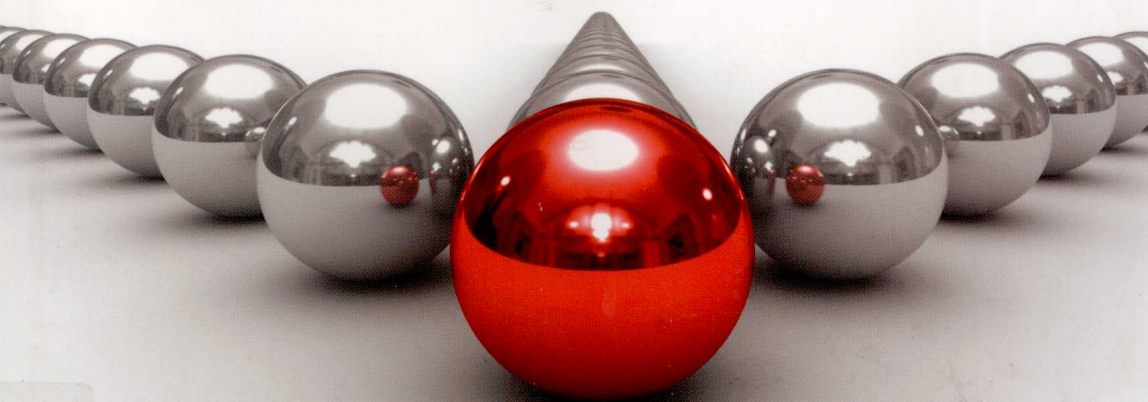


REINVENTING PROFESSIONAL SERVICES

BUILDING *Your* **BUSINESS**
in the **DIGITAL MARKETPLACE**

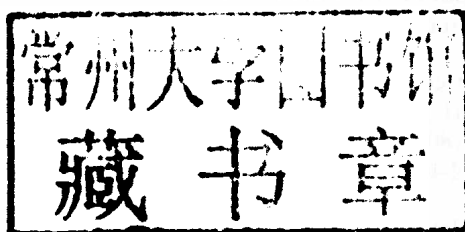


ARI KAPLAN

Reinventing Professional Services

BUILDING YOUR BUSINESS IN THE
DIGITAL MARKETPLACE

Ari Kaplan



John Wiley & Sons, Inc.

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Published by John Wiley & Sons, Inc., Hoboken, New Jersey.

Published simultaneously in Canada.

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Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data:

Kaplan, Ari, 1973-

Reinventing professional services : building your business in the digital marketplace / Ari Kaplan.

p. cm.

Includes index.

ISBN 978-1-118-00190-5 (hardback); 978-1-118-09750-2 (ebk);

978-1-118-09751-9 (ebk); 978-1-118-09752-6 (ebk)

1. Professions—Marketing. 2. Information technology—Management.
3. Technological innovations—Management. I. Title.

HD8038.A1K35 2011

658.4'063—dc22

2011011001

Printed in the United States of America

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

Introduction

The Rise of the White Collar Hustler and Your Path to Practical Innovation

Between my college graduation and my first semester of law school, I spent a year living in Kobe, Japan, working for the Japanese government through the Japan Exchange and Teaching Program of the Council of Local Authorities for International Relations. During one of my vacations, I made a last-minute decision to visit Nepal and flew into Kathmandu late one spring evening in 1994. I was alone, with only a backpack and a *Lonely Planet* guidebook. I recall a single telephone in the airport and I waited in what seemed like a very long line for an opportunity to call a few guesthouses in the city.

As I waited, I paid little attention to the travelers around me or to their systematic usage of the phone. I periodically looked up from my book and noticed that each subsequent person on the line lifted the receiver, dialed, and waited for almost the exact same amount of time as the preceding individual. As one walked away, another stepped forward, lifted the receiver, and executed the routine. It was very mechanical and efficient.

There was, however, one problem that went unsaid until I had an opportunity to play the game.

The phone was broken!

Each person took the same steps and realized the same result—failure. They thought those steps worked for their predecessor and simply followed his or her lead. They were unaware of the earlier results so they left in confusion without saying a word to their fellow travelers.

Upon realizing the trouble, like a courteous Eagle Scout, I turned to the person behind me and informed him that the handset did not work. He smiled and waved as I walked away to either find another pay phone or some other type of travel assistance. When I looked back, I was surprised to see him holding the receiver attempting to make a call. Even more startling was that despite my advisory to him and a few others within earshot in the line, not a single person left. Not one.

Today, providers of a broad range of professional services find themselves waiting in a proverbial line to use tools and techniques that are of waning utility. It is harder for them to build relationships with the same longevity and, therefore, they face greater challenges in developing business. Although most had been following a similar path for years with a fair amount of success, the recession and the impact of technology on information-oriented advisory careers are forcing them to become more entrepreneurial. A well-respected education, industry experience, and a book of contacts are no longer enough. There is a renewed focus on practical innovation.

The trends have, in a word, forced each professional to become a *hustler*.

This book is designed to provide readers with authentic insights on charting an accessible course for making small changes that have the potential to achieve identifiable results. It offers concrete ideas for engaging more fully with clients and prospects, raising your profile and that of your practice by contributing to the growth of your professional community, and creating additional opportunities to interact with your core audience.

Each chapter features an overall message, for example, Chapter 5 is about profiling and understanding your customers, clients, patients, and so on. Commentary from experts in various industries supports that message and there are often references to online resources that will help you execute this idea.

Ultimately, that is my goal. I want you to read this book, select a single idea that you believe can work in your practice, and act. Period.

To that end, I make you two promises. First, you are likely to fail at some point. Second, you are unlikely to succeed if you are not willing to fail, even in some small way. Of course, every step forward involves some risk. As professionals, we abhor risk. It is antithetical to

our training. In fact, we seek out advanced education and licensed skills to eliminate as much risk as possible.

The reality is, however, that success in today's highly populated professional communities requires both skill and style. Technology can help you hone both. New tools allow you to showcase your talent to a much broader audience. They empower you to interact with that audience in a more organic fashion. And, they create meaningful opportunities to follow up in a seamless and effective manner.

Everyone has a story about his or her first client or first job. It always seems like serendipity in hindsight, where the stars aligned and someone caught a very lucky break. In fact, there is often additional detail that reveals the coordinated long-term effort required to create that opportunity and others like it.

"The challenge is that people want the silver bullet, the formula, the magic potion," says Bruce Jones, Programming Director at the Disney Institute in Orlando, Florida, which trains executives worldwide on adopting the Disney model of creating an emotional connection to their brands. "It is not magic; it is day in and day out commitment," he adds.

That commitment might come in the form of networking or it might manifest itself in one's dedication to improving his or her community. Ultimately, it is demonstrated in ways that individuals can easily tailor to their own strengths and personalities. It is the modern hustle for longevity and client service recognition.

Everyone can take a common sense approach with their own branding, which reflects their character and capability. "We are not perfect," says Jones. "We strive for perfection and we'll settle for excellence, but we won't settle for anything less."

The challenge is that people want the silver bullet, the formula, the magic potion. It is not magic; it is day in and day out commitment.

Bruce Jones, Programming Director at the Disney Institute in Orlando, Florida

Getting Started

The central focus of today's white-collar hustler is a well-crafted plan and a dedication to a routine set of activities that contributes

to the professional's success, as well as that of those he or she serves. Throughout this book we'll explore how to make a plan that draws on individual strengths and needs. Having a plan, though, is not enough. Being accountable is essential. It is also important to bring others into the process; by telling someone about your goals, those in your support circle can help you with encouragement and reinforcement. In these pages, we'll also explore the roles of proactive listening and introspection, as well as the importance of being true to yourself.

The first step comes with understanding that professionals can change the manner in which they get from point A to point B in achieving business goals, without fundamentally changing their identity as doctors, lawyers, dentists, veterinarians, accountants, and the like.

Consider my experience as a swimmer: I have always loved swimming and, of course, hated it at the same time. As hard as I tried, I never seemed to get better or faster, but it has been my primary workout since following up on a New Year's resolution in 2007 and joining a local masters swimming team. After a frustrating practice session, a fellow teammate suggested that I read *Total Immersion: The Revolutionary Way to Swim Better, Faster, and Easier* by Terry Laughlin and John Delves (Fireside, 1996) to focus on my stroke, rather than my strength.

As soon as I began reading it, I realized that I had for years been concentrating on spinning my arms around as quickly as possible instead of streamlining my body to move through the water more aerodynamically like a fish. I asked my coach, Ultraman Canada finisher Melanie Fink, to help me implement the changes to my stroke and formation. Fink, the owner of Personal Training of Short Hills LLC, challenged me to dismantle my existing notions of swimming and reform my entire perspective on the sport. And, as you might imagine, I resisted.

For months, I struggled with learning new techniques and swam slower than ever before. But then it started to get easier and I began swimming faster, but more efficiently. Instead of using 24 strokes to make it across a 25-yard pool, I was across in 20, then 18, and now, depending on how tired I am, even 16 or 14. I am not stronger, but I am more economical with my energy and effort.

While the professional community is not necessarily struggling to make it across the pool, licensed experts in every discipline

are sensing a revolution in how they deliver their services to a more empowered audience of clients in a dynamic economic environment.

Advancements in technology have commoditized many of the services professionals once offered for a fee. Now, they are giving that information away and searching for higher-value revenue streams. Social media has completely shifted the landscape from commentary to conversation. While experts once informed individuals about key issues in their field, they are now responding to queries and discussing those issues in an open forum. That transparency has completely reconfigured the setting.

Lawyers, accountants, doctors, bankers, architects, veterinarians, dentists, and others who used to focus solely on their craft are now reconsidering their “stroke count,” having come to realize they are making inefficient efforts. Just as importantly, many realize they hamper themselves by avoiding calculated risks that are likely to produce results.

I actually avoided this risk on behalf of my then-seven-year-old son, whom I coached in Little League. I didn’t play baseball as a child; the thought of getting hit by the ball always scared me. That, and a complete lack of coordination. But my son can play. And, he loves it. So I coach.

All of the kids who pitched were eight, almost nine. For weeks, he kept asking me for permission to pitch and I quietly suggested that he keep practicing. The truth was that I was afraid that a batter would return one of his pitches right into his head or chest. Toward the end of the season, another coach offered him a chance and I acquiesced.

He walked the first and second batters. To be honest I was relieved because he didn’t get hit with the ball. Then he struck out the third and fourth batters. Every kid in the dugout was on his feet. Two on, two outs, and he struck out the last batter retiring the side with no runs scored. Amazing! Like it was no problem. Like failure was not an option.

In fact, failure is always an option, often a very real one. Complacency can be a smooth road on which to travel. It might be safe. But, where will it take you? And, of course, there are risks. After all, I’m glad my son pitched, but it took us a while to get him to stop sleeping with his baseball glove.

“Success today requires the willingness to take a risk and to put your stake in the sand,” says Nancy Fox, founder of The Business Fox, a coaching and training company. “You really can’t afford to treat your practice like a practice anymore; you have to be an entrepreneur and view it as a business,” she advises.

While it was once an advantage to have a personal brand, it is now essential. Without one, you often limit your value within your organization and the community. Hoping the phone rings is an exercise in wasting energy because, among other reasons, fewer people are using the phone to interact with their counselors. The marketplace is competitive; only those who target their audience and find ways to creatively interact with its members will continue to thrive.

Expectations, both internal and external, are higher. Decades ago, junior associates had seven or eight years to prove themselves. Today, they have three. And, one must be proactive now or face the consequences later. Those that are often reap rewards.

Two days after my son’s baseball game, I received this e-mail from a student at a law school where I had spoken a while back, who viewed his job search this way:

Ari,

You do not remember me, but I met you when you spoke at [our] Law School last year. I just wanted to email you to let you know that I followed your advice and got a job as a result of it. I won’t bore you with the details but basically I became a networking whore/junky. I just wanted to e-mail you to say thank you for your assistance.

Like this student, professionals must shift from being reactive to industry change to proactively incorporating new ideas into their practices. And, of course: *hustling*.

Over the past few years, I have had the opportunity to interact with thousands of professionals. Whenever I asked one about the key to success in his or her field, the response was typically: “I am a hustler.”

Aside from all of the gadgetry and Internet-based solutions, or the calls for value-billing and improved customer service, many of the professionals with whom I have spoken attributed their success in one method or another to leveraging a cocktail of efforts that

helped them fuel the hustle and create possibility. Fox paraphrases a quote that captures the essence of the new hustler's revolution: "If you're interested in success, you'll do what is convenient. If you are committed to success, you will do whatever the hell is necessary."

Each professional can find parallel challenges that colleagues in other disciplines are facing, as well as strategies that are helping them reshape their efforts. We must engage in a broader conversation that enables providers of services to reinvent instead of simply repeat past exercises. Most are steeped in tradition in terms of how they develop and cultivate client relationships, interact with peers, and collaborate. They continue to operate within models of hourly billing and base earnings solely on the time spent. Each profession also views its own protocols in isolation, but there are more universal similarities than many realize. From accountants to architects and bankers to barristers, there is a dynamic approach that could work for you.

Whatever name we give it, however we described the process, one thing is clear: the path to growing a professional business has changed. This book explores how to get on the new track, a process that needn't be painful and could even be fun.

What's in This Book

The transformation of professional services has been characterized by a more proactive base of clients/patients, who are empowered with information and heightened expectations. Each chapter is designed to help you navigate the evolution of this interdisciplinary phenomenon.

This introduction contrasts the urgent need for change with the approachable manner in which one can make subtle adjustments to remain on pace with progress.

The first three chapters highlight the characteristics that professionals should incorporate to properly position themselves for change. Chapter 1 suggests that in order to navigate today's more informal and instant environment, licensed practitioners should seek to become visible enthusiastic experts. Doing so will allow them to realize their potential. Chapter 2 justifies the need for innovation and encourages individuals to embrace new ideas in a traditional culture. Chapter 3 cites specific trends related to

pricing, partnerships, and correspondence that will help professionals thrive.

The next three chapters are meant to establish a generational understanding of how to practically approach goal-setting. Chapter 4 is designed for students to understand how to see the foundation for a future in a fiercely competitive market. Chapter 5 prompts professionals to learn more about their clients and patients, while Chapter 6 provides guidance on reshaping their practices based on the needs of those clients and patients.

The next four chapters are designed to help individuals and organizations adapt to new methods of communication and encourage experimentation with technology. Chapter 7 suggests that streamlining operations can revitalize revenue streams. Chapter 8 focuses on the updated art of networking in a digital world. It addresses the social media landscape and offers suggestions for acclimating to this new environment. Chapter 9 sets forth the advantages of taking a proactive and direct approach to connecting with clients or patients. And, Chapter 10 promotes the idea of customizing each approach to suit one's particular circumstances. It recognizes the critical nature of referral sources and strategic techniques for creating opportunity.

The remaining sections are designed to spark new ideas and inspire calculated risk-taking with a full understanding of the potential consequences. Chapter 11 prompts professionals to seek out specific contacts, rather than hope to make their acquaintance in the future. Chapter 12 provides concrete examples of how to execute and achieve those goals. Chapter 13 reminds readers that the ultimate goal is not to become adept at using a tool, but to enhance your ability to form genuine relationships. It also provides certain points of caution in creating those relationships online. Chapter 14 offers creative ideas for following up with those you meet and for remaining in touch with them.

Finally, the conclusion conveys the ultimate goal of cultivating community. It highlights that doing so creates opportunity and enables one to more effectively hone his or her message.

The suggestions and conclusions are based on proven efforts, as well as the experience, of those featured in the book. They are leaders in their fields and recognized as much for their accomplishments as the manner in which they achieved them.

The chapters are designed to form a cohesive journey from theory to reality, but can also be read selectively. Just as the book encourages customization of your approach in your practice, I have written it to allow you that same flexibility in the way you interact with the material. I hope that you find the content thought-provoking, action-oriented, and empowering.

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CHAPTER 1

Finding Your Way in a More Informal, Instant World

The new formula for prosperity among most professionals is to become a visible enthusiastic expert. This chapter will discuss how increasing his or her visibility can help a professional realize business-development potential, why modern hustlers are known for their enthusiasm, and the relative ease with which one can showcase expertise in a digital marketplace.



Important changes in marketing are already taking place. In fact, we are in a new era that values momentum over perfection.

For decades, personal marketing was time consuming and challenging because nothing could be released into the public domain until it was perfect. There was no tolerance for mistakes or inconsistencies.

Today, we are in the environment of perpetual beta, where technology has created a climate of perfect imperfection. The culture is more accepting of shortcomings. In fact, there is a certain authenticity in being almost cool. It is more relatable. It conveys sincerity. It builds trust.

There is also a certain freedom in not worrying about flawlessness and instead concentrating on commencement. Professionals are now liberated to start more initiatives just like the entrepreneurs they admire. They simply need to look to themselves for ideas.