MATTHEW MORAN

BUILDING YOUR I.T. CAREER

A COMPLETE TOOLKIT
FOR A DYNAMIC CAREER
IN ANY ECONOMY

SECOND EDITION

How quickly can you make money as a consultant?

If you want to be a profitable consultant, sales and marketing must play a central role in what you do. The ability to craft a message that is credible and creates trust, and the ability to get that message out to your potential customer, will dictate how quickly you can become profitable.

CHAPTER 27

12 Weeks to Profitable Consulting

Chapter 19, "Consulting," provided an overview of how the IT professional can enter the consulting field. This chapter takes a more in-depth look at the topics of sales and marketing, the proposal process, tracking and billing for time, and winning new clients as quickly as possible.

About 12 Weeks

This chapter presents a step-by-step 12-week guide to launching a profitable consulting practice. Much of the information focuses on the independent consultant but is also applicable to the small firm and even contains some valuable information for large firm consultants.

However, I make this disclaimer: 12 weeks is a highly aggressive schedule involving best-case scenarios. On a personal note, when a startup client I was working for many years ago lost its funding, effectively making me unemployed overnight, these techniques were put into play. In addition, I've effectively used them in my coaching with other consultants and small consulting firms. They work!

A Week-by-Week Overview

At the end of the chapter, I cover a week-by-week overview with specific tasks that refer to information covered throughout the chapter. This becomes your map or guidebook to putting the chapter information to use as effectively as possible.

Your Starting Point

Each reader will be at a different starting point. Some of you may already be consulting and are simply looking for ways to grow the consulting practice or to make it more profitable. Others may be I.T. professionals currently employed at a company but intrigued by the idea and the “exciting” world of consulting.

Your starting point, your attitude, whether you are proactive by nature, and your existing professional network will all have an impact on how quickly and effectively you put these ideas into place. But wherever you are at, the adoption and execution of some of the ideas in this chapter will prove beneficial in creating a dynamic and profitable consulting business.

What Does *Profitable* Mean?

That is a fair question. Profitable consulting for the CIO looking to leave his corporate environment and become a high-price executive consultant is certainly different from that of a junior-level programmer who wants to take on some part-time projects. In addition, your lifestyle and current expenses will largely dictate what *profitable* means.

In my anecdote above, it took me nine weeks after losing my client to find enough clients to generate several thousand dollars per month. However, I’d been consulting and marketing consulting full time for nearly seven years. I had marketing material, I had been speaking professionally in the area, and I had a strong understanding of the talents I brought to the table.

This helped me ramp up my marketing activities much more quickly than those just starting to put together their consulting identity and materials.

The Profitable Consulting Toolkit

By the time we’re done building our profitable consulting business, a number of critical pieces will be put into place. You may or may not adopt all of these pieces, and your success is not contingent upon doing so. But I do believe that each of these ideas adds to a stronger framework and therefore better supports a profitable consulting business.

What we will put in our toolkit:

- A website/blog
- Business cards

- A mailing list
- A strong message of value
- A case study
- A pitch
- A contact list
- A method for tracking time
- A method for invoicing

Some of these are more important than others, but in the end it is helpful to have as many of these things in place as possible. You may add other items to your toolkit, and that's okay. I'm not claiming to have everything in place that you'll ever need as a consultant; however, the items listed here are a great place to start.

In addition, I do not cover topics like business structure or how to manage your accounting or bookkeeping. I do believe there is a value to hiring people to take care of those areas for you, but the simplest way to get to a point where you can do that is to generate revenue. That is my focus.

A Website/Blog

This is an expected piece of your consulting puzzle. It is essential, as well. However, it might not be as important as you believe it is. One barrier to getting started for some of the consultants I coach is getting their website up and running.

In most cases, they want it to be much more developed than it needs to be. They are looking for the most professional-looking design, believing that a great design will be a primary factor in winning them business. They compare the designs readily available to them with multimillion (or billion) dollar firms. In doing so, they effectively freeze the launch of the consulting while they try to get a similar design.

Do not do this.

Take some time to go over Chapter 26, "A Professional Blog." It covers blogging, why it is effective, and some specifics on the WordPress blogging platform.

When it comes to starting your consulting business, your website is not necessarily there to win business. That might occur over time, as you develop content that intrigues visitors. In the beginning, it is more important that your website simply provide a short list of the services you provide. It is a reference point for your potential clients and possibly a way for clients to send your information to others.

It also needs to provide contact information.

You can simply have a page with your phone number, mailing address, and e-mail address; however, if you are concerned with spam, you have some other options. You can include that information in a graphic, making it less likely to be picked up through site scraping. Or you can include a contact form on your website. WordPress has several contact form plug-ins with CAPTCHA support to ensure that it is a person submitting the form and not a spambot.

What You Need on Your Website

I believe in starting simple. I recommend the following pages:

- Home
- Services
- About
- Contact

As you progress, your may subdivide services into specific major categories. In addition, if you are using WordPress to run your website, you might include menu items that point to specific blog categories. This helps your website visitors to quickly find the information important to them.

At the end of this section, I include a screenshot from my website with some notes about what I've included on the site.

Home

Your Home page should provide one or two short paragraphs about you and what you do. It is similar to your pitch or value proposition. You don't need much information. Remember, your visitors have likely already met you or were referred by another client. They have an interest in finding out about you and will likely delve deeper into the site.

Your Home page should not bog them down with details. It is better to provide shorter and more succinct pieces of information. That allows site visitors to determine what is important to them.

Services

You might have one or two sentences that describe your consulting focus. After that, I recommend, again, a short bulleted list. Avoid using terms that are confusing or are too much geared toward the I.T. industry insider; the person reviewing your site might not be the most technical.

Even a term like *integration* can be problematic. This is particularly true if your target audience or most of your clients are small to mid-sized businesses. They may view integration as expensive and more comprehensive than what their business needs. *Computer networking* is just as effective a term.

Another example is the term *ROI*. We know what it means, as do most of our clients, but it is rare that my clients truly speak in those terms. They have needs and want productivity and cost savings. ROI is, of course, assumed. They want their technology to help their business run smoothly and make more money.

I could see a potential client appreciating a statement as simple as "I make your computers run faster and help your business make more money." Below that, list technologies and services you make available.

About

What goes on the About page depends on whether you are primarily selling yourself as a consultant or selling the company (even if the company is you).

Initially, and if it is solely you doing the consulting, it is completely appropriate to sell the consulting as you. In fact, I recommend it. Why? Because that is what most of your clients are buying. They are buying their confidence in your ability to deliver solutions.

Later, you can transition to selling the company versus you.

However, even if you grow your consulting practice and have several staff consultants, each consultant will likely have a book of business that is there primarily because of them. This is true even with most of the largest consulting firms. In fact, a primary factor in hiring consultants from other firms is the strength and value of the business relationships that the consultant brings with him into the practice.

Transition from Selling You to Selling the Company

I address this concern briefly.

If you start your company and position your website as you but then start hiring others, use the following technique to transition to selling the company.

Extol the virtues and talents of the resource you are bringing into a client.

I had to go through this many years ago. My clients were comfortable with me. When there was a problem, they called me. As I hired people, they would voice skepticism or concerns that I was not on their project. They wanted me working on their systems. But I wanted to grow and take on more projects.

I learned that I needed to position my talent as less and my employee's talent as more. I would say something like this: "Oh, you need your Exchange Server looked at. I could do it, I have experience there, but you should really talk to David. He's the expert. I can't really match his expertise in that specific area. He's a better resource for this. Let me get him in here."

A couple things. Sometimes this was true, sometimes it was more about the role that person was taking with my client. I was never placing resources that could not do the work—and my employees all had areas where their skills surpassed mine.

But to start, I had to ensure that the client felt comfortable with a new person on their project.

It wasn't complicated, and soon my clients expected to see a variety of resources come into their offices to work on their projects. I was still available to them and maintained a hands-on role.

So, don't worry too much about how you might transition from a consulting practice and the About page on your website marketing you over the company. You can change that when it is appropriate to do so.

Contact

The Contact page should be sparse. It should contain your phone number, e-mail, and mailing address. You can also include a simple form for those who want to contact you.

Include your phone number and e-mail address on every page, as part of your header or footer information. Make it easy for clients and potential clients to get in touch with you.

Too many consultant websites I've seen make people dig through pages to find the best way to contact them. Some do not even provide a number or e-mail address, requiring me to fill in a form. I strongly recommend you do *not* do this. The simpler it is for them to contact you, the more likely they are to do so.

Other Web Content

After the basic web content above, you will want to turn to value-added content. For me, blog entries form the basis for high-value content. In Chapter 17, "Your Career and Social Media," and Chapter 26, I cover both strategy and techniques to help you grow your credibility online. A well-written blog with content that helps your client or potential client is a key element.

You should also have a page for media coverage and links to case studies. If you've been published anywhere, include links to the articles or do your own scanned version of the article if it was a print publication only. These are huge credibility boosters.

My Website: MatthewMoranOnline.com

My site is built on WordPress. It has most of the previously mentioned sections, with some variations, as shown in Figure 27-1.

Figure 27-1 *MatthewMoranOnline.com*

Business Cards

This often proves to be a curious barrier to starting a consulting business. It often has something to do with some hang-up on logo or overall image. I caution you to be careful if you are heading in this direction. You might be passing on a lot of opportunities.

At its most basic, a business card needs little more than the following:

- Your name
- Your cell phone number
- Your e-mail address
- Your website URL
- A simple title or description.

A black-and-white card with the contact elements in each corner and a description in the center of the card is adequate to get started.

It isn't that I am against having a nice logo and the most attractive card possible, but I've yet to meet a successful and profitable consultant who attributes his success to his business card or logo.

If you've given someone your business card or a client gives one of your cards to an acquaintance, it was part of a conversation. The person getting your card is probably a warm lead or referral. At that point, the look of your card pales in importance to what the person who gave the card (either you or the source of the referral) said.

The other thing is that you may change your card a few times in the first year or two of consulting. In fact, I might recommend you simply get clean edge business cards from your local office supply and print them as needed. By doing this, you can play with the look and feel while you get your consulting going. After you've developed some working clients, you can ask them what they would like to see. You might be surprised what they say.

For instance, for me, I want a card that is plain paper, not glossy. I cannot stand it when I can't write on a card with a standard pen. I strongly recommend that you not use a glossy card and one with color across the card. At least make sure that the back is not glossy and can be used to write notes.

Mailing List/Newsletter

A consultant is sought after because of specialized or highly technical knowledge. One of the most powerful ways to convey that knowledge and position yourself as an expert is a newsletter.

There is a misconception that newsletters are no longer effective tools. People have begun putting all their content on and sharing their expertise purely through social networks like Facebook, LinkedIn, and Twitter. As discussed in Chapter 17 and Chapter 26, I believe that this is a mistake.

A newsletter provides one of the simplest ways to take your conversation directly to your clients and potential clients. Social media is busy and noisy, requiring a nearly constant influx of content. In addition, only a fraction of your social connections are likely to see any given post or update.

A newsletter also allows you to expand and develop your ideas more fully.

Don't Advertise, Teach

A mailing list should not be an advertisement for your services. Most of your readers will know what you do already, and those who receive your newsletter from a friend will find out what you do more because of what you taught them than because of what you sold them.

You earn the right to pitch your services by adding value to your readers. This cannot be overstated. In my coaching, whenever I find a consultant who is not seeing a benefit from a regular newsletter, it is invariably because he or she is using it as a sales tool without adding value.

What to Include

If you have started blogging, content is much easier to come by. I almost always use blog content to fill my newsletter. My approach is to write several blog entries over the course of a month and then reintroduce them in the newsletter.

These can be tutorials or news about products. If you consult to a specific industry, you can include developments in that industry that are related to the consulting you do. This presents you as an expert and someone willing to share knowledge across your network.

Newsletter Distribution

Use a professional newsletter service. It will help with spam compliance and provide tools to help you grow your list. You can also track how many people open your newsletter and click the links within it. This information is valuable. It lets you know what people find interesting, and you can then reach out to individuals specifically based on what they clicked.

I use mailchimp.com for my newsletter. It provides well-designed templates, suggestions on newsletter subjects, and great analytics so you know what content your readers are most interested in. Mailchimp.com also provides the technology to integrate your newsletter with your social media, your website, and your blog, whether you use WordPress or some other blog platform.

The following are some other services:

- ConstantContact.com
- AWeber.com
- MyNewsletterbuilder.com

If you are subscribed to any newsletters, you can probably find out what service they are using at the bottom of their newsletter.

Your Services

If you can do that effectively and consistently, you can take your greed or your good deeds wherever you want to.

Exercise 1: Why Do You Want to Be a Consultant?

Jot some notes. This isn't meant to be an essay. It isn't meant to be a value judgment. There isn't a right or wrong here. In fact, there are probably many reasons why. Your goal, however, should be honesty. For instance, *"I'm out of work and need to do something,"* might not be the best reason to become a consultant, but it might be a factor.

I've known consultants who started for just that reason, loved consulting, and never went back to a traditional job.

Some of my reasons are as follows:

- Pay
- Prestige
- Problems with authority
- Love problem solving (being the hero)
- Love having some freedom of schedule
- Like learning new things and tackling new problems

Exercise 2: What Can You/Should You Be Paid For?

Make a list. This is the first step in being a consultant: simple brainstorming. List every skill you have that is worth money to someone. It should contain broadly applied skills such as people skills, management, project development, technology, marketing, and so on, all the way to more specific skills, such as Cisco networking equipment, Microsoft Office, web design, CSS, JavaScript, .NET, PHP, and so forth.

Put a check box next to your strongest skills. Those are core moneymakers.

Sales and Marketing Basics

For some reason, people have an allergic reaction to the idea of selling their services. If you hope to build and maintain a profitable business of any kind, there will be some degree of involvement. I believe the aversion or fear of selling is based on a caricature of a stereotypical used-car salesman (the one with the big toothy grin). In addition, there's the fear of failure or of being rejected.

I want to paint a different picture of what selling consulting means. I want to challenge the perceptions and provide you, the consultant or aspiring consultant, a different way to view the selling you are going to have to do.

The first thing you need to understand is that we sell every day. In the same way that we consult, offering advice and opinion, we do the same with products and services that we find valuable. When we have a service provider, let's say a plumber, who does great work, we refer him to our friends. We have no qualms with doing this because we are confident in what he delivers. This same type of confidence (in the value you bring your clients) is critical to marketing and selling your consulting services.

If you knew you had a way to dramatically help the business function better and to save or make more money, would that business benefit from talking to you? That is the mindset you need to have when it comes to selling your consulting. Of course, it is important that you can back that up by providing great services and solutions to your clients.

If you are unable or unwilling to be a value-added part of the clients you serve (a contributing member to their team), consulting might not be for you.

The "I'm a High-Value Solution" Perspective

From this point going forward, you need to convey the message both in your subconscious and to existing and potential clients that you are, in fact, a high-value solution. As such, you can have confidence that you are not the previously mentioned used-car salesman. When you have a conversation with a new lead, in person or on the phone, know that you are offering something important: *You!*

Developing Your Pitch

To get your message of value and competence to the greatest number of people, create a succinct message that sounds natural and compelling. The first step in doing so is to create your elevator pitch, so called because it needs to be short enough (but with enough information) that you can state it in the time it takes to go down a couple floors on the elevator. It quickly answers the question "what do you do?"

Do not underestimate how difficult this can be. Not complicated, but not simple on either. Depending on the kind of work you do, it might be very simple.

A friend of mine and fellow consultant, Marc, says something like this: "You know that computer thing blinking in the corner. I make it work better." Sometimes he even refers to it as "the magic box." His consulting, which has been a successful and profitable practice for more than 20 years, generally focuses on small business computer technology. Most of his clients do not use terms like *integration*, *ROI*, *uptime*, and other terms germane to the computer business. He purposely avoids terms that imply complexity or simply are not understood.

As you create your elevator speech, make sure that it is understandable to the person who is going to hear it. In I.T. in general, we are often guilty of using confusing acronyms and terms that only we understand. This will kill a conversation and make selling your service almost impossible.

The online supplemental material for this chapter includes several elevator speeches or short explanations that I found interesting.

Your First Case Study

Much of this material comes from a workshop I teach called Solution Selling: A Case-Study Approach.

It is my contention that too many consultants and other professional service providers create brochures that tell us very little about what they do and how they do it. A one-page (and even half-page) summary of a project or client you've worked for is a much stronger piece of collateral.

The following sections explain some of the guidelines I use when creating case studies.

The Case Study Framework

Case studies are made up of the following seven components:

1. **A title**—The title is a couple words describing the primary technology or problems solved (for instance, "using WordPress for search engine optimization").
2. **A summary sentence**—The summary sentence encapsulates the entire case study. It could reference the type of client, the challenge, and the technology used to solve it.
3. **About the client**—If I have permission in this section, I reference my client by name. If the project is sensitive, I may just reference the primary industry of my client. When appropriate, I include a sentence or two about the client.
4. **The problem or challenge**—If I've referenced the client by name, I reference them again in this section. (For instance, "Company ABC came to Kreative Knowledge wanting a solution to their low page rank in Google's organic search.")

I also address some of the steps the client may have taken before my engagement to solve the problem. This demonstrates that previous attempts to solve the problem had not been successful and sets up the case study to show you how I solved this exact challenge.

5. **The solution**—This is the most important section of your case study and usually the longest. In this section, you not only talk about any technologies or services that you developed or helped implement but also showcase the thinking involved in creating the solution.

   In fact, the technologies put into place are not the most important part of the solution. You are! This is a chance for you to take center stage. But do so carefully.

   This solution section should clearly demonstrate your concern for the client and the challenge they faced. You also want to show that the solution involved you working with your client. I am fond of saying that no one likes technology done to them.

   Potential clients reading the solution should conclude that you have the right aptitude (the skills necessary) and attitude (the proper perspective) to solve their unique problem.

6. **Conclusion**—Conclude the solution with a statement that summarizes the benefit of the work you performed. If at all possible, include any metrics that demonstrates success.

7. **A call to action and contact information**—When I suggest a call to action, I mean simply asking them to contact you with any comments or questions. Finally, include your name, e-mail, and phone number.

How to Use Your Case Studies

Notice that I said case studies, plural. As soon as you are able, write up a few case studies, even including projects you've done for past employers; those are solutions you developed, as well. Here's why you want more than one.

Every case study that you write addresses a particular type of problem and solution and typically involves certain technologies. Each case study also addresses a specific type of client, whether by industry, size, geographic location, or any other factors.

In the process of your work and in marketing your consulting, you will run across many different types of businesses and many different types of challenges. The goal with your case studies is to be able to leave with, or send to, any potential client a case study that relates to them in some way.

You might work for a restaurant company, for instance, that is a looking for assistance with their network. You might have worked with a restaurant in the past, helping them with a database issue. You might have worked with another type of industry helping that company with a similar network challenge. In this case, you can leave the restaurant owner or management two different case studies. One shows that you understand their industry, and the other shows that you understand the challenge they are facing. The two together form a powerful statement that you are the right person for this job.

Online I've included in Microsoft Word template for a simple one-page case study.

Tools for Tracking Your Business

You need to track a number of pieces of information for your business to run successfully and profitably. Of those, the most important are leads, clients, time, invoices, and your activities.

Managing Your Time and Tasks

Benjamin Franklin once said, "Dost thou love life? Then do not squander time for it is the stuff life is made of" (*Poor Richard's Almanack*, June 1746).

This is one of the most critical concepts in growing and maintaining a profitable consulting business. Much of the time, you will be billing by the hour. In that sense, your income is directly tied to your time. Furthermore, your ability to quickly produce proposals, responses to questions, manage e-mail and other correspondence, and control interruptions will also impact profitability.

It Isn't the System But Being Diligent with a System

Many technologist I know want to find the perfect tool. This is a result of living in the I.T. world. We understand what technology can do and therefore are often dissatisfied when a given technology doesn't do it all.

However, whether you use a computer-based time management and calendar system, something online, or a traditional pen-and-paper planner is not the most important factor in his successful system. The most important factor is that you use the system in place.

This means setting aside time, usually at the start or the end of the day, to ensure that your calendar is up-to-date. It also means having the diligence to update the system as information is given to you, transferring any information on loose pieces of paper into the system as soon as possible.

Clarity and Reduced Mental Noise

Keeping appointments and not forgetting to perform tasks is an important part of calendar and task management. But I believe the most important thing that effective time and task management does is provide you with clarity for your day and reduce mental noise. Let me explain.

Without an effective system, keeping various papers around on your desk or in your computer bag leads to forgotten appointments and information. When we are structuring our timing information this way, we know it. This means we are constantly looking back over those papers to ensure that we have not forgotten something and living with the knowledge that we most certainly will forget something at some point. This produces mental noise and inhibits peak performance. Operating at peak performance is directly tied to profitability and being the best consultant possible.

It is impossible to keep a pile of papers in front of us with every task we are going to need to complete over the next several weeks and months. A well-maintained calendar and task system enables us to see the information we need when we need to see it. It also hides the information we don't need to see (while allowing us to have confidence that will see that information when necessary).

Let's assume, for instance, that you have an appointment three weeks from today and that you'll need two or three days to prepare for that appointment. You do not need the appointment or any associated tasks listed on the current week's calendar. Instead, you need to put the appointment on the date it is due and have a task or an appointment three days prior reminding you to prepare for that appointment.

If managed properly, you can put that appointment out of mind and thus reduce mental noise and instead focus on the tasks in front of you today.

Establish a Routine: Your Ideal Day/Your Ideal Week

Many week-to-week items (such as a daily preview, a daily review, a once-a-week calendar cleanup, invoicing clients, paperwork, and other repetitive tasks) can be scheduled as repeating appointments. In addition, schedule in time for other weekly or monthly items (for instance, updating your blog or writing and distributing your newsletter).

If you want to make sure that you get these important items completed, you must add them to your calendar.

I have a standard starting time for my day, as well. I wake up early and do some writing, but I also practice guitar and work out. I don't put all of those things on my calendar, but I do ensure that I have a starting time. At the start of my day, I must be showered, shaved, and dress for the day. All the activities mentioned earlier in this paragraph must take place prior to that.

I also recommend that you start your day with a preview of the day's events and tasks that need completion. This gives you an idea as to what the flow of your day will be. Similarly, I recommend that you end the day with a review of the day's events and ensure that any notes written in notebook or on paper are transferred to your calendar.

I also reserve a few minutes every Sunday evening to go over the past week, bring forward any incomplete tasks or appointments, and ensure that any appointments for the coming week have been entered. I find that doing a review on Sunday evening allows me to start my week more relaxed because I know what's coming up (and so, no surprises).

Using Google Calendar

I previously used Microsoft Outlook for calendaring but switched to Google Calendar several years ago. It does not have all the features of Outlook, but it has many features that are too convenient to pass up.

Figure 27-2 shows Google Calendar with Google Tasks integrated.

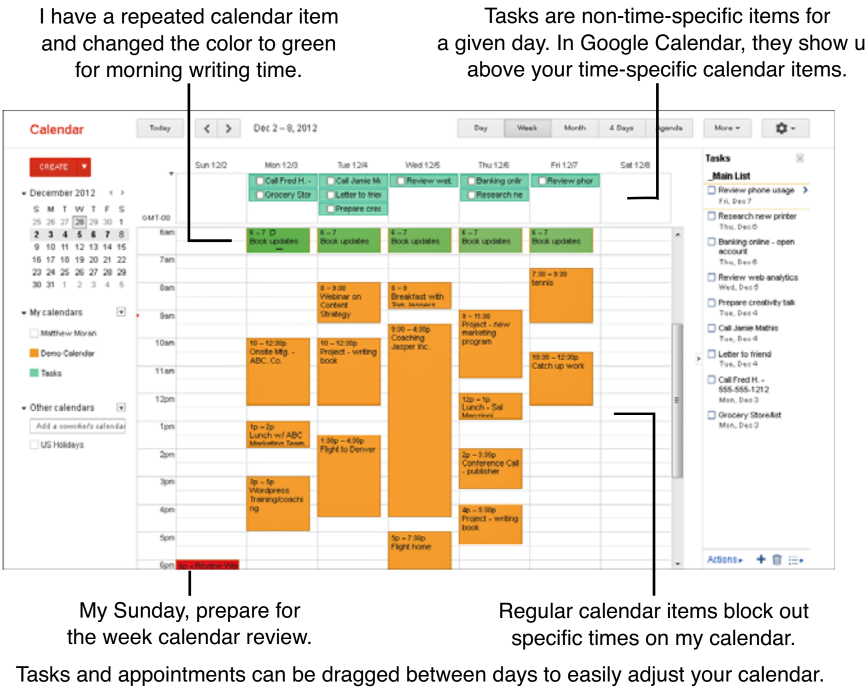


Figure 27-2 Google Calendar integrated with Google Tasks

Pre 12-Week Kickoff: Getting You Ready

Poof! You are a consultant.

That was easy, right?

Reality check! Everyone consults. We do it all the time. We have experience and talents that others want. If you are great with computers, your friend and friends of friends will ask you for help. If you are good with cars or home repair, there will be a stream of people seeking advice. When you offer that advice, you are consulting.

But the trick is to be paid for it. Money matters (although not necessarily in some greedy I-want-it-all sort of way). Even non-profit-minded philanthropic individuals must earn enough to be able to do their good deeds. Even churches have budgets.

I'm going to talk a lot about time and activity management and specifically about using your calendar and tasks list effectively. The first task I want on your list is this:

> Make money.

This is not because I am greedy. After all, even if you are a nonprofit, you must remain in the black through donations. The truth is, if you are in business, making money had better be a top-of-list item. It is how you can assess your time effectively: Is this paid time? Does it support paid time? Does it lead to paid time?

That isn't to say that you won't do unpaid time or pro bono work. You probably will. In fact, if you are a computer professional, you already do; your family and friends call you all the time, right?

By the way, that is a good place to start your marketing. Sure, you aren't likely to charge your mother for tech support, but reaching out to those people who understand your value enough to take your time seems like a fair trade. Let them be the first people to get you referral business.

Let's Hang a Shingle and Win a Client

Sounds simple, right? Simple? Yes. Easy? No.

Conventional wisdom is going to tell you that you need a business name, a logo, a website, brochures, and a presentation. Those are all good things. They are cool! You'll feel more official when you have all of that.

However, I know more than a few profitable consultants who have a black-and-white business card with their name, telephone number, e-mail address, and the words *consultant* or *computer consultant* printed on it.

I'm not saying you don't want a website (you do) and that you don't want a logo (you might) or a brochure and a presentation (maybe).

But all of those things can come in time. I know a successful consultant with more than 20 years in the business who does not use his website, rarely has business cards available, and does not have any brochures. He is consistently busy, though, often turning down work.

Why? How?

Because he started with a few small clients and makes sure that they are taken care of. When asked what he does, he does not use words like *integration* or *systems* *engineering*. Instead, he might say, "I work on computers" or "You know those magical and confusing computer things? I make them work for you."

You don't need the perfect marketing tool. You don't need the "right circumstance." You need consistent action over time. That is what the 12-week concept is all about: consistent action.

How to Use the 12 Weeks

This section lists some of the activities that you might undertake in a given week. Don't be consumed with each item being completed perfectly. Don't be discouraged if something gets pushed into the next week.

However, if nothing is getting done and everything is being pushed into the next week, you need to reassess or reestablish your commitment. Progress requires that goals be met reasonably consistently.

Move through the checklists in Table 27-1 and be sure to visit the 12 Weeks to Profitable Consulting resources online at www.ITCareerToolkit.com for additional tips.

Table 27-1 12-Week Checklist

Week	Tasks/Concerns
1	Make a list of your reasons why you want to consult. Make a list of what makes you a good consultant. Assess and list your personal network of contacts. List the 3 most valuable services you could provide immediately. Create a 1-page consulting resumé. Make sure to list and emphasize the above skills first.
2	Create a simple business card. Create an elevator speech or quick pitch. Draft an introductory e-mail to what you do.
3	Research and register a domain name. Host your website. (I provide some hosting information online.) Select 20 to 30 e-mail addresses from within your personal network and send them your introductory e-mail. **Hint:** Ask for their feedback, as well. Let them know that you are starting a consulting business and ask whether the e-mail was clear. You may discover a lot.

Week	Tasks/Concerns
4	Write content (or have it written) for a simple 4-page consulting website using the information in this chapter. Set up a tracking sheet for e-mail responses and how many e-mails went out. Send out 20 to 30 more e-mails from within your personal network. Select 3 to 6 individuals who responded to your e-mail to speak with directly.
5	Select 2 past projects for a case study. Outline and begin writing at least 1 case study. Publish your initial consulting website.
	Follow up with at least 10 e-mail recipients. Send out 20 to 30 more e-mails from within your personal network. (You should be modifying based on feedback; plus, your website can now be included.)
6	Outline second case studies, finish the first. *Beat the street:* Visit at least 1 networking group and visit a local business park. Your goal is to distribute 20 resumés and/or case studies and gather at least 14 business cards from those businesses. Send out 20 to 30 more e-mails from within your personal network. Follow up with 5 to 10 e-mail recipients via phone. Publish a blog entry introducing your consulting business to the world (and specifically to your city).
7	Open an e-mail newsletter account. (I use mailchimp.com, but you should visit www.ITCareerToolkit.com for more options.) **Beat the street:** Visit 20 more local businesses. Call at least 6 to 8 of the businesses you visited the week prior. Send introductory e-mails to any business cards from the prior week (even those you spoke to on the phone). Publish the first case study as a blog entry (or with a link to a PDF in a blog entry).

continued

Table 27-1 continued

Week	Tasks/Concerns
8	You should be seeing some traction by the end of 4 to 8 weeks (conversations and some questions coming your way). You may be surprised that between week 4 and week 8 that you have generated interest from 1 or 2 clients. If not, do not worry. Consistent activity is as important as results at this point. However, you should be modifying your e-mail and your phone conversations based on the feedback you are receiving. **Beat the street:** Visit 20 more local businesses and a networking group. Call at least 6 to 8 of the businesses you visited the week prior. Send introductory e-mails to any business cards from the prior week (even those you spoke to on the phone). Send an e-mail to all past e-mail recipients (those from your personal newsletter and those you have "beat the street" to find). Ask if you can add them to your e-mail newsletter.
9	**Beat the street:** Visit 20 more local businesses. Call at least 8 to 12 of the businesses you visited the week prior and past weeks. Send introductory e-mails to any business cards from the prior week (even those you spoke to on the phone). Write 3 newsletter article ideas (blog entries, case studies, services, perhaps tips).
10	**Beat the street:** Visit 20 more local businesses and a networking group. Call at least 8 to 12 of the businesses you visited the week prior and past weeks. Send introductory e-mails to any business cards from the prior week (even those you spoke to on the phone). Create your initial e-mail newsletter; send on Tuesday or Wednesday morning.
11	**Beat the street:** Visit 20 more local businesses. Call at least 8 to 12 of the businesses you visited the week prior and past weeks. Send introductory e-mails to any business cards from the prior week (even those you spoke to on the phone).

Week	Tasks/Concerns
12	**Beat the street:** Visit 20 more local businesses and a networking group. Call at least 8 to 12 of the businesses you visited the week prior and past weeks. Send introductory e-mails to any business cards from the prior week (even those you spoke to on the phone).

Review Constantly

Each week, you need to consider the feedback you get. Your materials should be modified for feedback that is consistent across your contacts, not necessarily based on one person's response.

At 12 weeks, you will have e-mailed 80 to 140 personal contacts. You will have approached 120+ local businesses and engaged in many follow-up calls and e-mails. You will have generated one newsletter at least and written several blog entries.

I have not begun any additional online presence in the form of social media, but that should be on your radar by now. Of course, read Chapter 17 and Chapter 26. Those activities correlate very well to the marketing of consulting.

Remember, however, that marketing with newsletters, blogging, and social media are much less about broadcasting your services and more about sharing your knowledge. This is the holy grail of marketing.

If you are able to engage readers with content that helps them, solves a problem for them at that moment, they will remain engaged, and you are then the top-of-mind expert.

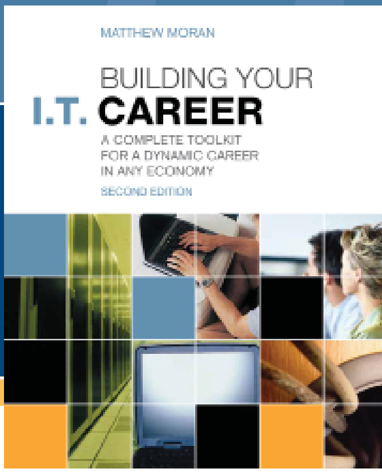
In Chapter 12, "Building an Active Contact List," I wrote, "It's who knows you and knows what you know!" That idea is what embodies today's marketing strategy for the consultant. You are letting them know you and know what you know.

Actions & Ideas

1. Write down what you find interesting or exciting about consulting. What scares you?
2. If you have done sales of some type before, what bothers you about sales? What do you like about sales?
3. Does it change your attitude about sales when you consider the product or services as highly valuable (that is, your talent)?
4. List four projects you've worked on that you could turn into case studies.
5. Take a quick guess as to how many people you have in your personal and professional network. Take an hour or two and go through your phone, contact list online, work connections, family, and friends (and friends of those people). How many people do you have in that network?

EXPAND YOUR TOOLKIT

Remember to visit the book's website at http://www.ITCareerToolkit.com for supplemental and ongoing advice, tips, and data relevant to this chapter.



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