



Battling ‘Good Enough’

Not long ago, I needed to have someone transcribe several speeches that I had recorded so that I could turn them into ebooks. Having already tried a speech-recognition “solution” to no avail, a friend suggested I simply find someone who works for a few dollars an hour to do the work for me. I headed over to Elance (www.elance.com), expecting to just throw my project out there and wait for some low-end bids to come in. I mean, how much value do I need for simple transcription work?

Before I posted my job, though, I spent a few minutes browsing the list of transcriptionists. Among the listings of people who worked for \$5 an hour, there was someone from Pittsburgh, Pa., who quoted her jobs by the audio hour. Hmm, I thought, I can get someone who is fluent in American English, can handle a rapid speaking pace, and can offer me a fixed price. Sold!

I was pleasantly surprised by what I got—not only an accurate transcription but also one that eliminated all the extraneous chatter and was already formatted as a white paper. My transcriptionist, Jenifer Toussant, went to the trouble of finding out what I was using these transcripts for so that she could edit and format them in a way that would be most convenient and useful for me. I could have used someone who bid lower, but I got more value than I expected, and she has made herself competition-proof, as far as I’m concerned.

Jenifer is on the battlefield of the War on “Whatever.” She knows that there are others who work for less than she charges, but she also knows that she can offer value that her low-end competitors can’t or won’t provide. Likewise, we info pros are fighting the good fight against “I get all I need from Google, thank you.” We can take a page from Jenifer’s marketing strategy and use some of the following techniques.

- Develop a tagline that emphasizes what sets you apart. Jenifer’s tagline is “Your Gal Friday”; whenever I get an email from her, I am reminded that she does more than just transcriptions. Info pros might use “Bringing Insight to Information” or “Enabling Better Decisions”—something that highlights our skills in analyzing and synthesizing information.
- Make yourself findable. Jenifer’s Elance profile includes keywords that someone looking for her skills would use in describing their problem rather than what she does. Her keywords include “document preservation” and “article writing”—client needs rather than services offered. Likewise, info pros’ online profiles, both internal

and public, can include words and phrases that clients would use when *looking* for us, such as “market research” or “industry projections.”

- Find out what your client is using your services for and how you could enhance your deliverable. Jenifer conducted a reference interview with me to find out what my final goal was in getting these presentations transcribed and what I’d tried already. She had worked on other white papers, so she offered to format my transcripts to make them as polished as possible. Likewise, the reference interviews with our clients need to elicit not only what our clients need but why they need it—and how the information will be used. Our clients may not think to ask for an executive summary or a table of key findings; it’s our job to remind them.
- Listen to your clients for ideas for new services. On Jenifer’s Elance page, she includes not only client feedback but also ideas on what else she could provide. “Use your commute to brainstorm into your digital recorder. Send the recording to me and you’ll have a written version of all your ideas. Spend your time being creative.” Info pros can have similar conversations with our clients. “Bring an info pro into your next project meeting. We offer SWOT analyses, industry profiles, and customized research to inform your next decision.”

That knot you’ve just noticed forming in your stomach? Normal. Moving beyond our comfort zone is never easy; we get enough stress just going to work. What surprised me is how easy it has been to move up that value chain once I started seeing myself as a strategic partner with my clients rather than “merely” an info pro. The secret was in realizing that I already *do* analysis; I just hadn’t surfaced it as much as I need to now.

Jenifer builds long-term relationships with clients and provides high-end, one-stop services that require critical thinking. We too need to look at how we can build relationships with clients so that we know not only what they need but also what we can offer that requires critical thinking.

Join the War on “Whatever” and make yourself competition-proof.

Mary Ellen Bates (mbates@BatesInfo.com) is now a virtual shopkeeper at <http://batesinfo.com/Store/store.html>.

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