



# How to Harness the POWER of Public Speaking

*BY LORI NASH BYRON*

You're a marketing pro, so you already know that speaking engagements are a smart way to reach potential clients and demonstrate thought leadership. So why don't more firms use speaking programs as a pillar in their marketing strategy? It could be one of several reasons.

1. Your firm's professionals are uncomfortable with public speaking. They pursued their profession to solve problems and work on projects, not to emote on a stage.
2. Your firm's professionals pursue their own speaking engagements. The most technically accomplished staffers submit papers for publication in prestigious industry journals and present those papers at academic and technical conferences.
3. Your firm's professionals are already sought-after speakers because of their renowned expertise and charismatic delivery. Event organizers seek them out without any effort on your part. You can focus your efforts on leveraging that advantage.

## THE VALUE OF PUBLIC SPEAKING FOR PROFESSIONALS

With speaking, you advance your firm's reach and reputation and increase your profit. How? Because speaking helps:

- strengthen your expert position (more on this below)
- build your firm's brand, gaining recognition, visibility, and respect
- increase the professional's influence, as he or she puts forth ideas and information
- enhance the ability to promote your firm and services, in a non-salesy way



“Why don’t more firms use speaking programs as a pillar in their marketing strategy?”

## WHY IT WORKS: RARITY, PSYCHOLOGY, AND PRESTIGE

One reason that speaking is so powerful is that it requires self-confidence. Few people will do it. (You’ve heard about the studies showing that, for many people, fear of public speaking ranks higher than their fear of their own death, right?) By taking an action that so many fear, professionals are assured of standing out from most competitors.

Your professionals don’t have to have the crowd-commanding skills of Steve Jobs. They only have to be professional, prepared, and able to clearly communicate ideas and information.

**Targeted.** Presentations and events are largely opt-in affairs. The audience (when you’ve done your homework) is made of individuals who are already qualified prospects. By showing up, they’ve demonstrated an interest in the service you have to offer. Plus viewing a presentation offers some proof for the potential clients—they have a tangible example of how your firm is different; not just because your marketing materials say so.

**Psychology of authority.** The act of standing before a group and demonstrating knowledge on a topic is, by itself, a credibility indicator. Most attendees assume that, because a person has been invited to speak, he or she is a recognized expert on the subject. We’re all unconsciously biased to view a speaker as an authority figure and a subject matter expert.

**Prestige factor.** When an individual wears a speaker’s badge at an event, he or she dons a cloak of celebrity. Fellow conference goers strike up conversations with speakers at lunch, breaks, and sessions. Savvy professionals can leverage this effect by engaging as much as possible with prospects and influencers during and after the event. This natural allure gives your professionals dozens of opportunities to “seed” conversations with information that sells without being salesy.

## PROOF OF CONCEPT

Sure, speaking is important for prestige, but does it really bring in the bucks?

Yes. Yes. Yes.

Let’s look at a few examples.

**Robert Czachorski, P.E., PH,** is an engineer with OHM, an engineering/architecture/planning firm headquartered in Livonia, MI. Robert is a modeling guru, who together with his college roommate, an aerospace engineer/software developer, developed a novel way to model sewer systems. His new modeling method gives the client precise information to right-size the sewer system, meeting regulatory requirements and avoiding “overbuilding.” Because the approach is new, Robert has found it effective to present his method, along with project results, at conferences. It gives prospects an in-depth view of the idea and offers proof in the form of case studies.

Robert says, “I meet new leads at every presentation. There are at least three or four at each one. Over the last 5 years, I’ve done between 10 and 15 presentations, so that’s easily 40 to 50 new opportunities.”

“Three people come to mind who I met through presentations—a contact for a large municipal sewer authority and two partners from other firms. Those relationships are leading to hundreds of thousands of dollars of new business.”

**Carl Friesen**, a writer, author, and management consultant (and a *Marketer* contributing editor), also testifies to the business-building benefits of speaking. “I’m living proof that speaking engagements work. I received my two biggest clients, one of which I’ve had for 10 years, through one speaking engagement in Vancouver in 1999.”

Beck Technology, Ltd., is a Dallas-based developer of specialized macro BIM software, used in preconstruction to create fast and accurate 3D cost models. **Andy O’Nan**, Beck Tech’s director of business development, is a believer in the power of speaking engagements. He’s devoted a significant portion of his marketing budget to securing and delivering presentations to regional and national audiences, using a consultant to perform much of the work. Beck Tech uses speaking engagements to get the word out about the company’s software. Because it’s a new and unique offering, presentations give Beck Tech leaders a non-promotional way to introduce their product and its capabilities to their target market. Beck’s presentations are based on customer success stories and industry trends.



“Speaking is a powerful tool for positioning your firm’s professionals.”

“We never give a sales pitch; that’s important to us,” says O’Nan. “Instead we focus on trends and case studies that impact our target market.”

The results? “It’s powerful. Each time we give a presentation, the visits to our Web site increase significantly, along with the number of people requesting trials of our software. And now that we’ve focused on developing a speaking program, opportunities come to us.” O’Nan continues, “Stewart Carroll, our COO, was recently invited to be a keynote speaker at a conference organized by Disney, in a room filled with industry leaders.”

## YOU’RE DOING IT WRONG

Has your firm pursued speaking engagements, only to experience lackluster results? You might be making one or more of these common mistakes.

- 1. Not speaking to audiences of potential clients.** It’s natural; many firm professionals want to stay in their “comfort zone.” Technical types may pursue speaking engagements for themselves, but those events are typically full of academics who judge the merits of the ideas discussed but don’t hire firms to perform work. Likewise, your staffers may deliver presentations at professional organizations made of their colleagues and peers, rather than potential clients.
- 2. Not proposing topics that are interesting to the potential audience.** The best topics are those that your target audience would consider to be “hot” (meaning that it’s current and generates a great deal of interest).
- 3. Not demonstrating the expertise of the speaker.** Make sure your professional’s bio includes credibility indicators and isn’t just a boring work history. Where you can, tout your professional’s previous speaking experience and include session evaluation information; it offers conference organizers a level of assurance that your speaker will perform well.

## WAYS TO MARKET POTENTIAL SPEAKERS

Want to increase your win rate for speaking engagements? Copy these techniques used by professional speakers’ bureaus.

- 1. Stack the odds in your favor.** Before you submit a proposal to an organization, do your homework. Read about the organization’s membership and mission. This will give you insight into the information its members would value and what the hot topics might be.
- 2. Make the conference planner’s job as painless as possible.** Provide all the information the selection committee needs to choose your candidate. Here’s what goes into your package:
  - brief bio
  - clear statement about the topics your speaker covers (e.g., sewer modeling, hydraulics and hydrology, regulatory compliance)

- list of topics (with catchy titles) and what the attendee will learn with an abstract about each session
- video demo of your professional, live and in action (YouTube is a perfect place to host this)
- testimonials and evaluations from organizations to which the potential client can relate
- list of companies/organizations your professional has previously spoken for

Because this is meant to be concise, all the written content should fit on a single page.

## PAY FOR PLAY

What about conferences that steer all session presentations to the organizations that sponsor the event? Are those legitimate, and are they worth thousands of dollars in sponsorship fees? That's tough to say. Conference organizers who value the quality and reputation of their event tend to use separate committees to solicit sponsorship fees and to evaluate speaking proposals.

## USE THE SECRET

There is a secret to getting more presentation opportunities for your staffers. It's one that few marketers practice: Ask.

Don't wait for a Call for Speakers for that small handful of conferences your firm always attends. Take action to expand your reach and influence. Research groups and organizations made of your firm's target prospects. (Most groups host regular meetings, lunch and learns, Webinars, and conferences. They are *starving* for valuable content for their members.) Reach out and propose a presentation with a timely topic and the reasons that it is of interest to the audience, and include your speaker package.

Speaking is a powerful tool for positioning your firm's professionals as authorities and leveraging their valuable time. Now go and put it to work for you. **m**

## About the Author



**Lori Nash Byron, a former marketing director for an A/E firm, is the founder of Famous in Your Field, a consultancy focused on helping firms, executives, and consultants break out of the commodity trap and attract more business with less effort. Visit [www.FamousinYourField.com](http://www.FamousinYourField.com) and sign up for weekly tips to boost your fame factor. She can be reached at 734.678.7831 or**

**[lori@practicalmagicmarketing.com](mailto:lori@practicalmagicmarketing.com). This is her first contribution to *Marketer*.**



## Integrated Planning MARKETPLACE

### Need to reach clients in the higher education market sector?

The Society for College and University Planning (SCUP) has the place for you to advertise in its online **Integrated Planning Marketplace**, a search tool where clients can find you not only by location, services, or building types, but, more importantly, by your experience and success in providing effective and **integrated** planning, design, and implementation at colleges and universities.

SCUP's 5,000 members include individuals from institutions **and** from consulting firms who are involved in all aspects of planning in today's complex higher education environment. SCUP is the only association that promotes and provides integrated planning knowledge—the process that links and drives planning and budget activities at all levels of the institution to its vision, mission, and academic priorities.

Our Integrated Planning Marketplace allows you to tailor your message to a targeted audience of decision-makers at institutions throughout the US and the world. SCUP's website is viewed by more than 3,000 readers every week.

New listings are accepted at any time and remain online for 12 months. The cost is \$600/year, which is about the cost of one client lunch per month. Not a bad investment!

Contact Betty Cobb, SCUP Associate Director of Corporate Relations at 734.764.2004 or [betty.cobb@scup.org](mailto:betty.cobb@scup.org)

 Society for College and University Planning  
INTEGRATED PLANNING FOR HIGHER EDUCATION

1330 Eisenhower Place, Ann Arbor, MI 48108  
[www.scup.org](http://www.scup.org)