## Visible Expert®

A Guide for Professional Services Executives

#### **Becoming a Visible Expert®: A Guide for Professional Services Executives**

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### Introduction

There is a tiny minority of professionals out there that attracts an unfair percentage of the industry's attention. The press loves them, and businesses seek them out for their knowledge and wisdom. While they may not be household names, these professionals are widely known and admired by their peers. They are regularly featured at conferences and write for the best publications. Their reputations can even lift the fortunes of their firms.

These are the Visible Experts<sup>®</sup>. And their success is no accident. In fact, their achievements can be modeled and emulated.

In this guide we show you how any expert can achieve broader awareness and recognition in the marketplace. So settle in. It's going to be an eye-opening ride!





## What is a Visible Expert?

Almost by definition, most professional services firms have some level of specialized expertise. In many cases, there are individuals within the firm who can legitimately be thought of as experts.

While they may be well known to their colleagues inside the firm or even within their respective professions, they remain largely unknown to the larger community of potential clients or influencers. We can think of these folks as "invisible experts."

Now contrast that image with experts who are known to the entire business community. Think Jim Collins on management or Warren Buffet on investing or the late Steve Jobs on technology. Their opinions can make news or start trends. They are the very epitome of the Visible Expert<sup>®</sup>.

Fame alone isn't enough. Many people are well known but have no special expertise.

### Visible Expert Defined

The concept of a Visible Expert is very intuitive. A Visible Expert combines the qualities of high awareness or visibility with specific areas of expertise. Examples of this expertise might include cloud computing, business valuation or marine engineering.

Alternately, that expertise can be associated with particular issues, such as health care reform or computer security breaches.



Whether a Visible Expert specializes in a service or an issue, he or she has to be visible to *key audiences of interest*. The Visible Expert is someone whom people turn to for trusted advice and opinion.

The Visible Expert is an individual with high visibility and acknowledged expertise who can command influence within a specific target audience.

Fame alone isn't enough. Many people are well known but have no special expertise.

By the same token, technical expertise alone, no matter how impressive, is insufficient. These two qualities must be combined in a way that produces tangible results.

### Benefits of Being a Visible Expert

As you might expect, there are many benefits associated with being a Visible Expert. Here are seven of the most compelling reasons:

 Increase firm visibility. By his or her very personal visibility, the Visible Expert increases the visibility of the entire firm. This is an easy benefit for professional services firms to enjoy. Your people are your product, so everyone gets it.

With visibility and expertise come potential clients.

- 2. Attract new clients. With visibility and expertise come potential clients. This is a well established relationship that has been an important pillar of professional services marketing for many years. Potential clients believe that a recognized expert is a good bet to solve their problem.
- Command higher fees. Premium service providers typically command premium rates. And nothing says premium service provider like being the most well recognized expert on an indemand topic.



- **4. Strengthen your firm's brand.** Perhaps the easiest way to think about the **strength of your firm's brand¹** is as a simple equation: your firm's reputation × its visibility. Clearly, having a Visible Expert® in your firm helps on both accounts. Having several is even better.
- 5. The halo effect. The halo effect<sup>2</sup> is a well-researched concept from psychology. It explains how people who have a positive evaluation of one aspect of a brand tend to generalize that evaluation to the entire brand. In this case, it describes how others in a firm benefit from the presence of a Visible Expert<sup>®</sup>.
- 6. Attract stronger partners. In the same way that clients are attracted to a Visible Expert®, so are potential partners. The expert's status and visibility makes their job easier. There is no need to apologize for partnering with a highly visible, well respected expert on a project.
- 7. Make recruiting easier. One of the least obvious benefits is how the presence of Visible Experts® helps recruit talent to your firm. Many of the best and the brightest want to work with a recognized authority, or at least be associated with a Visible Expert's® firm.

There is no need to apologize for partnering with a highly visible, well respected expert on a project.

In the next chapter we'll explore how to begin the process of becoming a Visible Expert® yourself or helping someone from your firm achieve that status. As you might expect it begins with an understanding of where you are now.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>2</sup> http://www.hingemarketing.com/blog/story/brand\_strength\_and\_the\_halo\_effect1



<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup> http://www.hingemarketing.com/blog/story/how\_to\_measure\_the\_strength\_of\_your\_professional\_services\_brand



# Start With a Visible Expert Assessment

Having a Visible Expert® on a professional services firm's team is pure gold. As they speak, write articles, grant interviews or publish books, they attract potential clients, teaming partners and top job candidates.

So how do you become or help create a Visible Expert®? The first step is to conduct a comprehensive assessment. Assessing your status as a Visible Expert® involves looking at three key areas:

- · Visibility within the target audience
- Areas of demonstrable expertise
- Level of influence or impact on the audience

Within each of these areas there are both subjective indicators, such as people's opinions of your level of expertise, and objective indicators, such as the number of speaking engagement requests or the number of new client referrals.

Let's look at how one might assess each of these in turn.

- **1. Start by defining the target audience of interest.** Be sure you understand the target audience that you want to influence. Typically these audiences include:
  - Potential clients within certain industries
  - Key influencers such as journalists, bloggers, opinion leaders and the like
  - Other professionals who may be referral sources or potential hires



An important point here is that the broader the audience, the greater the effort required to achieve Visible Expert® status. The issue is focus.

For example, let's say you are a business valuation expert who wants to specialize in working with government contractors. You need to understand your visibility within the government contracting community — and not within the general business community or among other business valuation experts (unless they are in a position to provide referrals).

2. Assess current visibility. Where are you starting now? You can either ask your target audience to name firms they can think of in your sphere of expertise (unaided recall) or ask them to rate firms from a carefully designed list. These are direct assessments.

There are also indirect assessments, such as Google search results, citation indexes, Twitter followers, and the like. The rapid growth of social media has made this sort of measurement easier.

The broader the audience, the greater the effort required to achieve Visible Expert status.

But beware. The measure must be reflective of visibility within the target audience and not other unrelated audiences. Measure what you are trying to improve.

3. Assess current expertise. What are the areas of expertise that you want to be known for? Is it a broad area such as IT consulting or a narrow specialty such as financial systems for higher education?

It's important to note that sometimes these areas of expertise can relate directly to a service offering from your firm, such as software development. At other times, they can be broader issues that are relevant to your firm's services but have wider implications.

Choosing the best target topics is a matter of strategy. But at this point it is just necessary to see what you are currently known for.

**4. Assess level of influence.** What is the result of your current level of visibility and expertise? How is your influence felt within the marketplace? How is it impacting your firm?

Here again you can look at direct evidence by getting an influence rating from members of your target audiences. You can also check indirect sources, such as social media shares or inbound links.

Another approach to assessing influence is to identify new business referrals, partnering inquiries, speaking requests, press citations and the like.

In some ways, the assessment of influence is a sort of "bottom line" of your visibility and expertise. It's where thought leadership and eminence translate into new business and firm growth.

**5.** Assess the competitive environment. Who else of interest is influencing the marketplace? Here you are identifying other Visible Experts® and trying to get an understanding of their visibility, expertise and impact.

This allows you to develop a sort of competitive strength analysis that will be very helpful as you take the next step in becoming a Visible Expert®. That next step is developing a strategy.





# Developing Your Visible Expert Strategy

In the last chapter we reviewed how one might assess the standing of a professional as a Visible Expert<sup>®</sup>. Now it's time to explore the process of developing your strategy.

### Begin with Your End Goal in Mind

Any strategy must start with your end goal in mind. Do you need to be the foremost authority in a particular topic, or are you primarily interested in generating leads and increasing the visibility for your firm? The latter can be much more easily achieved than the former.



A focused, clearly stated goal will make the strategy development easier. Be specific and write it down.



Do you need to be the foremost authority in a particular topic, or are you primarily interested in generating leads and increasing the visibility for your firm?

Here are the basic steps in strategy development.

 Start where you are strong. Any successful strategy has to be founded on a realistic assessment of where you stand today. If you have completed an assessment along the lines that we discussed, you should be in good shape.

In this step, you are focusing on your existing areas of strength. Where are you already strong? The best strategies tend to be ones that leverage these strengths.

Can you start from scratch and completely change focus? Can an audit partner at a CPA firm with no direct experience become a health insurance finance expert? Yes, but it is a difficult road. An easier goal would be to become an expert on health insurance fraud, for example, where the audit experience has more direct applicability.

- 2. Pick your target audience. Who do you want to influence, exactly? The more focused your strategic targets, the faster you are likely to achieve your goal of becoming a Visible Expert® to that audience. Remember, you want to target both your potential new clients and the influencers around them.
- 3. Specify the limits of your expertise. What are the bounds of the expertise that you want to be known for? The goal here is to be as narrow as possible while still being broad enough to have an enduring impact.

The narrower the breadth of desired expertise, the faster you can achieve it.

This relationship is best seen in the evolving world of technology. If your expertise is focused on a single technology it may well become outmoded when the technology shifts.

On the flip side, the narrower the breadth of desired expertise, the faster you can achieve it.

4. Pick your issues and perspectives. This is one of the most important aspects of your strategy. An expert becomes visible by applying their expertise to specific topics or issues. If their perspective is particularly insightful or provocative it tends to gain traction in the marketplace of ideas.

Contrast this with the approach of most traditional professionals. In their search for visibility they tend to provide conventional, widely accepted perspectives on topics that are of little immediate interest to their target audience. Ho hum. Not much opportunity to increase visibility and garner influence.

Look for issues that are about to emerge onto the scene and are likely to be complex and controversial. These are the issues that journalists will be writing about and potential clients will be talking about. These audiences will welcome expert opinions and perspective.

Remember that some specific issues will endure for years, while others will have a very limited life. Over the course of your career you will have both.

Make sure that for each issue you target you have a clear perspective. That clarity and consistency will help you as new variations and permutations of the issue emerge.

5. Outline an implementation strategy. How will you use these tools to develop your expertise and visibility? Where will you publish your thought pieces? Where will you secure speaking engagements? Who will you cultivate as partners?

For example you might conclude that the best strategy is to partner with an industry trade association to do a major piece of research. Based on that research you will seek certain speaking engagements.

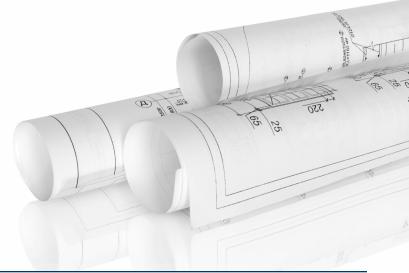
You can then turn that research into a book. That book will become the foundation of your expertise and be used as a tool to generate additional speaking and interviews.

All of these specific objectives fit together to reinforce expertise while increasing visibility. That's how a good strategy should work.

- **6. Identify the tools you will need.** What are the specific tools you will need to implement that strategy? Many folks are surprised to discover the wide range of tools they need to succeed. Here are some common tools to build your reputation:
  - Bios in various lengths
  - Professional photography
  - Videos overviewing your expertise or sampling speaking skills
  - Dedicated website or microsite
  - Blog posts
  - Position papers/ white papers
  - Media kits
  - Articles
  - Research
  - Books or e-books

The specifics will, of course, vary by industry and profession. And you will need outside professional help to develop some of these tools.

- **7. Turn your strategy into an action plan.** The final stage of your strategy development is to turn it into an action plan.
  - How will you build out the tools?
  - What outside resources will you need?
  - What is your implementation timeline?
  - What is your budget?
  - Who will be responsible for making it all happen?



Once you have completed these basic planning tasks you can start the implementation phase.

Developing a solid Visible Expert® strategy is fundamental to making it a reality. When you look around at all the individuals and firms that have pursued a thought leadership objective and failed, it's very sobering.

We believe that one of the reasons so many fail is that they are either following a flawed strategy or none at all. Vague wishes and unfocused effort do not make for a successful strategy.

When you look around at all the individuals and firms that have pursued a thought leadership objective and failed, it's very sobering.

In the next chapter we'll focus on the relationship between the Visible Expert® and the firm's brand. It's an important consideration.



### Want to do it yourself?

From step-by-step How-Tos to in-depth courses, Hinge University will give you the skills and know-how to elevate your brand.

Check out Hinge University: HingeUniversity.com

# The Visible Expert® & Branding Your Firm

Having an individual in your firm who is very well known and influential in their area of expertise can be a boon to a professional services firm.

In addition to attracting new clients and top employees, a Visible Expert® can help you solidify your firm's brand. That's what we would like to explore next.

### Personal Brand vs. Firm Brand

It's very natural to think of your firm's branding as having two different aspects: the personal brands of members of the firm and an overall brand of the firm. These are not, however, the same thing.

If an individual leaves a firm to join another firm, they take their personal brand with them. The firm's brand, on the other hand, stays with the firm. On one level, it's quite simple. In reality, it can get more complicated.

In addition to attracting new clients and top employees, a Visible Expert can help you solidify your firm's brand.

Many professional services firms are started by individuals with strong credentials and high industry visibility. At least initially, their personal brand may be more powerful than the brand of the firm as a whole.

This can create problems for the firm as they attempt to grow. Potential clients want to talk only to the founder. Other very competent staff are ignored or sidelined. The founder becomes a bottleneck and progress is slowed.

A parallel issue can occur with a Visible Expert®. Clients only want to deal with the Visible Expert. His or her brand overshadows that of the firm.



### Rock Star vs. Rock Band

brand.

The metaphor of a rock star versus a rock band is an easy way to think about this challenge. Who is the star here? The individual with high visibility and expertise or the firm itself? Is it the star player or the star team?

For an individual practitioner or a small firm a "rock star" approach may be perfect.

But for most firms the obvious answer is the "rock band." To effectively build a valuable firm you must leverage the Visible Expert® influence to lift the entire firm and burnish its brand

How can this be accomplished? Here are three key principles to keep in mind.

To effectively build a valuable firm you must leverage the Visible Expert® influence to lift the entire firm and burnish its brand.

1. Select issues strategically. The foundation of making the relationship work is laid in the strategy you develop for the Visible Expert®. Issues to focus on must be selected so that they reinforce the expertise of the firm as a whole. Don't select issues that promote the Visible Expert at the expense of the firm's

Usually this is not an issue. But on occasion it can be a big issue. That's why issue selection must be deliberate and not left to chance.

2. Develop multiple Visible Experts. This approach is perhaps the surest way to avoid the problem. If you have multiple Visible Experts around various aspects of your firm's services, you reduce the likelihood of a single expert distorting your brand.

Identify good potential candidates and begin to develop them through a Visible Expert program. Even if all of the candidates do not achieve true Visible Expert status, the effort is not wasted. Their efforts strengthen the overall firm brand.

3. Proactively emphasize the whole "rock band." There are many steps you can take to emphasize the contribution of the broader team. This may be reflected in the language used by the Visible Expert herself (e.g., "we" vs. "I") and how business development is conducted (e.g., always use a team to close new business).

If you think about it in this light, what you are really trying to do is increase the power of the "halo effect" whereby other people in the firm benefit by their association with a Visible Expert. If you have chosen your issues strategically, developing Visible Experts should help the entire firm and not just the individual.

In the next chapter we'll explore the tools needed to implement a Visible Expert program.



### Need help increasing your visibility?

Hinge's Visible Expert program can help you command higher fees and help your firm grow faster

Let's explore how we can help: getvisible@hingemarketing.com

703 391 8870 | <u>hingemarketing.com</u>

## **Building Your Toolkit**

In this chapter we'll cover the process of building out the tools you'll need to promote a Visible Expert.®

While the specific tools will vary from person to person, there are some common ones that are widely used. Here is the list.

1. Your expert positioning statement. This is a carefully crafted statement, usually a few sentences in length, that lays out the nature and scope of your expertise. It also positions you relative to competing experts and specifies something of your perspective on key issues. Just as your firm has an overall market positioning, the Visible Expert® also has a positioning in the marketplace of ideas and expertise.

This statement is useful in preparing a wide array of other promotional materials, such as bios and intros, and it influences subsequent content generation. For example, positioning a tax expert as "the insider's insider" would be very different than positioning her as "the voice of small business."

2. Professional photography. Most professionals have a single formal headshot. Often, it is out of date and lacks personality. A well-conceived series of photos that reflect the Visible Expert's® positioning and status is very useful. Use them to promote speaking engagements, in "about the author" segments or as part of press packages.





- 3. Press packages. An up-to-date and complete press package (or press kit) is very useful in a variety of circumstances. It provides useful background information for reporters, speaking engagements and radio and television interviews. It will contain a background piece based on the expert's positioning, a bio, photography and a sample of past publications relevant to the subject.
- 4. Bios of various lengths. It's useful to have a series of bios of various lengths for example, a full bio of 100-200 words and a shorter series of approximately 50, 20 and 10 words each. If they are crafted carefully, each will consistently convey the Visible Expert's® standing and positioning. They can be accompanied by scripted intros of various lengths for speaking engagements. Don't make the person doing the introduction guess at what is most important or read the bio in its entirety. Yuk!
- **5. Video.** Two types of video are most useful. The first is an overview of the Visible Expert's® credentials and experience told through the eyes of others. Filled with testimonials and facts, it can be the most compelling tool in your possession.

The second video is a sample of an expert's presentation skills and guest appearances. This removes the element of risk as someone considers whether to book you to speak. Make sure these videos are professionally produced and of the highest quality. They will make an impression, good or bad.

Filled with testimonials and facts, a video can be the most compelling tool in your possession.

6. Issues papers. Where does the expert stand on the issues that matter to potential clients, reporters and other influencers? These are the issues that you have identified in your Visible Expert® strategy. Be sure to articulate your positions and perspectives by making available published articles and/or short, internal position papers.



- 7. Robust web presence. There are two components to a strong web presence. One is to accumulate all the relevant information and links on one page on your firm's website, or even a mini site. The second component is a series of web pages on the relevant issues. Each page should be optimized for SEO to make them findable online.
- 8. A consistent and robust social media presence. Apply the positioning, design and copy to the expert's social media pages, as well. You can expect these to be important sources of activity and engagement with the market. They are every bit as important as your firm's website and should be treated as such.
- **9.** A blog. Your strategy may call for a completely separate blog or a series of posts on the firm's blog (your firm has one, right?). In either case, this is an essential part of any Visible Expert's® online presence, and the expert should be posting weekly. If necessary, a professional writer can be used behind the scenes to make this happen.
- **10.** A book. Nothing says Visible Expert® like a book. While not an absolute necessity, it is the crown jewel of expertise. Don't have time to write a book or commit to a major book deal? At least consider publishing a substantive e-book. Aim the book at the target audience and influencers, not at the expert's technical peers. It will dramatically improve the impact.

Of course many of these tools are not one-time events. A blog is an ongoing process, for example. Eventually, you'll need to produce multiple articles, position papers, webinar recordings and other substantial pieces. Begin figuring out how you can make time for these activities in your schedule.

With the basic tools in place you are now in a position to implement your plan to develop a Visible Expert.® We'll tackle that next.





## Implementing Your Plan

In this guide on how to become a Visible Expert® we have covered a wide range of topics. We started by defining a Visible Expert® as a person with influence within their field who combines acknowledged expertise and a high level of visibility.

We also explored how to assess where you are now, develop a strategy, integrate it with your overall firm brand and build out your toolkit. We're now ready to take on the challenge of turning it into a reality.

### The Right Perspective

The process starts with the Action Plan that you developed as part of your strategy. But it doesn't end there. In fact, the process is ongoing. And if done correctly, visibility and influence can continue to build with minimal incremental input. Once you are the leading expert, people will seek you out.

Once you are the leading expert, people will seek you out.

You begin your journey with a resource-intensive ramp up period, followed by ongoing maintenance. You must continue to stay relevant and active, but once you have achieved a certain amount of success the level of effort and required resources is much less.





### The Initial Launch

It's tempting to think of the initial launch of your ramp up almost as a personal rebranding. In many ways, that is a fitting analogy. After all, you are positioning yourself (or someone from your firm) in the marketplace of ideas and using tools to communicate it.

But there is an important difference. With a firm's brand launch you typically want to make a splash and draw attention to the change. With the launch of a Visible Expert® that sort of direct attention on an individual can backfire and come across as conceited or self-centered.

It is much more appropriate to deploy tools such as bios and strengthened online presence and focus attention on the ideas and perspectives, rather than on the person herself. If the ideas and information you present are sufficiently valuable, personal visibility will naturally follow. The perceived quality of who you associate with matters when building expertise.

### **Building Expertise**

Expertise is built on both formal credentials and the stature of your accomplishments. The formal credentials are usually the easiest, as most folks who want to become a Visible Expert® already possess them. In those cases it's a matter of selectively highlighting the right ones.

In some cases, expertise can be based on a person's educational history. In others, it may be the specifics of what they have written or worked on, or even who their clients have been.

The stature of an individual's accomplishments is often communicated by who has recognized them. Where have they been quoted or published? Being quoted in the *Wall Street Journal* is different than being quoted in the *Milwaukee Journal*. Where was your article was published, the *Harvard Business Review* or a small trade journal? The perceived quality of who you associate with matters when building expertise.

### **Building Visibility**

Visibility is built differently than expertise. While perceived status is critical to establishing expertise, audience focus dominates visibility. The priority is on the target audience. How visible are you to them?

Let's say you are trying to reach construction firm managers. You would likely be better served to be quoted in *Construction Today* than in *USA Today*. Even though the latter reaches many more people, the former reaches more of the right ones.

Visibility is also boosted by the range of places you are seen. If you are active in social media, easily found via search engines, well known in relevant trade associations and often quoted in trade press, you are well on your way to target exceptional audience visibility.

### Wielding Influence

How do influential people exert influence? Usually, it is not through the direct application of power. Rather, it is through the sharing of ideas and perspectives. This is also true for the Visible Expert.®

Consequently, the expert is often in the role of educating their target audience through seminars, training programs, webinars, speaking engagements, publications and interviews. This requires that the person have something of value to share and that they are not hesitant to share it.

Don't be afraid to share the "secret sauce." In many ways, the more you share, the greater your influence.

### A Final Thought

The process of becoming a Visible Expert® is never really over. As we mentioned already, it does become easier as visibility increases. But you must maintain the quality and usefulness of the content you produce and the opinions you share.

Becoming a Visible Expert® is not about faking it. It is about focus, planning and genuine expertise. And if you do it well, the rewards can accelerate not only a career, but also an entire firm.

### ABOUT Hinge

Hinge specializes in branding and marketing for professional services firms. We are a leader in helping them grow faster and maximize value.

Our comprehensive offerings include research and strategy, brand development, award-winning creative, high performance websites and marketing outsourcing.

Hinge conducts groundbreaking research on professional service companies. We have identified a group of firms that grow 9X faster and are 50% more profitable yet spend less than average to get new business. We can show you how they do it.

To view our full library of research reports, white papers, webinars and articles, please visit www.hingemarketing.com/library.

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### Help Us Make this Guide Even Better

We want to hear from you. If you have any suggestions to improve this resource, please drop us a line: info@hingemarketing.com.

Thank you!



### How Hinge Can Help

### Visible Expert® Program

Designed to help individuals cultivate an authoritative online presence in their area of expertise, the Visible Expert® Program delivers the tools and strategy required to build personal reputation and visibility in the marketplace. Based on extensive research, the Visible Expert® Program helps experts become recognized industry leaders.

For more information, call **703 391 8870** or email us at **info@hingemarketing.com**.

### Take the Next Step

Choose the option that's right for you.



### Want to do it yourself?

From step-by-step How-Tos to indepth courses, Hinge University will give you the skills and know-how to elevate your brand.

Check out Hinge University: HingeUniversity.com

Need help increasing your visibility?

Hinge's Visible Expert program can help you command higher fees and help your firm grow faster.

Let's explore how we can help: getvisible@hingemarketing.com

