

**Survey of the use of publicity and advertising by consultants****August 2014**

Two questionnaires distributed to two communities generated a total of 19 responses from a total of about 200 people regarding the usefulness of different forms of publicity for independent consultants. The purpose was to confirm current experience in the light of changes in the market, in the use of social media, and the use of other advertising and PR alongside membership organisations.

All respondents revealed that they had a LinkedIn presence as well as a website, although the main use of each was for credibility to enable contacts to research them. Membership of professional organisations was also linked to confirming credibility, with five reporting some business generation.

LinkedIn, website, and a local network (not a chamber of commerce) had all generated business for people, although this was limited in the case of LinkedIn and the websites. One person, of five with a Facebook presence, reported some response. Similarly, one of five using Twitter has generated some business.

Nine people reported membership of partner organisations with three reporting business generation.

Of three who have contributed to professional publications, two had received enquiries and one has generated business, but this might refer to them being a 'published author' believed to mean a book rather than articles or conference papers. Newsletters and blogs, used by seven respondents, had produced some responses but no sales. However, this might be part of gaining or maintaining credibility.

Advertising on-line and through conventional printed media was broadly unsuccessful with only one reporting any business generation from national or local media.

The survey also gave people the option to provide other comments, with suggestions of a trial of a news postcard for a new service; the reflection that LinkedIn and websites are of greatest use to provide credentials, while real sales are through referrals and are conducted face-to-face; that one person has won work for themselves through speaking at conferences but that if there is a need to pay to speak or publicise the event they do not usually attract the right audience. There are benefits from entering awards with clients but this is time-consuming and there is a cost for attending – this being true also for creating quality research papers and presenting them at conferences.



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The main messages therefore appear to be:

- Referrals and networking are still the most important. This can include professional organisations and networks and their listings. If you have a specialist network appropriate to your business this probably falls into the same category of selected networking.
- Attending conferences and awards events might work but is best if you are entering for an award or delivering a quality paper.
- Being published as a book author might also generate business.
- Newsletters and blogs can be used to generate interest but no-one reported any sales.
- There is little response from advertising in local or national news.
- No-one reported any success from paid-for on-line business advertising or listings.
- Websites and LinkedIn profiles are important for credibility and credentials with some limited business generation.

Although the survey was limited in scope, and would benefit from more responses, the findings were clear with little variation amongst the respondents from the two groups.

There would be benefits from a parallel survey of clients and possible clients to see how they source their consultants and professional advisors, which would provide the facility to match client and consultant approaches.