How to Generate Income from Teaching and Training

by Amelia Kassel

ABSTRACT

An effective way for independent information professionals to expand business is through teaching the skills they use. Training opportunities include programs, workshops, courses, podcasts and webinars, offered at venues ranging from local meetings to international conferences. Distance education courses through universities are another potential instructional vehicle. Business organizations may offer a useful starting point with eager audiences seeking targeted material. Networking is important to share information on personal expertise and availability. One needs to balance the time and work involved against reasonable compensation, prospects for business development and personal satisfaction.

KEYWORDS

independent information professionals
business
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training
marketing
information and reference skills

Establishing a teaching and training segment of an IIP business is one marketing strategy that serves double-duty as a profit center and also as a method for building your reputation, which is central to success. You can use your expertise and skills to reach potential clients while at the same time building brand name awareness and adding to your revenue stream. Teaching and training opportunities include presentations and workshops for associations, conferences and meetings – or even full-length courses at universities. You can teach courses as adjunct faculty for schools of library and information science or other educational institutions, conduct workshops for continuing education programs and develop customized presentations and workshops for your clients. Many business professionals and knowledge workers are interested in tips for finding information quickly and economically. A workshop with techniques for finding answers to their information needs using the Internet is a popular topic.

Although some IIPs are concerned about giving away their trade secrets, you’d be surprised how giving workshops about what you know educates prospective clients about the services and benefits you bring. Yes, it’s true that some in the audience may leave you out of the loop; others, however, may decide to hire you once they realize the complexities involved in the type of research they require. Still others are so impressed by what you do that they become part of your informal sales team, also called missionary marketers. They send their colleagues your way. The idea is to dovetail teaching and training based on your expertise as a way to leverage and expand your business.

Teaching Formats and Venues

In addition to on-site venues for face-to-face meetings at conferences and on campuses, opportunities abound for online teaching in the form of
webinars, podcasts and other distance education formats. Distance learning programs can be found in a variety of places:

- The Peterson’s Distance Channel Online Learning Programs website www.petersons.com/distancelearning/code/search.asp?sponsor=
- The ALA Library and Information Studies directory www.ala.org/Template.cfm?Section=lisdirb&Template=/cfapps/lisdir/index.cfm

As you build a repertoire of topics, consider adapting them to various time slots and formats:

- short speaking engagements and panel discussions (20 minutes to an hour)
- two-hour presentations
- half- and full-day workshops
- two-day seminars
- short courses
- full semesters (as part-time/adjunct faculty)

Word-Of-Mouth

The best opportunities come from word-of-mouth referrals, which is why it’s extremely important to network with colleagues and let them know your strengths, expertise and interests and to develop market literature that incorporates your teaching and training services. Once you build a reputation as an expert, invitations often come your way, which is in line with my philosophy of “getting business to come to me” and based on a book by Paul and Sarah Edwards, Getting Business to Come to You [1].

Getting Started

First, evaluate your skill set. Start by teaching what you know based on your background, education and experiences. Identify business groups, associations and conferences related to your business mission and target market(s). If you are new to teaching, a good starting place is in your local business community. Contact program directors and conference coordinators to investigate opportunities. There are often several if not dozens of business and professional organizations in a local community and thousands of associations in the United States and worldwide.

If you can suggest a topic that’s a good fit for a professional organization, that’s half the battle since providing fresh ideas is helpful to program planners. Explore local college and university opportunities. Many offer short courses geared to the business community. At the national level, it’s common to submit proposals based on conference themes.

Fees

How to price isn’t necessarily easy. In many cases, however, an organization or institution has established fees for workshops or courses. Some conferences use revenue sharing, providing for example 40% or 50% after expenses. In other instances, your fee is negotiable. How much to charge can depend on a variety of factors:

- How much you want to gross and think you’re worth
- What the organization can afford or what they’ve paid other speakers and trainers.

Realities

Teaching comes with challenges. It can take time to overcome fears or cope with unfamiliar situations. Each presentation requires a tremendous effort and yes, it’s a time sink. Workshop preparation can take hours and is daunting in the beginning. Curriculum development for full-semester courses is especially time-consuming and without equal remuneration the first time around. Each time you repeat a course, you’ll make improvements, but it does get easier. Academic institutions require grading, which takes even more of your time. The good news is that, despite the initially long hours for development, you can use the same material again and again by adapting it to different venues or repeating a course either more than once during a year or a number of times year after year. Some of these realities are indeed difficult to fathom and then overcome but also consider some of the important benefits.

Benefits

Apart from longer-range goals of adding a revenue stream while building your reputation and connecting with potential clients, students, other faculty, administrators and staff, another invaluable aspect of teaching is the
satisfaction derived from imparting knowledge to colleagues, peers, clients and a new generation of information and business professionals. A perhaps less tangible benefit is the synergy that develops between student and teacher. Not only do students learn from you but you also constantly learn from your students, which is a building block for expanding your expertise.

Is It Worth It?

That depends. Whether and how much revenue is added to your bottom line is related to your overall personal, business and financial goals and how you decide to divide your time. Building a lucrative teaching and training practice takes time. You must decide whether you have the interest or inclination to invest in what can gradually become a financially and personally rewarding part of your career.

Tips

The following are some tips for adding teaching to your business:

- Develop a list of topics of interest to your target market that also educates them about the services and benefits you provide.
- Start at the local level, if inexperienced, where you can cut your teeth and hone your teaching skills, thus paving the way for regional, national and international opportunities that generate substantial revenue; some workshops can generate thousands of dollars for a half or full day;
- Negotiate an honorarium if possible; while many local speaking engagements are voluntary, it’s good experience to try to negotiate even a small fee and require payment for any expenses. Speaking or teaching may not be immediately financially rewarding, but the goal is to generate new accounts for your research business – if not on the spot, at least down the road.
- Inform colleagues of your specialization: they can serve as word-of-mouth referral sources for your training programs.
- Adapt workshop materials to a variety of situations by reusing or repurposing content. If you update and improve your presentations each time, you’ll maximize profitability.

Summary

As a marketing strategy, teaching and training are ways to increase the number of contacts you make that can lead to word-of-mouth referrals for other segments of your business. Giving presentations and programs at local, regional and annual meetings and gradually adding the longer-format workshops and courses in other venues is one path to success. Escalating the number of workshops you give over time is one way to generate even more revenue from teaching and training, should you decide it’s a good fit for your business plan and personality. Always remember that this is your business and you should enjoy what you do. Words of wisdom: Teach for fun and profit but also for other rewards you find satisfying.

Resources Mentioned in the Article