

Start My Consulting Business
Stop whining. Take action. *Change your life.*

11 Proven Ways To Get Clients

by Greg Miliates of

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A couple years ago, I didn't know where the next month's business was coming from. I had bills to pay, the kids needed new shoes, we like to eat regularly, have electricity, and on and on. But at the start of that particular month, I had little idea how I'd get enough work to be able to pay all my bills.

I counted up all the hours I currently had lined up—less than 10—and thought, “How am I possibly going to get 80 more consulting hours this month to pay my bills?”

It was scary. I felt flustered and scattered in a bunch of directions, not sure where to start first. And I didn't want to appear desperate to existing or potential clients. And every day that ticked by and I didn't have a solid lead, I'd get more anxious. My wife would ask how

the consulting business was, and I'd cringe. So I know how it feels.

But I've found a way out.

It wasn't quick and easy. That's because running a business is hard work—but you already knew that. But I've found some tactics that DO work, and those tactics have made running my business a **lot** less stressful.

It'll probably happen to you too

Unless you're very lucky, there will be times when you're scrambling to find new consulting/freelance business. Maybe some big projects are coming to an end, and you need to line up some other work. Or maybe the

clients you've been working with are doing fine, and don't currently need anything else from you.

Whatever the case, you have bills to pay, and need to keep the work coming in.

People can smell desperation

I know what it feels like to be anxious and scared. But remember: don't be desperate. People can smell it a mile off, and you'll suffer for it.

You might be tempted to lower your rate, or bid low on a project, or cap the cost of a project—just this once. But don't do it. It'll come back to bite you. I've let it happen to me, and I've seen it happen with other consultants.

Instead, be confident and matter-of-fact.

You're just doing another task for your business: prospecting and finding new business leads.

Ideally, you should be doing this on a regular basis so that you have a relatively steady stream of new work.

But wherever you're at, don't worry, just get started. Beating yourself up about what you "should" have done in the past won't help; instead, congratulate yourself on tackling it now. I'll repeat that: congratulate yourself on tackling it now.

Take action NOW to prevent the problem in the future

Ironically, although I now have more business and it's steadier, I often don't know where I'll get all my billable hours for the month. But the funny thing is, I'm not as worried about it, because I have steady streams of work from several consulting clients, and I have several marketing pipelines set up which require very little work on my part to keep a flow of prospects coming to me.

But it didn't happen overnight. I built those pipelines over time, and as a result, don't have to worry much about getting enough business every month.

So even if you're scrambling now, take action, and it'll pay dividends in the future. You'll likely end up with new business fairly quickly, and even more business later on—that's because it may take a while to close a deal or for a client to decide to move forward with a project—after all, they're busy with other things too.

Keep plugging away at it though, since the most successful salespeople aren't the flashiest or slickest, they're the ones who follow up the most. (I read this somewhere in the distant past, but can't remember where...).

Small, consistent efforts pay huge dividends

Something I've found extremely helpful is to spend a little time every day on marketing--even as little as 15-30 minutes.

Maybe you'll do something as small as making one phone call. Or follow up on a potential project with a client. Or maybe spend a few minutes commenting or answering questions on forums and websites where your prospects hang out. But **do a marketing task every day**.

As the days and weeks go by, those small chunks of time add up, and before you know it, you'll have built some great pipelines for creating a consistent flow of work.

You're growing an orchard

The techniques included here may not get you clients fast--after all, this isn't a get-rich-quick scheme.



I like to think of it more as **growing an orchard**: you plant seeds, water them, nurture the seedlings, and over time, you'll have a productive, ongoing crop of continuing business that needs relatively low maintenance.

Proven ways to get clients

All of the following are proven tactics to expose you to new prospective clients.

Ready? Let's go!

#1 Commenting on forums in your niche

I started doing this when I first started my consulting business, and it's really paid off. It allowed me to become known as an expert in my niche, and it's been a source of roughly 30-40% of my clients. It can be time-consuming—especially if you craft detailed answers to forum questions and provide a lot of value—but it will pay off.

The other key is to focus only on forums in your niche—that way, the forum readers are more likely to be people who need your services.

I've talked before about why a niche is important and how to find a profitable niche, but it

bears repeating: In a niche, you'll:

- have lower competition,
- be able to charge more,
- stand out as an expert more easily, and
- have clients seeking out your specialized skills & experience.

A niche, by definition, means a distinct segment of a market. So, no, IT consulting is not a niche; you've got to get **way** more specific.

#2 Contribute content in your niche

There are a number of ways you can do this, and I suppose that

forums are one way, but I wanted to list forum posting separately since it's been so helpful for me and other consultants. You can start a blog, write articles for other blogs and websites, and even be a expert source for other articles.

A good way to become an expert is to sign up for the free service from HARO(Help A Reporter Out: HelpAReporter.com); this service links reporters and experts who can contribute info for the reporters' articles.

Yes, you CAN be an expert, so don't worry about feeling like you need a Ph.D.—you don't.

You'll receive daily e-mails tailored for your expertise, and then you can e-mail the reporters with your input. You can even be featured on high-

traffic sites like CNN or HuffingtonPost.com.

Contributing solid content will establish you as an expert in your field, which will make it easier to get clients. Prospective clients may even read your content and then come to you.

Now that's easy marketing!

#3 SEO for your website



SEO (Search Engine Optimization) simply means making sure that your website can be easily found, essentially by making sure it's at the top of search engine results. There are a bunch of ways to do this, and you can find some great comprehensive info in [SEOMoz's Beginners Guide To SEO](#).

Commenting on other websites (where you can leave your website link in the comment or attached to your user profile) helps with your site's search rankings.

One of the neat things about being in a small niche is that you'll have less competition; and in a tiny niche, you might end up being the only consultant who's doing any SEO. What this means is that clients who are looking for consulting services in your niche see your website ranking at the top of the search results, and sometimes multiple

times on the search results page. Not only does that give you instant credibility, but it ensures that you get more prospective customers coming to you.

Within the first 14 months or so after I started doing SEO for my website, **it brought me roughly \$80,000 in new business** (I know, since I track how I got each of my clients). And that's all from clients I would never have known about if they hadn't found and contacted me. That also means lost business for my competitors who aren't doing any SEO. **So, SEO can pay HUGE dividends.**

I've found that creating short videos (where I demo some of the things I do) quickly and easily boosted my search rankings. I posted a handful of

2-5 minute videos on YouTube and created my own YouTube channel, which I then linked to my website. I also include a tiny screenshot and link to my YouTube channel in my forum signature as well.

To create my videos, I used [Camtasia](#), which is a fantastic screencasting app (if you have a Mac, you can use ScreenFlow); it's easy to use and has tons of features. [Amazon](#) is the cheapest place to buy it, but you may also be able to get a 30-day free trial. There are also some good free tools to create short videos if you don't need some of the advanced features; [Jing](#) (from the makers of [Camtasia](#)) has a free version which allows you to record videos as long as 5-minutes.

#4 Free giveaways

You might be thinking, "Free?! I'm trying to MAKE money, not give stuff away!"

True, but when you give away something that's valuable, you show potential clients what you can do, and you also establish your credibility as an expert in your field. It's a bit like building a portfolio of your work, which can be essential for clients to feel comfortable before they give you paid work. You can experiment with what you're giving away:

- An e-book
- A video that shows how to do something useful. In my case, my videos show clients the kinds of things that are possible to

automate/customize in a particular enterprise software package; so, it piques their curiosity and gets them thinking about how my services can be applied to their situation.

- A webinar where you talk about some of the most common problems your target market faces, and how to address them.
- A podcast
- A blog
- A regular column in an online or offline publication for your target audience
- An infographic
- A workbook

#5 Subcontract for other consultants

This is how I got my first consulting/freelance work. Although you'll probably work for a lower rate as a subcontractor, it allows you to get your feet wet when you're starting out, learn how to run your business (invoicing, etc.), and builds your experience and credibility both with the contractor and their client.

You'll also be able to get a reference and possibly even a referral to get new business.

Another great thing about subcontracting is that it boosts your confidence. I still remember getting my first consulting paycheck, and

thinking, "Wow! They're paying me that much?!" I was immediately hooked, and realized that I really could run a consulting business.

Obviously, you aren't going to want to be a subcontractor forever, but it can be a good start, and can also get you through some lean times.

#6 Conduct a training or a class

Conducting a training or class is **a great way to establish credibility**—and you'll need credibility especially if you're starting out.

There are a number of ways you can offer a class. You could teach a class through the

continuing education program at your local university. Some communities have a network of non-university-related adult education classes, and you could teach through that network.

You could also offer a class or training through your website (you do have a website, right?) and set it up as a webinar (you can host your webinar using a tool like [GoToMeeting](#)).

A training or class is a great way to get in direct contact with prospective clients, especially if your consulting niche relies on direct interaction or private individuals for your client base.

But even if the people attending your class aren't going to be clients, you can at least have a feather in your cap of having taught a course; if you taught through a university, that's

additional credibility for being affiliated with a university.

You can gain additional credibility by posting testimonials on your website from attendees/students in your training. You do have a website, right? :)

#7 Network with other consultants who have complimentary skills and who can refer work to you

This is how I got my first clients. After leaving my day job at a software company, I

kept in contact with some of my colleagues who were already doing consulting work, and had somewhat different skillsets than mine. I let them know that I was available to do consulting, and within a couple months, started getting work from them on projects for which they needed my skills.

I subcontracted with them, but you may also be able to bill the client directly, depending on whether your colleague is comfortable with that arrangement. If possible, I prefer billing the client directly, since I then control the billing, and have the additional benefit of establishing a direct relationship with the client—which can and usually does lead to future work.

#8 Offer a free analysis/review of prospective clients' situation and needs

This is a fairly common technique among consultants, since it's a way to: build a relationship with the client, establish credibility for your skills & experience, establish your integrity for looking out for the client's best interests, and, steer the client toward your services by showing the value/benefit of what you provide.

For example, you'd discuss the client's current situation, making sure to elicit their pain points—the things that most trouble them—and then prepare a

summary review which you'd then discuss with them. You can e-mail the review, but you'll want to follow up with a phone call or in-person meeting, since personal contact is going to be **much** more effective.

In your review, you'd summarize their current situation (both the positive and negative) and the problems they're facing, then suggest possible courses of action. I always like to **give the client a couple options for any problem**, along with a cost estimate for each option, as well as the pros & cons. That way, the client has more information so they can make a better, more-informed decision.

Typically, your suggestions will be tied to your services, but you always want to provide the best value to the client; sometimes this means you may **deter**

them from some services if they're not needed. This is actually really good, since it bolsters your credibility as someone who's looking out for their best interests, rather than just trying to make a buck.

After all, a sustainable business is built on long-term relationships, and isn't just a flash in the pan. **Remember: you're growing an orchard.**

Ideally, what you want to do is provide the client with a compelling list (a concise list, no longer than 3-5 pages) of their biggest problems, and how you'd solve them. The client will likely already know about all the problems, but you not only show that you intimately know their business, but that YOU can make those problems go away.

Lord knows how much I'd like it if someone showed me a list of

my biggest problems and told me exactly how they'd make them disappear. I guess that's one reason why hit men get paid so much (Problem? Poof! Gone!).

#9 Ask for referrals

If you don't ask, you won't get. Ask for referrals from existing clients, prospects, colleagues, people for whom you've subcontracted, or whoever you know who might have a connection to a potential client. This gets your foot in the door with new clients, since you've been recommended by someone they know, and as we all know, word of mouth is one of the most powerful marketing channels.

So, don't be afraid to ask for a referral. But be sure that the person you ask will be happy to refer you. That means that you need to make sure you focus on providing reliable, stellar service. You'll also want to make it easy for people to find you: give them your business card, your URL (you do have a website, right?), your phone number, whatever.

#10 Speak at places where your prospects gather, both online and offline

Think about your prospects, their traits, and where they might gather. Figure out how you can reach them in a compelling way.

For example, I know a personal organizer who spoke at a PTA meeting a local school (after getting her foot in the door with a referral from a client who's on the PTA board). At first, a PTA meeting might not seem to be a natural place where her potential clients would gather.

However, nearly all parents struggle with organization, juggling the demands of work and family, as well as how to teach and model organization skills to their kids—especially for homework as kids get older or are in middle school or high school. Every parent can identify with the challenges of being on top of things. So, talking about those struggles and how she can help is a great way to connect her value to potential clients at a PTA meeting. This is also a great example of how she was

able to **think outside the box to tap into potential clients.**

And no, I'm not saying you need to scream from a soapbox on downtown sidewalk like a religious zealot (apologizes to you religious, soapbox-screaming zealots). Be professional. Act like the people you want to attract. Be likable, and make people feel comfortable.

For online gathering places, you may need to think creatively too. I've talked about posting on forums within your niche, but there are other ways to reach potential clients. Think Twitter, LinkedIn, Facebook.

#11 You do have a website, right?

OK, enough already. If you still don't have a website, check out the free ebook you received with the Consulting Toolbox.

Creating your website is a commitment to your business, and is a way to show yourself—and the world—that you're serious about your business. Making that public commitment will get the ball rolling on your business, and will actually force you to start doing other things to build your business.

Now get out there and take action!

So there you have it: 11 proven ways of finding and landing new clients.

Before you go, I'll leave you with 2 final pieces of advice:

1. Start with just one of the tactics I listed, and spend some time working it. Experiment with it to see what works best in your niche and for your prospects and clients. Track your progress, then do more of what works.
2. Spend a little time every day on marketing. The most consistent way to grow your business and have a steady flow of work

is to consistently spend time on marketing. Over time, you'll find what works best in your niche, and can focus more on the tactics that bear the most fruit.