

Charge More Sell More

— BLUEPRINT —

10 STEPS TO BUILDING YOUR AUTHORITY

Before you can create credibility as an expert, you have to understand what it is - and what it isn't. You also have to understand that the definition changes according to the field you are operating within. If you are in any academic or scientific field, for example, University degrees don't even begin to count until you achieve your doctorate (or at least a master's degree). All work has to be completely original. You cannot "re-purpose" any work unless you cite all your previous uses (in a specific format). And so forth.

If you are running a blog about Burmese cats, nobody cares if you have a doctorate. They do care whether or not you know Burmese cats - and it helps if you have one (or have previously owned at least one) yourself. But tell them that Burmese cats have short, bushy tails and are ginger and white - and all credibility is gone.

When you get right down to it, credibility means that you are believable - and you deliver the goods that prove this. It's about knowing how to communicate and connect most effectively and directly so that your ideal clients or customers unhesitatingly know you are the best person to help them in your niche.

Step One: Put the Past into Perspective - and Words

People will tell you that it takes years to build up credibility - and to a point, that's true: But think back to experts who you gave your trust to. Was there anyone who gained your trust and interest instantly? Did you find yourself either wishing you were exactly like that professional - or that you could be coached by her? If so, take out a notepad and detail exactly what happened - and why you felt the way you did.

Don't just remember your introduction to this expert - make actual notes about:

- **What caught your attention.** (Was it an example? A statement? Someone talking about exactly what you needed right that moment?)
- **What you felt.** (Be as detailed as possible, no matter how self-conscious or silly that makes you feel.)
- **What that person offered.** (And how much it resonated with you.)
- **What you bought.** (And why you bought it.)
- **How well it delivered.** (Was it the solution that was promised? Did you get at least one valuable, tangible "gem" from it that made your life better in some way?)

- **How hard you had to work to continue the relationship.** (Did you remember who that person was, the next time they emailed? Did their follow-up email come after an interval that felt natural? Were you eager for more?)

What most likely stands out in your mind, if you remember an expert like this, might well be that the connection was instant.

And now the most important question - the one that directly relates to your field of expertise:

- Why was the connection instant?

Step Two: Determine What Credentials You Need to Succeed

Your answer to the last question immediately determines what you need to attain credibility. If you answered that connection was instant because that particular research chemist is doing the job you want to do, you do need credentials such as doctorates and degrees.

If you answered about the Burmese cat owner, “her problem with Topsy exactly described the weird situation I’m going through with Rollo right now” then you aren’t interested in her credentials: You want to know her solution - and you’re reassured that she experienced it with her own Burmese cat.

If you are trying to enter a field where certain professional organizations hold sway, you need to show your readers that you are a member in good standing - and the more acknowledgment you have from that organization in the way of awards and accreditation, the more reassured your specific target market will feel.

So take your notepad and write down what type of “credentials” you need for your particular field:

- Degrees
- Certificates
- Accreditation
- Personal experience
- Practical, working experience

If you are having trouble narrowing this down, proceed to the next step...

Step Three: Certification and Credentials - Are they Necessary?

Do any of your most successful competitors have degrees or accreditation? If so, do they display their degrees after their names? Do they show accreditation stamps or professional organization logos prominently on their blogs or websites?

If they do, then it's a sure bet accreditation is important; even if only legally. Consider taking courses or joining the same professional organizations, if you need to do so - or else figure out another way you are going to show professional credibility. (For example, Canadian interior designers and drafts persons legally need to acquire a B.C.I.N. number before they can practice.)

You can still practice as an architectural technologist if you don't have one - but you need to be ready to associate with or hire a fellow professional who does possess a B.C.I.N. and who is ready to provide that number on stamped drawings.

What you would do in this instance would be to highlight your awards, if your design experience went back a long way, and/or briefly talk about major industry-breakthrough achievements. (E.G. "Invented the circular, self-closing skylight for Cargill and Company, 1989")

And, of course, display your results - before and after shots of a client's renovation project, for example. (Happy or proud clients are usually pleased to give permission and provide photographs - and testimonials. But you have to ask them - and the best time to do that is in your second consultation, so that you are setting them up for your specific request when the job is done - not afterwards.)

If you were an interior designer, you would also see, while checking out B.C.I.N. certification, that requirements are changing in 2017: A three-year college diploma will no longer be adequate for certification. You would need "a CIDA-accredited bachelor's degree program as the minimum education requirement".

Fortunately, most online marketers don't need such stringent and specific certification - and degrees are not always a guarantee of stronger credibility if they are too general or not relevant to your client's need today: However, one factor you do need to check carefully is whether or not certain certifications are required by law.

To relate this with online marketing examples:

- A university business degree is not half as important to a client struggling with setting up her shopping cart as whether or not you can do it for her simply and quickly
- You do, by law, need a disclaimer page about affiliate earnings, if you have affiliate links on any of your pages
- Certain types of coaches don't need anything more than visible, proven experience: Others, however, by law need highly specific professional accreditations to practice

You can also display seals and insignia from other professional organizations to bolster your professional image - and the beauty of these organizations is their courses are not necessarily three-year courses: For example, a licensed plumber could increase the credibility of his site with any number of professional logos after his contact information - the customer doesn't need to know that the snazzy "CPDA" logo really means he took a week-long course in effluent pumps with the Cochrane Professional Dealers Association.

To summarize, certification, degrees and credentials are sometimes required by law in certain fields, but displaying or talking about other credentials and certification is only as strong as the way you

position and present them. If you are able to show a potential client your membership in a certain body is to her advantage, go for it!

And everybody, in any field, should always keep their ears to the ground to find out what new laws are going to be put into effect and which credentials are soon going to be required.

But when deciding which of your accreditations to highlight or display, the main point to keep in mind is:

- Show what is legally required for your industry and field
- Show what your customer or client most urgently needs/wants to see

If you don't need to clutter up a website talking for two pages about your credentials or degrees, don't.

Focus on proven results.

Step Four: Mining your Competition

We spoke earlier about checking out your main competition to see how they positioned their own credibility. This is a step you should never omit.

You need to ask yourself:

- "What sells my competitor to her clients?"
- "What does she present that I don't have?"
- "What advantages do I have that she doesn't?"
- "What are her clients saying? What are they praising? Complaining about?"

These are big clues to help you start planning now how you are going to boost your own online credibility.

Step Five: Storytelling

The best way to create credibility lies in two simple actions:

- Think of your website as your "story"
- Live your story in social networks, media, YouTube videos, articles, guest spots and live venues

But there's one key point here: Your story has to mirror your ideal customer or clients. Show her you totally understand her challenges and can provide what she has trouble providing.

In other words, both customers and clients have to be able to relate.

If you go back to our first exercise, where you thought of a professional that you connected with instantly after reading an article or a post on their website, that is most likely the reason - you found yourself saying: "It's as if she was talking about me!" Or: "Yes! That's EXACTLY what I've been trying to tell people I'm having trouble with!"

The best way to give your story credibility is to be real: Just tell it like it is.

Then edit out anything that doesn't relate to your customers.

For example, they don't need to know about your epiphany with bird-watching if your website is there to help them get into the best physical shape of your life - unless you tell your bird-watching story to demonstrate that unwittingly, as you were hiking miles of trails in search of the rare stomach-catcher warbler, you were toning your leg muscles and losing weight without thinking about it (relevance).

Here's how to tell a great story - one that will resonate with your customer or client.

1. **Find out their biggest concern, problem, desire or need**

Don't be hasty about this. Dig deep. Think about what you're reading, hearing and what they are showing you.

For example, when a client says "I need someone to do my bookkeeping", yes, he may mean it literally - but stop. Take the time to think about what is really underneath this comment. (Look for clues in other statements, complaints, questions - or just ask your client why!)

What they could really be saying is any of the following:

- "I hate bookkeeping. Mathematics makes me break out in hives."
- "I can do it, but I don't make money when I do my own books - I make it when I design a website."
- "I feel frazzled and overwhelmed with my business."
- "I need to keep in a creative-flow state of mind, and bookkeeping knocks me out of that."

The really brilliant storytellers don't just speak just to their clients' visible problems: It's when they tap into the hidden fear, desire or frustration underneath the surface - and address that hidden issue directly - that they create loyalty (and credibility).

2. **Be yourself**

Speak to your clients with your own voice. People who think they need to put on an "image" do exactly that - and people see through insincerity much quicker online than they used to, in the internet's infancy.

When people read your articles or website posts, they should hear the same voice you use when you speak to them. In their minds, there should be no difference between reading what you've written and listening to your podcast.

3. **Be ruthless**

Not with your clients or customers: With your storytelling. If a sentence or paragraph doesn't directly support, clarify, prove or reinforce your story's main point or premise, kill it.

Cut out adjectives and adverbs too. Keep sentences short. (They'll be easier for your readers to

remember and accept.)

Avoid self-indulgence. Only tell an anecdote if it directly relates to your reader's problem or need: If it elucidates the point your story is making.

Never tell anecdotes for the sake of "venting" or "sharing": That's what you do with your counsellor or coach, or your fellow mastermind group members - not with your clients or customers. The moment you vent or share, the story is all about you - not about your audience.

Reveal just enough to connect emotionally - just enough to use yourself as an example of your main point.

Focus on your client or customer.

Focus.

4. **Be repetitive.**

Not like a broken record, but communicating in the way your audience has come to expect. Use templates to help create that repetitive consistency. Create regular, recurring features people can look forward to (and remember).

There's a reason that little children love stories based on simple repetition.

Repetition means structure; and structure equals "safety".

Safety equals credibility.

Even when you present wildly different theories or products, presenting them stamped with elements of repetition - your company colors, your logo, your price structure - helps to reassure those ready to take your exciting new step.

5. **Be real.**

So we've talked about repetition and consistency and safety for your audience. When it comes to you, however, be prepared to take risks. Reveal yourself if you want your customer to view you as a real person who actually does understand her life circumstances. If you sit comfortably, several stories above your customer, apparently having been perfect all your life, they will never relate to you (no matter how much they might envy you).

If they know you've had the same weaknesses, struggles, challenges and failures, it will mean much more to your customers when they see you now, having surpassed these. This is proof they can really do what you do; get to where you're sitting.

That's called "credibility" too - and it's the most important sort: it's emotional credibility.

It's all about relevance. It's not really about you (even if you're positioning yourself as - we'll use that archaic and outdated word - a guru): It's only ever about your customer or client, and her particular journey.

Step Six: Your Audience

To prove credibility, you have to totally understand your particular, unique audience - and those who search and live online generally.

Consumers have gotten better at spotting phonies, which means they require more proof (or more solid proof).

On the other hand, barriers to online purchasing have dropped. While online security continues to be an issue of concern, there is no longer a huge fear preventing the majority of shoppers - particularly those with cell phones - from parting with credit card information on line.

Some things haven't changed: You will always get the odd customer who purchases a product and instead of asking for a refund, lodges a protest with PayPal.

You will always get the odd client who insists on looking over your shoulder or micro-controlling every step of a project; then complains about cost overages.

These are the human character traits and cultural trends you have to take into account, anticipate and plan for, when setting up your services and website. The more thoroughly you can anticipate, the better you can prevent misunderstandings or dissatisfaction - and happy clients and customers mean better testimonials and better recommendations.

Better recommendations means greater credibility - while complaints (no matter how unjustified) undermine your precious reputation.

Step Seven: Practical Experience

You don't always need to have literally "walked the walk" - but if you haven't done so, you do need to make sure that you:

- Thoroughly understand what you are sharing, selling or teaching - and that what you share is valid and valuable
- Provide well-researched, accurate facts, products and information your ideal paying client or customer can successfully use

The best way to be credible is to genuinely focus on serving your client or customer. Care about their problems. Find real solutions. And when you've found that solution, go back and re-think it again: Is there any way you can go a step further by:

- Making it better
- Making it simpler

When you value yourself and value your customer, it is much easier to provide the perfect solution - for everyone.

You will be paid what you deserve. Your reputation will grow as your customers and clients spread the word. Just remember this:

- The more practical experience you have in your chosen field, the more confident you'll feel. The more confident you feel, the more confidence you will project
- The more practical experience you have in your chosen field, the less you will have to talk about yourself and the more others will positively talk about you (and recommend you)

But it would be naïve to think you can just sit back and all this wonderful buzz and credibility will happen. You need to promote yourself in the right places - and how much promotion depends on how well known you already are on the web, how much of a celebrity or expert you are known as in your field and how wide your reach is.

For example, if you were a household name in the dog world, like Cesar Milan, not only would you have a highly-professional, well-paid team to manage promotion and advertising, but you would be seen in every household across North America in your TV shows.

People would be able to see from your TV shows that your dog-training gets results and provides exceptional solutions.

You may not have a big budget or even a team (yet), but you can duplicate these strategies - and results - quite easily, using the following three suggestions:

1. Show - don't tell

Is yours a tactile or physical skill? Create a video series and start sharing it.

Focus on the narrowest area of skill you most want to be known for - preferably something your competitors have not yet managed to successfully cover - and build your series around that.

For example, if you are a master weaver and your big product is a brand new type of loom targeted at serious craft weavers building up experience, create a video series on different types of looms. Each episode in your series should demonstrate a different loom type: For example...

- Episode One: Weaving on a Rigid Heddle Loom
- Episode Two: Weaving on a Back Strap Loom
- Episode Three: Weaving on a Tapestry Frame Loom

And so forth.

Finally, release a video demonstrating your brand new, original loom:

- Episode Six: The Murray Lightweight Portable Jack Loom

(That's yours!)

It's up to you to decide on the intervals between episode releases, but use the time between episodes to get the word out about your series and ask other weavers to share your links.

Do your best to make sure each episode:

- Identifies the most common glitch or problem people experience with whatever you're demonstrating
- Shows them a ridiculously easy or logical way to solve this

Don't overwhelm them with industry jargon or try to show off your knowledge - focus your attention one-hundred-and-ten per cent on helping them overcome and master their one big problem with whatever component you're showing them.

Write posts about your videos, treating your written post content as a "teaser" and making sure your video is embedded in the post, so people don't feel like they have to leave your site to view the video.

Take it one step further, and include actual screen shots from your video in your post, so that people can see instantly - at a glance - what they're going to learn.

(Note that videos perform one other valuable service in helping you establish visibility - the first step to credibility: People see your face in what feels like "real time". They see your facial expressions they hear your tone of voice, the experience your confidence and mastery of your topic.

A video series is the next best thing to presenting courses and workshops in person - and it's always available on YouTube, every time someone types in "jack looms" or "video lighting".)

2. Ask and Share

Always make sure your social posts, podcasts, webinars and videos include calls to action, of course, but these should flow naturally from each piece of content - your calls to action should never feel like a sales blitz.

3. Stay Updated in your Field

If you want to be regarded as the go-to person and ultimate authority in your topic or field, make a commitment to staying on top of new developments and changes in your field.

Step Eight: Authenticity

If you want to build credibility, people have to feel that they can trust you absolutely. Speaking to them with your whole focus on them and their needs is only the first step in making sure this trust develop.

Here's how you can develop it further:

1. Be Transparent

If you don't know the answer to something, say so, simply and plainly: Then either promise to find out, giving a date you'll do this by; or refer them to another industry peer who can help them.

2. Build your Reputation

People also need to know:

- What you stand for
- What they can count on you to provide
- What you can help them with
- What you won't do

This means you need to know these things too - and live by them.

3. Learn to Listen

What makes someone trust another person? Many things: But high on the list is "feeling that the expert you're talking to cares".

Surprisingly, too many experts undermine themselves in this area by not actively listening. Instead, they're too busy thinking of the perfect thing to say (and anticipating what the person they are talking to is trying to share). The result? The person talking to them feels cut off when the "expert" begins to talk over top of them, anxious to dispense his knowledge.

That person may feel unheard, belittled, "boring" or any other variety of negative emotions.

Really listen. Remember, you may have heard the identical question or problem five hundred times before, but it's new to your questioner.

Real listening involves:

- Acknowledging
- Mirroring back
- Re-stating the person's main point, if necessary, to ensure you've got it right
- Waiting till your questioner has finished speaking before offering your ideas

And while you're busy being authentic, do make sure you use professional-quality profile photos on all your sites and social platforms (preferably versions of the same photo). Make sure your photo is current and updated regularly too: There's nothing like letting your audience meet you in person and discover someone 90lbs. heavier and twenty-two years to that perfect profile photo to bewilder and disappoint your audience.

Know your mission. Know your values. And don't be afraid to say "I don't know - but I can find out..."

Step Nine: Reassurance

We spoke about honest, current profile photos - and about using videos, so that people can see how you operate in "real time".

There are other ways to provide reassurance - a big part of credibility building - to your target audience.

Let's take a look at three of the easiest and most important ways to provide reassurance:

1. Delivery

To build credibility, deliver exactly what you promised and make sure it easily does exactly what you said it would. It really is as simple as that.

Don't include nasty little surprises such as "you can only solve your big problem if you upgrade to my Big Ticket Product". If you promised your Little Ticket Product would do A, B and C, then under no circumstances just give your customer A and B - and then force them to upgrade, to receive C!

If you provide upsells, make sure they are presented as options for people who want more.

And it's always a grand thing if you provide more than they asked for, but it's not strictly necessary as long as "what you promised" more than delights. In fact, avoid bombarding your customer with dozens or hundreds of other "bonuses" - particularly when these:

- Are not directly related to the product your customer bought
- Do not add to or enhance the product your customer bought
- Require individual sign-ups for each bonus

The problem with the latter condition is that your customer may not have time and/or may become slightly confused. Your original product may actually get lost in the dozens of sign up windows. Or your customer may become distracted and just decide to "close everything for later" - including the product they bought from you.

Better to include one or two absolutely relevant, knock-out bonuses

2. Testimonials, Referrals and Recommendations

One of the best ways to build credibility is to let others do it for you.

Make it easy for your customers or clients to recommend you.

Use calls to action. Ask for referrals. This becomes easy when you make asking for referrals...

- Part of your habits and patterns
- Part of your contracts or sales agreements
- Easy - by placing a "Tell others about this product" call to action over your share buttons
- Part of your literature and presentations
- Part of your website

3. **Customer Service**

You've made the sale: Now you need to focus on follow up and customer service. Nothing destroys easily-won, enthusiastic trust quite as completely as a big let-down after purchase.

We've already talked about making the product download and utilization/implementation processes easy for your clients - but make sure you provide them with multiple, efficient, easy options for customer service too.

That includes helping your client or customer to...

- Easily access your site
- Find information she needs to find - quickly
- See instantly how to contact you, should she need to
- Understand how you (or your representative) will respond - and know how long she will have to wait before her issue is resolved

Outsourcing your customer service to someone who specializes in fast service and turnaround is a sensible option if you are selling many units of product, or serving clients to your maximum limit.

But you need to also introduce your clients and customers to that representative - and let them know how to reach her, positioning her as your own expert. You need to help instill trust in your representative - to boost your own credibility.

Step Ten: Follow Up

Finally, make sure you nurture, nourish and continue to build your reputation with your...

- Fans and followers
- Visitors and subscribers
- Customers and clients

That involves maintaining multiple online and offline platforms (e.g. social media, forums, guest speaking, workshops, and events).

It also involves planning, so there are no "gaps" in your web visibility.

It's a real relationship so treat it like one. (Think of how this would go if your subscriber was a friend you regularly interacted with, in person.)

- Don't bombard your subscribers or customers with new offers. Give them time to check out, use and think about your last one.
- Don't "disappear" for weeks or months at a time - and then suddenly expect them to remember and care who you are.
- Provide tips, information, FAQs and answers to questions
- Keep them up to date on new changes or products in your field
- Understand where they are coming from - and what is changing in their lives too

Above all, be there and care. Even when "caring" simply means you are quietly but visibly providing those 1/16" hooks they've just realized they need for their latest project.

There's really no substitute for confidence - and for focusing on your customer and her needs.