

An Original Study from
HINGE RESEARCH INSTITUTE

FINDING EXPERTS:

Why & How Clients Seek Visible ExpertsSM



Hinge[®]

Finding Experts: Why and How Clients Seek Visible Experts™

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Why and how do prospective clients search for Visible ExpertsSM?

Professional services purchasers often seek out professionals who have achieved a high profile and outstanding reputation in their marketplaces. We call these exceptional individuals Visible ExpertsSM.

For service providers, the authority and industry recognition of an in-house Visible ExpertSM can bolster a firm's brand and drive growth. But how do buyers seek out and engage Visible ExpertsSM, and what benefits do these clients find in working with them?

Purpose and Methodology

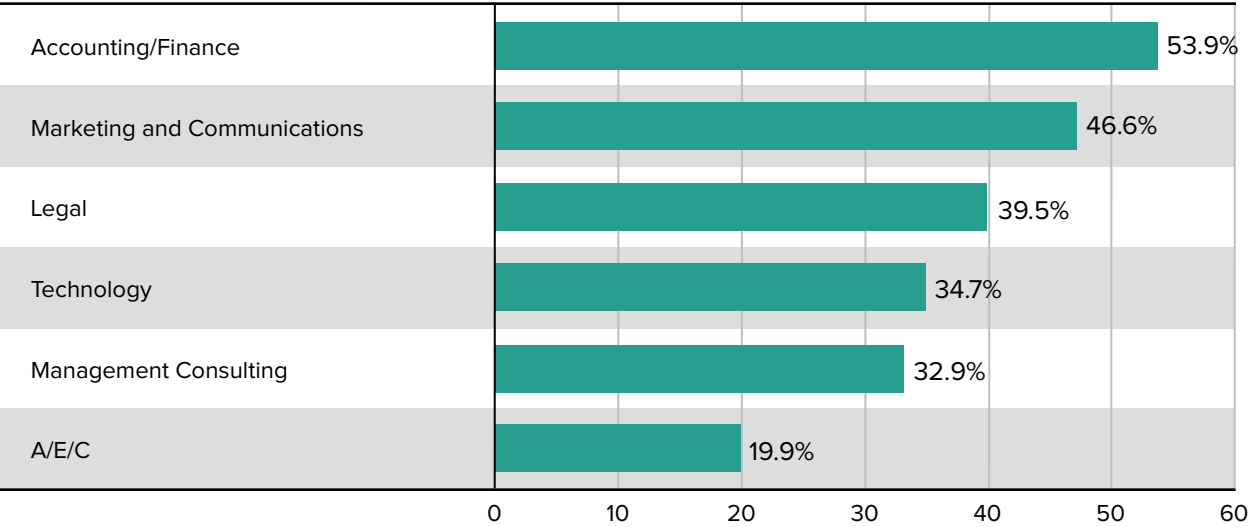
Since our [previous research](#)¹ has shown that expertise is so important to professional services buyers, we wanted to understand the process by which purchasers engaged high visibility experts. We surveyed 1,028 buyers of professional services as part of a larger original study on the Visible ExpertSM, which will be published separately.



¹ *Inside the Buyer's Brain: How to Turn Buyers into Believers* by Lee Frederiksen, Ph.D., Elizabeth Harr, Sylvia Montgomery, CPSM, and Aaron E. Taylor.

Our respondents purchased an average of 2.3 services across the following industries:

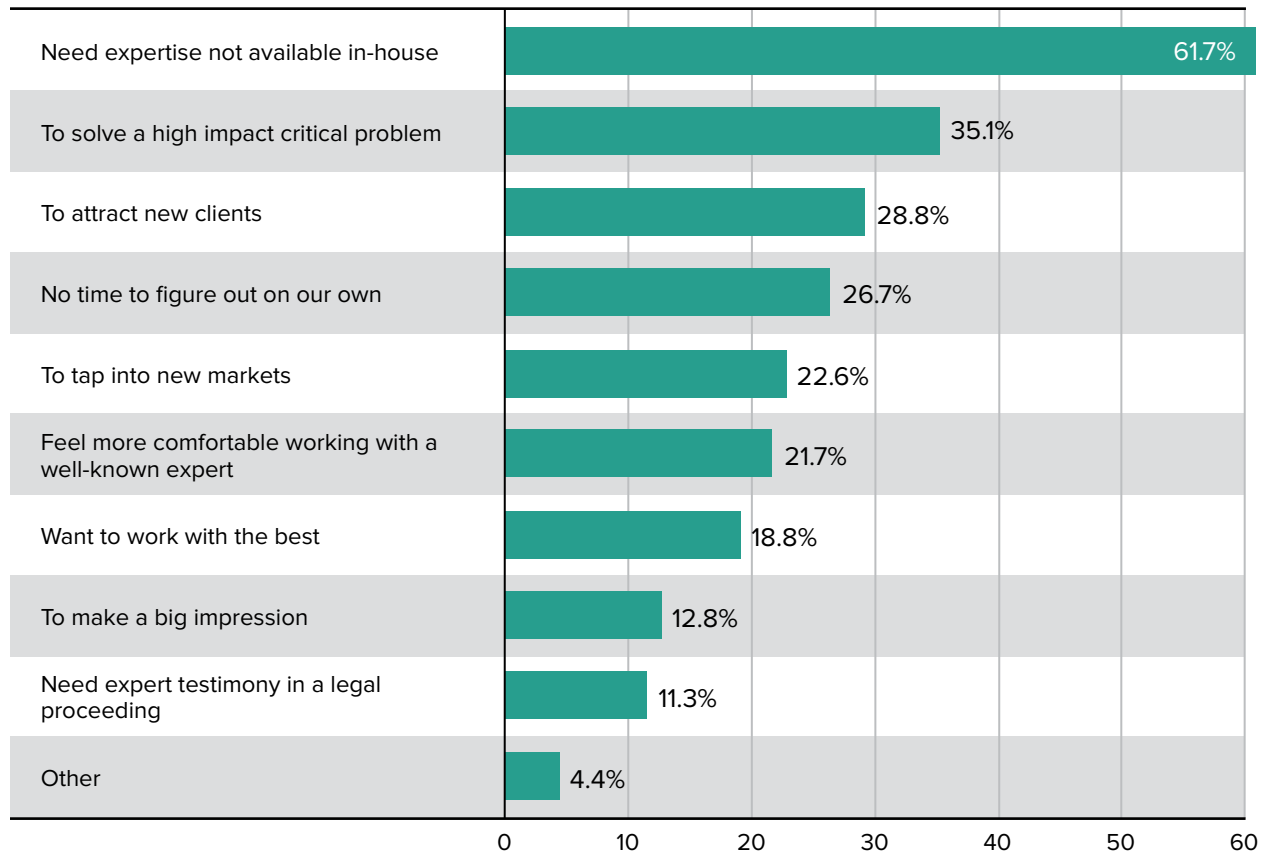
Figure 1. Types of Professional Services Purchased



Why Clients Seek Out Visible ExpertsSM

What motivated purchasers to seek out high visibility expertise? When we asked the buyers in our research sample, respondents indicated that multiple factors influenced their search.

Figure 2. Why Professional Services Buyers Sought Visible ExpertsSM



A lack of in-house expertise was the most common motivator, but respondents' reasons for seeking an expert were not reducible to a single need. In fact, buyers averaged 2.4 needs. The reasons cited generally fall into four categories:

Solving a critical problem

Reasons such as time constraints, the need to solve a high-impact problem, or a lack of internal expertise fall under this category and represent three of the four most common factors in a Visible ExpertSM search.

Building the brand and winning new business

Some of the next most common factors were a desire to attract new clients and tap into new markets — in these cases, buyers looked to high visibility experts to help shape their brand and bring in new business through their reputation and industry profile.

The confidence conferred by an expert

"We feel more comfortable working with a well-known expert." "We want to work with the best." These factors illustrate a powerful psychological phenomenon among buyers: engaging an expert creates a sense of confidence for the purchaser.

For a legal proceeding

The final category and least common factor for our respondents involved engaging an expert to give testimony in a legal proceeding.

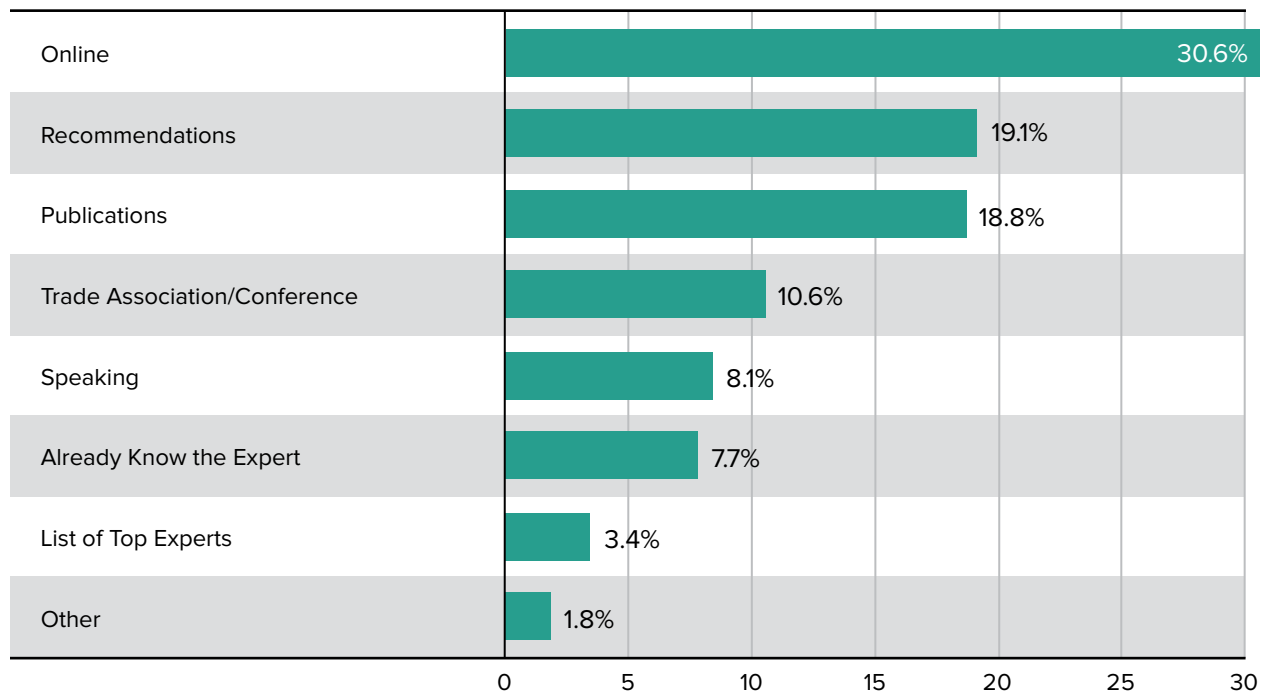


2.4 Reasons buyers sought Visible ExpertsSM.

How Clients Find Visible ExpertsSM

Our next question aimed to understand how buyers find Visible ExpertsSM. The results indicate a dramatic shift in the mechanics of reputation for professional services expertise:

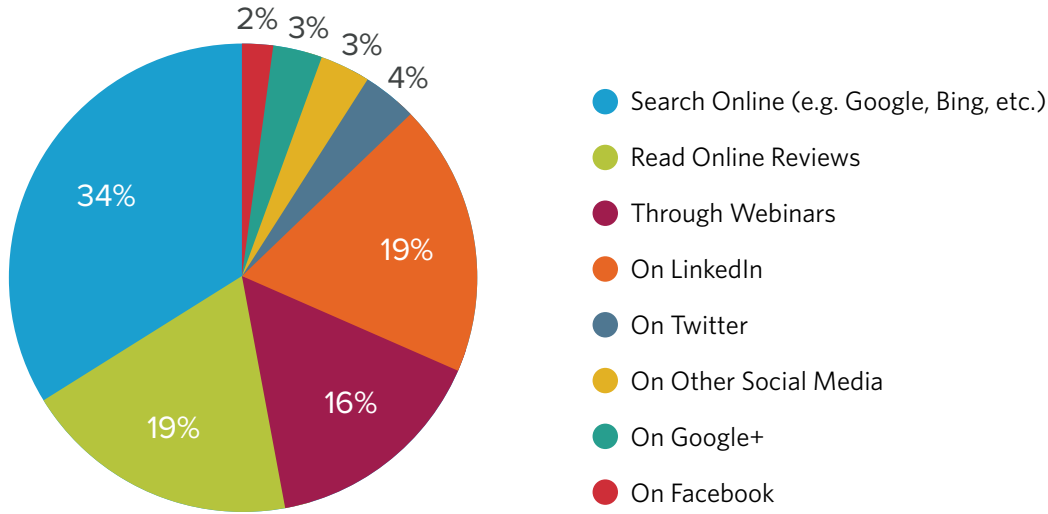
Figure 3. How Purchasers Find Experts



Cumulatively, online techniques have eclipsed more traditional methods such as recommendations. The diversity and accessibility of information online has made tools such as online search, LinkedIn, webinars, and more increasingly fundamental.

Below is a breakdown of online techniques as used by our respondents:

Figure 4. Online Techniques Used by Purchasers



These two charts demonstrate that expertise is projected through multiple channels. On average, buyers use 4.8 techniques to find experts. Online, search engine visibility and presence on social media — particularly LinkedIn — are all important.

Offline, recommendations and publications remain significant ways for buyers to find experts. Recommendations, in particular, reflect the existing strength of an individual or provider’s brand.

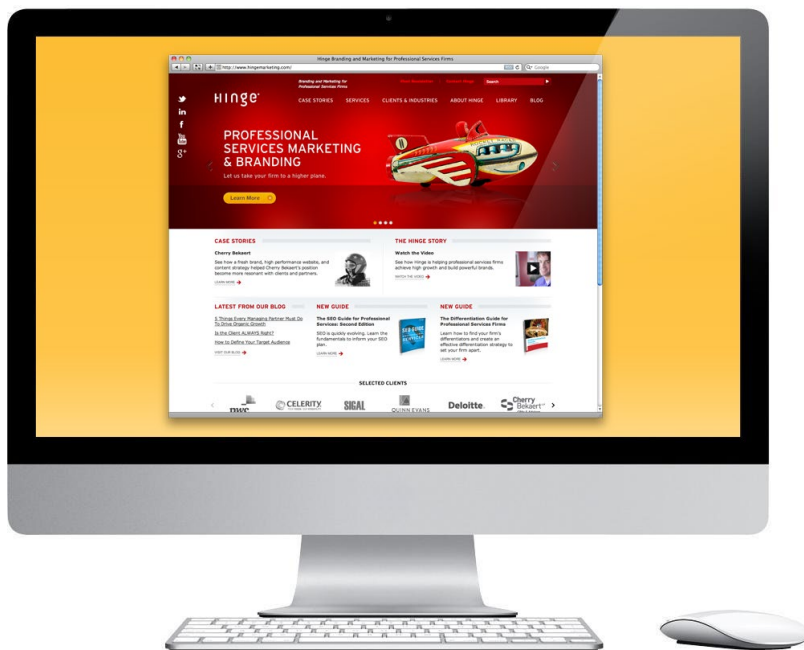
Some experts have achieved such a prominence in their industries that they are already known, while others raise their profiles through industry events and speaking engagements.

➔ **4.8** Techniques buyers use to find experts.

What Convinces Clients You're a Visible ExpertSM

In Hinge's research report "[Beyond Referrals: How Today's Buyers Check You Out²](#)," we found that prospective buyers evaluate service providers in much the same way as buyers search for experts. A provider's website was buyers' most common source of information; friends and colleagues, online search and social media, and formal references played important roles as well.

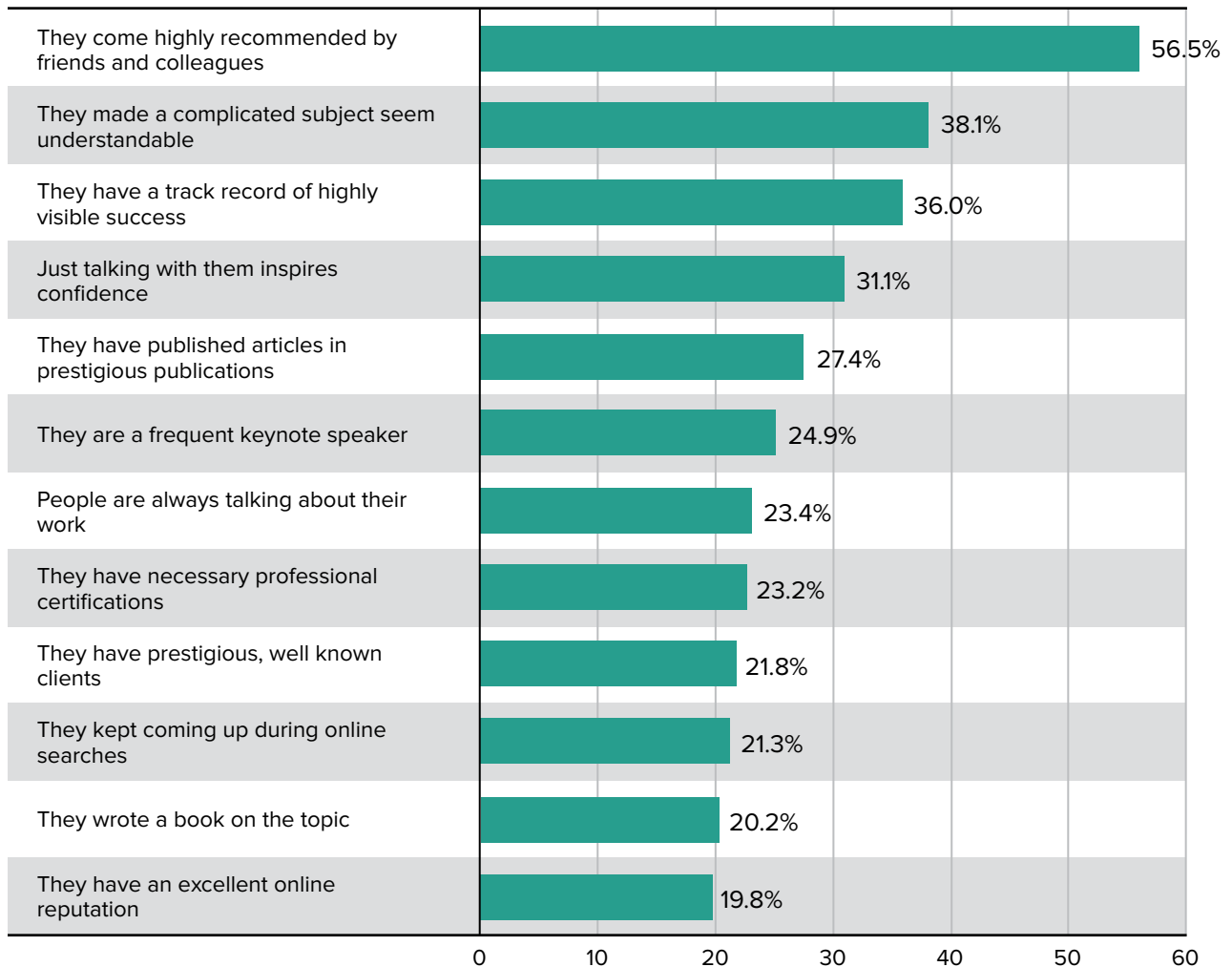
But how do buyers evaluate Visible ExpertsSM? What convinces them that someone is an expert?



A provider's website was buyers' most common source of information.

² www.hingemarketing.com/library/article/beyond-referrals-how-todays-buyers-check-you-out

Figure 5. What Convinces Clients that Someone is a Visible Expert™



An individual's reputation among buyers' friends and colleagues is the most important single factor to our respondents, cited by 56.5% of purchasers. This is the core of an expert's personal brand: their reputation. Buyers' perceptions of expertise aren't reducible to a single factor, however. In fact, an average of 4.1 factors influence purchasers.

The next most persuasive characteristics of expertise are particularly revealing. 38.1% of buyers were convinced by an expert's ability to make complex ideas understandable. 31.1% were persuaded because simply speaking with the expert engendered confidence.

For Visible Experts™, these "soft" communication skills are key. Indeed, they're a critical part of what makes their expertise accessible and therefore visible. Contrast the significance of these skills with professional certifications, cited by 23.2% of buyers. Certifications matter, but they don't speak nearly as loudly as explanatory power.

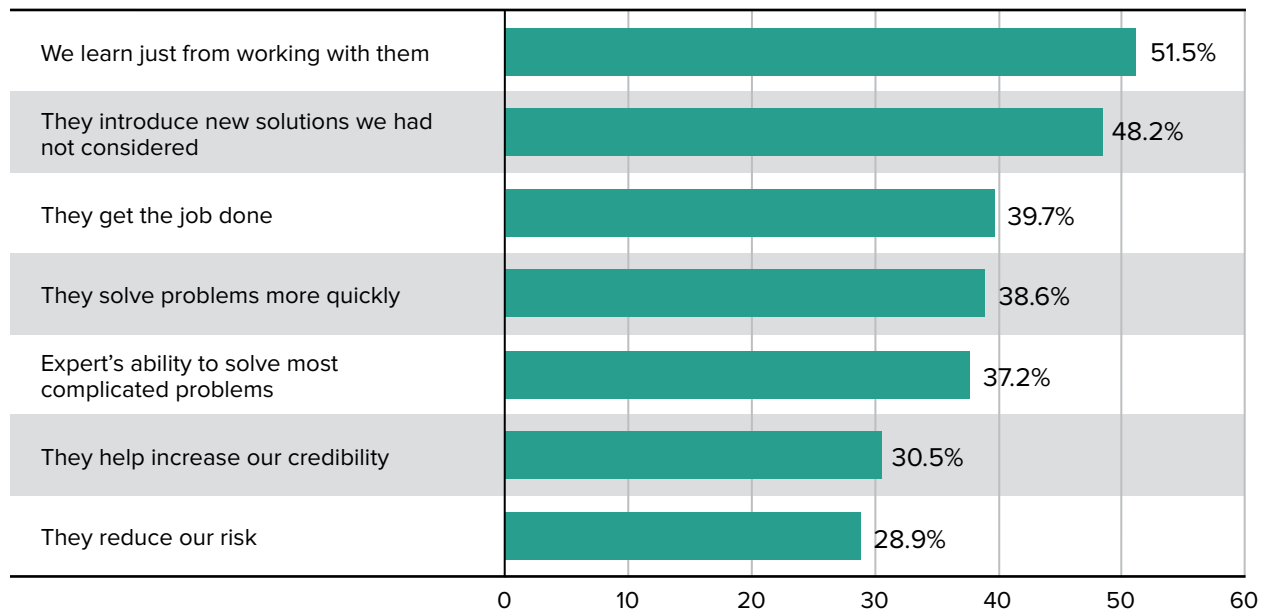
4.1

Factors that influence buyers' perception of expertise.

How Clients Benefit from Working with Visible ExpertsSM

What benefits do purchasers find once they identify and engage a Visible ExpertSM?

Figure 6. Benefits of Working with a Visible ExpertSM



Paired with Figure 2 (Why Buyers Sought Visible Experts™), these results tell an interesting story. Buyers name many benefits — an average of 4.6 — but these do not completely align with the reasons they wanted Visible Experts™.

Note the high ranking of new learning. Clients didn't seek out Visible Experts™ for this purpose, but in retrospect they identify it as a top benefit of the engagement.

For these clients, working with a Visible Expert™ solved their problem quickly with an innovative solution, even if the problem was highly complicated. Overall, they increased their credibility and reduced their risk. In addition to all of these intended outcomes, they gained new knowledge that unveiled previously unconsidered paths.

4.6 Benefits of working with Visible Experts™.



Clients benefit from Visible Experts™ just by working with them.

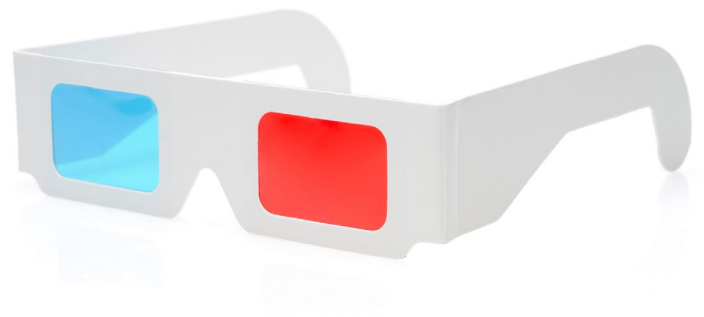


Conclusion

We know from our [previous research](#)³ that buyers' perception of expertise is the single most important factor driving their decisions about whom they will work with. This new research expands that understanding by explaining why and how they select a high-visibility expert.

Moreover, this report illuminates how buyers make the judgment that someone is, in fact, an expert. These insights can help professional services providers develop marketing programs that leverage and nurture expertise to connect more effectively with clients.

Buyer's perception of expertise is the single most important factor driving their decisions about whom they will work with.



³ *Inside the Buyer's Brain: How to Turn Buyers into Believers* by Lee Frederiksen, Ph.D, Elizabeth Harr, Sylvia Montgomery, CPSM, and Aaron E. Taylor.

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About the Hinge Research Institute

The Hinge Research Institute is the part of Hinge that is dedicated to monitoring, analyzing and reporting on high-growth professional services firms and their clients. We have identified firms that grow 9X faster and are 50% more profitable, yet spend less than average to get new business.

Our goal at the Hinge Research Institute is to show you how they do it.

We publish revealing and informative studies on high-growth firms and the people that do business with them. We invite you to check out our full library of research reports, books and other publications here: www.hingemarketing.com/library

For more information about the Hinge Research Institute, please contact:

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How Hinge Can Help You

At Hinge, we specialize in branding and marketing for professional services firms. We are a leader in rebranding firms like yours to help them grow faster and maximize value. Our comprehensive offerings include research and strategy, brand development, award-winning creative, high-performance websites and marketing outsourcing.

Like to keep it simple? Many of our clients choose to enjoy the cost benefit and ease of engaging with one of our multiple programs:

- [Online Marketing Programs](#)
- [Branding Program](#)
- [High Performance Websites](#)
- [Visible Expert™ Program](#)

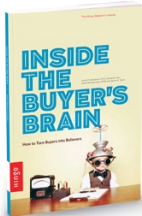
To find out how Hinge can help your professional services firm experience faster growth, contact us!

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Additional Resources

Books:



Inside the Buyer's Brain: How to Turn Buyers into Believers

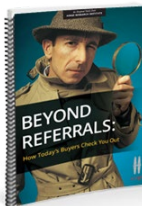
www.hingemarketing.com/library/article/book-inside-the-buyers-brain



Online Marketing for Professional Services

www.hingemarketing.com/library/article/online_marketing_for_professional_services

Executive Guides:



Beyond Referrals: How Today's Buyers Check You Out

www.hingemarketing.com/library/article/beyond-referrals-how-todays-buyers-check-you-out



Becoming a Visible ExpertSM: A Guide for Professional Services Executives

www.hingemarketing.com/library/article/becoming_a_visible_expert_a_guide_for_professional_services_executives



The Brand Building Guide for Professional Services Firms

www.hingemarketing.com/library/article/the_brand_building_guide

Ask About Our Programs



Visible ExpertSM Program

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

Online Marketing Program

Designed to deliver higher visibility, boosted traffic, and more qualified leads, the Online Marketing Program leverages your firm's expertise to draw the right audience of potential buyers to your website — and keep them coming back for more. Our content-based offer strategy helps you nurture qualified traffic into clients the right way.

High Performance Website Program

Bundling a beautiful new site with a powerful suite of online tools, the High Performance Website Program turns your website into a lead-generating machine. Fine-tuned to attract the right visitors from search engines, a high performance site engages and converts qualified leads with finely crafted content strategy, optimizing your online presence increased new traffic and leads.

For more information, call 703.391.8870 or email us at info@hingemarketing.com.