

What makes Your SMME so Special?

Contributed by Lindsay Grubb
Tuesday, 29 June 2010

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Most often an SMME has a small but dedicated staff complement, working with limited funding and resources. It's usually a case of "all hands on deck" with everyone handling projects or crises as they arise. More often than not, there is no marketing and PR department to liaise with media or to ensure that your SMME is in the spotlight. Your name and your product or service are not getting out there to customers. If you're not being seen, how can you attract these target audiences you need to survive? How can you get them to answer your call to action and convert their queries into sales?

Every organisation – big or small – needs a PR and marketing champion in its ranks. Building relationships and managing your organisation's reputation are critical to boosting its success. That's all good and well you're all thinking, but we simply don't have the funds to hire a marketing and PR specialist. So what are your alternatives?

It's simple really. The key is to leverage your relationships with others. It's to network within and outside your networking circles to source individuals who could assist you with your marketing and PR strategies and requirements. Discuss your requirements with colleagues and peers. Ask for referrals for a good freelancer. You will often find that their fees are reasonable and fall within your budget parameters. This is because you're not saddled with the administrative and financial overheads involved in hiring a full-time individual to fill this role. Freelancers are available for ad hoc projects or can assist you over a longer period on a retainer basis.

How can a Freelancer help Your SMME?

A good freelancer can get your message out to your target audiences in an articulate, succinct manner and can assist you with many of your marketing and public relations requirements.

A freelancer can assist you with:

Proposal, Bid or Tender Documentation and Report-writing skills

Much business is gained through the bid, proposal or tender process. These submissions need to be well written, clear and concise, paying careful attention to the guidelines required in the documentation. Likewise, once a bid or tender has proved successful, it is important to comply with the administrative requirements for example the submission of well-written reports.

Good proposal and report writing requires that the writer choose their words carefully and expresses themselves clearly. It is often difficult when English is not your first language to express yourself and your ideas clearly. A professional writer is accustomed to following writer's guidelines and is able to translate this skill for proposal guidelines, paying strict attention to what is required by the bid, proposal or tender document.

Writing proposals and reports for SMMEs requires the writer to have a technical knowledge of the type of project activities the SMME undertakes, as well as specialised terms, and development strategies. Professional writers are very good at researching particular topics, and adapting them for the specific project on which they are working. The more information you can impart to the freelance writer with whom you choose to work, the more educated they will be on your processes, and the more prepared they will be to complete your proposals and reports.

Proofreading and Editing Skills

Many international companies require that their local representatives follow global processes and procedures when it comes to submitting documents and reports. This is encouraged so that everyone "speaks" in one voice. More often than not the primary language used is English and this can present problems for non-native English speakers. This is where a native English speaking writer can be a great help in editing and proofreading materials that will be submitted. They can also assist with proofreading of materials for training, survey reports, and minutes of meetings, presentations, policy manuals, newsletters and the SMME's website amongst others.

Public Relations Material

According to the Business Dictionary, Public Relations is a systematic effort to create and maintain goodwill of an organisations various publics, usually through publicity and other non-paid forms of communication.

SMMEs need PR materials for many reasons, whether they are trying to raise capital, describe their services or inform the public about their accomplishments, or to distinguish themselves from their competitors.

Many freelance writers are able to assist SMMEs with writing and submitting press releases, leveraging their existing relationships in the media to gain coverage for the SMME. They can often assist with additional services such as photography, DTP, and website development. Magazines and newsletters are an excellent way to regularly communicate with your existing customers and a freelance writer can assist with this as well.

If you are lucky, you may find a freelance writer with a background in Public Relations and Marketing who is able to assist you in compiling a PR and Marketing Strategy Plan for far less than hiring a full time specialist.

You might think that you have nothing that is particularly newsworthy to write about. A good writer has an eye and an ear for a story, and after learning more about your organisation, can identify areas of interest to readers on a local and international basis.

IEC Development

With the advent of high-tech media, SMMEs are now able to reach the most remote parts of the globe without blowing their budgets. Teaching and training methods on the products and services of the SMME are being adapted accordingly and Information, Education and Communication Development is a growing industry. A freelance writer can assist SMMEs in many ways, from strategising around the communication message, to assisting in writing the training manuals and or scripts for educational audio cassettes or video, and employee training videos, public service announcements and more.

This is where it is good to have more than one freelance writer in your network. You will need a native English speaker for the base platform of such projects, but you will also require a writer whose native language is the same as the target audience in order to impart your message or lesson in their mother tongue. You may get lucky and find a freelance writer who is skilled in the English language and who can also speak the language in which the medium must be presented, just be aware of the nuances and subtleties of the particular language into which the lesson or script must be translated.

Marketing Strategy

What is your SMME's marketing strategy for the upcoming year? Do you have one? Did you spend time brainstorming who your primary, secondary and tertiary target markets are, and ways to communicate with them effectively. Did you discuss how you could get the most bang for your bucks? Which mediums will you use to communicate your message? Are the mediums you are using at the moment achieving what you need them to or do you need to go back to the drawing board?

A freelancer with a background in Public Relations and Marketing can assist you in coming up with a public relations and marketing strategy best suited to your needs and budget.

Web and logo design and content

A freelance writer is able to assist you with the design of your logo and website. They often work in tandem with other freelancers specialising in these fields and are able to leverage these relationships to secure top class service and design skills for very reasonable rates. They are able to write your web content in your SMME's voice, ensuring all the important information about your organisation is available for all to see.

NB: You do not have to have a big fancy website with all the bells and whistles! You can successfully achieve your aims through a simple and clean website, with well written content. It is important to have a website as so many people are online these days. You need to tell the audience who you are as an organisation, what products and services you offer and how best to contact you. Try not to be one of those organisations who only has an online contact point. People like to talk to people, put your contact details on your site or you might find they turn to your competitors instead.

Social Media Marketing

If you're not blogging, or Tweeting, or Linking In or Facebooking, you're not keeping in regular contact with your current and potential customers. More often than not, you won't have time to worry about these things every day – you're too busy getting the job done. This is another area in which a freelance writer can assist you, sourcing information and writing regular articles on your blog, tweeting about your latest activities and getting others to Like you on Facebook. The bigger your community online – the more people will learn about your organisation.

Hiring a freelancer for any area of your operation is a cost effective way to achieve your targets and goals for the year. The advent of the internet and the various virtual communication options available also means that your freelancer can live and work on the other side of the world but still perform at a high standard for your SMME.

About the Author

Lindsay is a wife, mother and freelance writer based in Midrand Johannesburg. Lindsay is passionately optimistic about the future of SA and enjoys working with organisations focussed on bringing about positive change in this country. She is a member of Young Business for South Africa (YBSA) and assist them on the administrative side. She is also a fan of the Majestic Way and is the new co-ordinator for the Kyalami / Midrand Coffee Group.

She recently started a new parenting portal, www.hiccupsandgigglessa.com where she and other contributing authors share their experiences and learnings as parents and enjoy a sense of shared community online.

Lindsay believes that everyone should have a voice. She is encouraged by the entrepreneurial spirit of the SMME sector and believes that we need to start supporting the little man. Visit her website at www.lindsaygrubb.net