

“I Know I’m Good. You Need to Know Too. . . Now Hire Me!”

© By Linda Gorham, Storyteller
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We work hard to become talented tellers!

We know when we’re good.

But there are those in the “great beyond” who need to know too. Hiring folks!

How do we get the word out? One word – marketing.

As storytellers, we definitely corner the market on creativity. Who else can take an idea, a phrase, a folktale, or a personal encounter and turn it into an exciting, fun, moving story? Our “right” brains (the creative side) are expansive and overflowing with imagination.

But brains have two sides: “right” and “left.” And its that left side (the logical side) that marks appointments on our calendars, keeps our files in order, and helps us develop five and ten-year plans. We, as tellers, sometimes neglect the strengths of our logical side. Let’s be honest – it’s more fun to create stories than to get contracts out on time. I understand. But it’s our “left” side, that “get-out-the-contract side,” that helps us promote our storytelling businesses. And this means marketing.

Marketing is everything!

Creativity does not get us jobs, marketing does. Marketing is everything we do to promote our businesses. Everything . . . from casual conversations, to brochures, to mailings, to showcases, and yes, even to wearing logos on our shirts. Everything!

I presented a workshop at the 2001 National Storytelling Network conference entitled, **“I Know I’m Good. You Need to Know Too . . . Now Hire Me!”** If the title sounds a little cocky, well, that’s on purpose. Before we start to market ourselves, we must believe in ourselves. We must have good stories, and we must be able to deliver them well. That’s step one.

What makes me good?

Step two is to be able to identify our strengths. Ask yourselves these questions: What are your best attributes are as a teller? Do you “move” people? Are you funny? Do your personal stories have universal appeal? Do you interact well with your audiences? This evaluation process helps ensure we highlight those strengths in our marketing materials.

Where do I want to tell?

Once we have affirmed ourselves and assessed our strengths, we need to give some thought to our target markets. Where do you want to tell? Do you want to seek out adult venues? Children’s venues? Are you interested in telling at schools, libraries, festivals, coffee houses, nature sites, nursing homes, or hospitals? The list could go on. In fact, any of us will be comfortable with several targeted venues. The main thing is to focus on where you want to tell.

How can I get a marketing mindset?

The last man in the world sat in a darkened room.

There was a knock at the door.

Before opening it, he took out his business card.

Now that's a marketing mindset! Do you have it? Can you get it? Of course you can! I like to think of the marketing mindset as an "anything goes" process. All ideas are worthy if they highlight your strengths, and are directed toward your target venues.

Here are the basics of marketing:

- You need a goal (*Decide on your target markets.*)
- You need a plan (*Write a mission statement.*)
- You need an identity (*What makes you unique?*)
- You need a budget (*You will have to spend money to make money.*)
- You need a marketing calendar (*When are you going to do what?*)
- You need to set priorities (*Try some new ideas and keep track of the payoff.*)

In this article, I'm going to describe a few of the marketing ideas from my workshop to get your creative juices flowing. Hopefully your "right" brain will be so inspired, that your "left" brain will be willing to do the work to get the results.

Run your business like a business

Like any small business owner, you need to plan your office time just as efficiently as you plan your programs. Make weekly and/or monthly storytelling "to-do" lists. Do something daily that will help promote your business.

Be on time / don't delay in follow-up

A personal pet peeve of mine is people who do not return phone calls or email requests promptly. Wouldn't it be nice to be known as the teller who is easy to reach and who responds quickly to inquiries? How about thank you letters? Do you send thank you letters to everyone – those who hire you and those who refer you? After all, if they can send us a check, we can send them a thank you note.

Be prepared to help advertise and promote your visit

Have an information kit with a bio ready to mail out. Have good pictures and/or a logo that can be used for signs. Offer to help write advertisements or descriptive parts of grants.

Always look and sound professional

Get return address stickers for your mailings. Ensure your answering machine message is clear, short and professional. No musical interludes or short speeches, please. Check out how you look on stage. Are you consistently dressed in a special way? Do you have a signature style? Are you wrinkled? *Never be wrinkled (another one of my pet peeves!).*

Start or enhance your marketing kit

In addition to sending your brochure, add other items that will help the hiring venue to advertise your show. Include a bio, newspaper articles, a fact sheet, a description for signs, and a professional picture with your name on the front.

Be visible

Volunteer in your community and join professional organizations (not just storytelling organizations). Many of my volunteer jobs have turned into great job opportunities.

Be proactive

Keep copies of flyers used at your venues. You can usually take them down after the show. Save them for decorating your office space or your showcase exhibit backdrop. They can also be helpful when applying for grants.

Be unusual

Get personalized license plates. I have one on order. I also have my logo embroidered on several polo shirts. They have started some great conversations. Make a huge sign with your picture and/or logo and name on an easel. Display it in the entrance or on the stage when you are performing.

In short, go for it. Try things. Let your imagination soar and force yourselves to pursue the details to get things done. Remember -- you are marketing you. If you don't do it, who will? And finally, there is no place for modesty in self-marketing. Ignore the tendency to downplay yourselves, and GO FOR IT!

Dynamic and exciting, Linda Gorham's stories reinforce values, spark imaginations, and explore ideas and traditions from other cultures. She tells folktales, inspirational stories, fables, "RESPECT" stories, hero stories, and of course, spooky stories. Before her storytelling life, Linda spent thirteen years as a three-piece suit wearing, briefcase carrying, Human Resources Manager for Prudential Insurance Company's Home Office in New Jersey. As a storyteller, Linda is known for using movement, humor, and sometimes zaniness as she tells imaginative multicultural folktales updated with "attitude." Her new CD, "**Common Sense and Uncommon Fun**" has won three National Awards: Parents' Choice, iParenting Media, and NAPPA (National Parenting Publications).