your ability to negotiate, or your ability to discern the relevant factors in a problem situation to name a few.

Next look at the list of benefits and skills you have, and weed out obvious duplications. You do not need to write a brochure which describes how you did the same thing five different times.

When you have identified four or five or six unique experiences in your life where you produced different kinds of benefits, using different kinds of skills, write a 40 to 100-word vignette which describes what it is you did, why it was of value, and what skills you used. These are almost like mini-case histories, which then become the substance of your brochure. The idea behind recording these “cases” is that your potential client can read them, perhaps identify with them, and say, “Yes, I have that kind of problem, I have the same kind of need, and therefore I could benefit from using this consultant’s services.”

One example of a well-written vignette would read as follows:

“A major trunk airline wanted to change its advertising campaign to revere a declining market share on its major (and highly competitive) routes. In the past they had changed advertising emphasis from personnel to timeliness to food service to quality of ground service, and so on. The philosophy had been to keep the name of the carrier in front of the public and to stimulate awareness by changing ad content.

Unsatisfied with the modest results they were getting, the airline and its advertising agency retained the market division of our agency to find out what the ads should say. In less than 60 days, with an expenditure of less than one week’s budget, we undertook a comprehensive consumer study to determine the factors that caused an air traveler to choose a given air carrier in those competitive markets.
The results of the study were used by the carrier’s agency to develop a totally revolutionary emphasis for the carrier’s advertising program. Today, that airline is a leader in five of its seen competitive trunk lines.

The techniques applies in this important consumer research are applicable to a number of industries. We think you, too, will be amazed by these findings and our agency will be pleased to share the findings with qualified inquirers”

In a few brief paragraphs, this vignette has explained a substantial success. It has also provided an opportunity for the reader to learn more.

Aside from vignettes, you may include such information as that listed below in your brochure.

A list of previous clients or references. In general, don’t link names of clients with specific accomplishments described in your vignettes; clients may prefer to be treated with confidentiality and it is your responsibility to know which ones care and which ones do not.

Client testimonials. No selling of your capability is more powerful than that rendered by those for whom you’ve worked. Have the quotes from clients speak of the results you produced for them—the more tangible and result oriented the better. As mentioned above, you may want or need to keep testimonials anonymous, which many consultants do by providing initials or title of the quoted clients. You can also keep the company name confidential by citing in general, nonidentifiable terms (e.g., vice-president of marketing, mid-sized computer technology corporation).

Your credentials or capabilities. While by no means the most important factor is most people’s decision to make use of a particular consultant, they are certainly not out of place. Be careful not to go overboard. While any of your credentials may be important to you, only a select few will be of interest to your readers. Do not underestimate the importance of practical, hands-on on-the-job experience. For many clients, that is the vital and determining buying factor in selecting a consultant.

Statement of operating philosophy or practice. If you feel it is appropriate, include a statement of your operating philosophy and practices. A description of how you run your practice, how fees are charged or determined, your ethics, etc., may be useful. As in all other decisions concerning the brochure, ask yourself: Could this information be critical to the reader’s buying decision?

Contact information. Don’t forget the obvious things like your name address, phone number, email address, website URL, etc. you would be amazed how often these are accidentally left out!

As you are writing, keep in mind that you have very little information about the people who are going to be reading the brochure, so be careful to keep the language simple, avoiding complicated words and terms, which are only applicable or understandable within a particular industry.

Testing the Message

Once you have finished with the first draft, put it down for a while and then come back to it, re-reading it from the point of view of a prospective client. Ask yourself if:
• The reader will find the message being communicated of great interest and value.

• The brochure concentrates on the advantages that the client will receive.

• The brochure uses simple and easily understood language.

• Important benefits of the service being offered are stressed in the headlines and made prominent.

• For each benefit of utilizing your services, the advantages and features of your service(s) are clearly explained.

• The message that the brochure communicates is appealing and interesting.

• The brochure is believable and the claims are credible.

• The brochure is devoid of suspicious and questionable claims or promises.

• The brochure invites further inquiry and contact on the part of the reader.

• The brochure avoids long and hard-to-understand words, phrases, and sentences.

• The brochure stresses the potential losses and disadvantages of not doing business with you.

• The graphics, approach, and general style of the brochure planned are sufficiently interesting to encourage reader involvement.

• The paper or card stock on which the brochure will be printed reflects quality and good taste.

• All of the type font styles you use in the brochure reflect a strong, positive appeal and are attractive and easy to read.

• The brochure has been carefully proofed for typos and grammatical errors.

• The use of colors and/or tones reflects very strongly the feeling of quality and good taste, as well as confidence.

• Promises or guarantees of client satisfaction with the services detailed in the brochure are stated with precision and certainty.

Once you are satisfied, congratulations!

**Producing the Brochure**

You now have completed the rough draft of your brochure. Are you ready to print 10,000 copies? No. First, take the brochure and give it to a thirteen-year-old child with the ability to read at grade level and have them mark anything that they do not immediately understand or the point at which they begin to lose interest.

Take the brochure back to the drawing board and rework it until you have a piece which a thirteen-year-old will read and comprehend from cover-to-cover.

Once you have attained that put your brochure in the hands of some prospective clients you desire to serve and let them read it and tell you if it mis-communicates or misinforms.

Once you have feedback from this select group, go back to the drawing
board once more and eliminate these areas of confusion.

There is one last test which you should consider giving your brochure, but it requires a strong ego. Contact the marketing chairperson at a local university and explain that you would like to work with one of the upper division or graduate marketing classes to conduct come marketing research. He will probably refer to you to a faculty member or the student marketing association, and before long you will have a captive, eager group to assist you.

The tasks for this group will be to review your copy (or perhaps a mock-up of your completed brochure) and in a pencil-and-paper test write down a description of the consultant who would mail this out. A type of psychological profile will be the result.

After you have collected the first reactions in writing you can conduct a verbal discussion with the group to garner the additional findings provided by the group process. You will probably be very surprised about what you have learned about yourself and your image. The information gained can be used to modify your brochure and make it more effective. The changes you are contemplating will serve as a good ending for the class that has given its time. It will provide a good instructional lesson and allow the faculty member to explain the theory behind your research. It would probably be a nice gesture to make a contribution to the student marketing association or scholarship fund for their help.
3. Design

Now that you have your message, you need to ask yourself exactly how you want to broadcast this message to the world.

While we have been using the term “brochure” in this monograph, it is a mistake to assume that a printed brochure is the only, or necessarily the most effective, medium to use. You should certainly consider the use of other media such as slide presentations, audio, DVDs, website, FaceBook, MySpace, and others, or a combination of several of these.

As is true with all decisions regarding your practice, the question of which media to use has to be decided by referring to the market you are trying to reach. What media are they going to find the most effective? In the rest of this monograph we will continue to refer to “brochures”, but remember to keep your options open.

While what your capability statement says is important, it is totally immaterial if it does not get read. The brochure should be designed with two important things in mind. The first is grabbing and holding the reader’s attention. The appropriate use of headlines and graphics can go a long way towards keeping the attention of the reader.

The second important consideration to keep in mind is that the look of your brochure is going to tell the reader as much about you as the content. The choice of type fonts, graphics, colors, etc., are all going to make a significant difference in the way you are perceived by your reader.

Unlike many other brochures, which are designed to be read once and then acted upon, this one is being designed to be read more than once, and hopefully kept for future reference. Where other brochures might make use of garish colors and wild type-faces to attract the reader’s attention, your brochure has to be very carefully designed so that the appearance supports the message that you are a solid, dependable professional whose judgment can be relied upon. And yet, it cannot be so conservative that your prospects view you as less than vital or aware of the state of the art.

When you are preparing your brochure for production, use professional services when you can afford to do so. Photography, graphics, design and printing are rather price-sensitive, so it is well worth your trouble to shop for price as well as quality. Having your capability statement designed by professionals can be expensive, but the results are often worth the investment. To cut down or eliminate this expense you can learn how to do your own graphics and mock-up.

The availability of various computer applications with document layout and publishing capability will make your job much easier and the time it takes to learn these will be worth the effort and expense. A course in graphic design at your local community college will more than pay for itself in the savings you realize by being able to design the brochure yourself. Courses in website design can also be of real value as you load your material to the web.

In the production of the brochure it is also wise to aim high. This is not the
place to save money. The few extra dollars you will invest in quality paper and high quality printing will, no doubt be more than repaid.

If you are planning a one-page (8½ x 11 inch), two-sided brochure, and are planning to print 2,000 copies, the difference in cost between a mediocre printing job and a quality printing job may increase your per-brochure cost by one or two cents. To realize the difference that they one or two cents can make, simply remember the last brochure you received which was badly printed or on poor quality paper,, and think about your reaction to it.

Likewise, think about those brochures you get in the mail or on your doorstep for lawn care or other services and that were obviously designed on home computers and printed at home, as compared to those from national organizations that are designed, laid out, and printed by professionals. You will see an obvious difference.

One last thing to think about when it comes to printing your brochure: this piece of paper describes you and your practice as it stands at this moment. You are going to continue to grow and change as a professional, and your capability statement is going to need to change to reflect this. So don’t print 10,000 copies of the brochure because you are going to want to change it long before you have the opportunity distribute that number of copies.
4. Distribution

You finally have the completed brochure in your hand. Now what do you do with it?

What you do not do is print 10,000, buy a mailing list of “hot prospects to buy consulting services,” and litter them over the countryside through a cold mailing. Research demonstrates that cold, direct mail does not work at all well for the marketing of consulting services.

What you do with your brochures is hand them out when you are asked for them. You give them out when you speak somewhere. You hand them out discretely at a convention or a meeting where you are running into people who are indicating that they may have some interest in your services.

A brochure or capability statement is not an effective primary marketing tool, and should not be looked upon as such; but, properly written and effectively distributed; it can make a strong contribution to the growth of your practice.
5. Developing an Internet Presence

The Internet has exploded as a promising marketing and information medium since the mid-1990s and is one that many consultants are using as an adjunct to their capabilities brochure and other marketing efforts.

The elements of effective Web pages are much the same as those for brochures. The major difference is that literally thousands of prospects for your services can gain access to information about your practice without your initiating the contact or, for that matter, even knowing about it.

The strategic value of a presence on the Internet needs to be weighed carefully before deciding to pursue it. Although having a website developed for you and placed on the Internet need not be a huge capital investment, it is an investment nonetheless, and like all investments, you will want to assess what you want out of it by way of return before you forge ahead.

If your consulting practice, for example, is going to focus on servicing clients located in just your local area, an Internet presents may not be needed. The Internet is no substitute for personal contact with prospective clients—contact that should be easy to make if your practice is limited to your local area. On the other hand, if your prospects are national or international, an effective website may help prospective clients, who would not otherwise even know you and your service exist, find you.

In some circumstances, having a website may be necessary simply to demonstrate that you have the high-tech savvy and capability demanded by your target market. Many consultants operating in technology specialties, for example, have determined that they must have a website to be credible in the eyes of their clients and prospects even though they do not expect their Internet presence to directly generate new business.

In addition to creating your own website, there are a growing number of companies that are using the Internet as a connection point between consultants and those looking for outside expertise. National Consultant Referrals Inc. (NCRI), for example, has established a website and among the services it provides is the showcasing of its member consultants. The NCRI is the oldest and most prominent organization in the United States that makes consultant referrals. It maintains a database of consultants representing a multiplicity of specialties and makes referrals to clients according to clients’ specified needs.

Beyond websites, email offers an effective and now nearly essential communication medium for consultants. Having an email address and using email as a business tool are probably as important as having and using a fax machine in today’s consulting practice.