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A Successful It Consultant: A Small Business Operator

By Greg Fitzgerald

You need to consider yourself as a small business. This is how the government and the Australian Tax Office (ATO) view you.

To operate as a small business you must obtain an Australian Business Number (ABN). All small businesses are required by law to have one. You can apply for an ABN from the Australian Business Register (ABR) at

http://www.abr.gov.au/ABR_BC/

. It takes about 30 minutes to fill out the online form.

You'll need your Tax File Number as well as your personal and business details. Don't delay, get one TODAY. It can take up to 3 weeks to receive your ABN. You don't want to be without one when starting your first project. An ABN is free.

If you're going to be earning more than \$50,000 per year you're required by Australian law to add 10% GST to all fees you charge. You must also fill out a Business Activity Statement (BAS), either quarterly or yearly. If you register for GST you can claim the GST you pay on materials and services you buy for your business. GST and BAS are very complicated and you need to find a good accountant to help you with all your business tax and financial business. Ask your friends or associates if they know a good one.

You must keep good financial and business records. This is essential for running a successful small business, and you don't want the ATO asking you for information you don't have. There's no getting around it. Even if you can't stand it, you have to do it and you have to do it well. Your accountant will require you to provide details of your income and expenses. The more structured you make that information the cheaper your accountant's bill will be.

The second reason for keeping records is for your own information. In order to run your business you need to know how much money is owed to you or how much you owe, who hasn't paid and how much

money you really have in the bank. Reconcile your bank statements against your financial records to make sure there are no discrepancies. If you have no bookkeeping experience it is a good idea to take a course.

Always keep receipts for any business expenses. These can be claimed on your tax return. If you use a car keep a car logbook. This can be in actual book or on computer. Record in the logbook details of both private and business journeys. Your accountant can then decide whether to claim a percentage of expenses or a kilometre rate as a tax deduction. Record dates, times, to and from destinations, and odometer readings at the start and end of each journey.

Reasonable expenses include the purchase of computer equipment and software, stationery and books, electricity, gas and telephone (including Broadband) bills and insurance. If you work from home you can claim part of your home as office space, and even such things as cleaning products. If in doubt, keep the receipts. Ask your accountant what you can claim. A good one will make sure you claim everything you're entitled to claim for.

To operate a successful business you need to have good cash flow. You need to make a profit, that's obvious. Your income must exceed your expenses. But that's not the only thing you have to worry about! You have to be paid! And some clients will take a long time to pay. It's a fact of doing business.

That's why you need to have a few clients at any one time with projects at different stages of completion, so that it won't be long before you receive payment from someone.

Have a variety of payment methods. People find credit cards payments easy, especially if they have no ready cash. Online payments can be good too, so consider doing it from your website. You can also use online payment systems such as PayPal.

There are many legal issues associated with operating a small business. Especially relevant to IT consultants is the contract. This needs to be done professionally and thoroughly, and should be fair to both parties. You should seek legal advice before preparing your first contract. You can find more information from the Legal Issues Guide for Small Business, at the Commonwealth Dept. of Employment Workplace Relations and Small Business at

<http://sblegal.industry.gov.au/>

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Greg is a respected freelance writer whose work is published on Get Somebody Now, the site for IT contractors and consultants –

<http://www.getsomebodynow.com.au>

Finding IT contractors online,

FAST.

What Does A Blogging Consultant Look Like?

By Chris McElroy AKA NameCritic

You know, normally you can find a definition of a word or phrase by typing "define: your phrase here" into google and come up with a lot of results. Currently there are millions of blogs and there are hundreds of people who call themselves "Blog or Blogging Consultants", yet when you type "define: Blogging Consultant or Blogging Consultant" into google you get no definition.

That is probably a good thing for most blogging consultants because without a definition, there is no standard to hold them to. I'm not claiming to be the blogging guru of all time or anything of the sort. So before you "blogging consultants" out there start getting defensive about this, think before you write. If you get too nasty about the post I may ask you to define "blogging consultant" and without google many of you couldn't do it.

Now that is out of the way, lets talk business. Every business should have a blog. There are so many reasons for your business to have a blog it would be hard to write them all in one blog post, so lets assume you know your company needs a blog.

So do you hire a blogging consultant? What qualifications do you look for in a blogging consultant? What does a blogging consultant look like? How much should I pay a blogging consultant?

Lets start with "Should you hire a blogging consultant?"

The quick answer is yes, but lets go into why first. There are a lot of things that go into making a blog popular. Technorati tags, submissions and pings to bloglists and blogsearch websites, learning how to get on the right blogrolls, etc.

If you are new to blogging it takes awhile to catch on to most of these things and most blogging consultants say that all of the above is necessary if you are going to have a successful blog.

There are more things to add to the list but this article isn't about how to run a successful blog, it's about blogging consultants. Hiring a blogging consultant can save you from making a lot of early mistakes and get your blog found a lot quicker than trying to do it on your own.

Now all the blogging consultants are liking me again. I can tell. But will it last?

What qualifications do you look for in a blogging consultant?

Here is where things get ugly between me and the blogging consultants. Most blogging consultants are . . . well . . . bloggers. Many of them have what they think is a successful blog although many bloggers have different ideas for what success is.

Some think it's defined as how much they made on google adnonsense last month. Others count success by number of visitors to their website or the number of comments that appear on their blog. Still others measure their success by what the other bloggers think about them.

What do all of those bloggers who are blogging consultants have in common? They all think that

having a successful blog automatically makes you a qualified blogging consultant. I told you it was going to get nasty. After this article if I measured my success by what the other bloggers think of me then I'm doomed!

Fortunately I don't measure my success in terms of what the other bloggers and blogging consultants think. Lets get back to those qualifications for a blogging consultant.

First of all a blog is a website. It is a website that is updated often in most cases, but it is still a website. Each blogpost becomes a page of that website. So with a blog you are creating more webpages to your website as often as you post to your blog.

Now I have a question for you. Would you first look to hire a blogger to do search engine optimization for your website? Would you first look to hire a blogger to handle your AdWords campaign? Would you first look for a blogger to build your website for you?

The answer to all of the above is probably no, unless the blogger also has experience in those fields and not just for their blog. Actual websites they have built, optimized, and marketed for themselves and for clients.

A blogging consultant should not just be a blogger. They should also have all of the skills necessary to run a website. Now the blogging consultants are all mad at me again. But think about it. Many bloggers know how to write. They know how to get into the right circle of blogger friends who will link to them. They know about blogging.

So if all you need to know is how to write a blog, then hiring a blogger who knows how to write is the answer, but if you need someone who is going to manage your blog for you including posting to the blog, search engine optimization, link popularity, (and not just from blogrolls), and marketing, then you need to hire a webmaster who also blogs.

Okay, How much should I pay a blogging consultant?

How much do you have? Just kidding. A lot depends on the type of blog you want or have. A corporation blog has to pay more, not because they have more, but because there are all kinds of legal and policy matters that have to be considered with every single blog post and every single link to or from another blog or website. A small business blog doesn't have many of the same issues as the corporate blog, but still has certain standards that need to be met.

If you have ever hired a webmaster, not a web designer, a webmaster, (Thats another article), or a Search Engine Optimization Company, or a Search Engine Marketer, or even just a Marketing Consultant, (The just was in there just so I could make consultants mad again.), then you have an idea of what a blogging consultant should cost.

Now keep in mind, if you are hiring a blogging consultant to strictly teach you how to blog, then it's not

worth as much money as when you hire a blogging consultant who is also going to perform all of the services a Webmaster and Internet Marketer would provide plus search engine optimization.

Ha ha! I still didn't say how much it costs. It's coming. Read on.

What does a Blogging Consultant look like?

He or she looks like someone who has more than just a blog or blogs. Someone who also owns and manages several websites for themselves and for clients. As I said before a blog is still a website.

Now back to that cost thing. NameCritic, will manage your blog for you for as low as \$150 per month including all of the things necessary to run a successful website or blog. According to the description, NameCritic what a blogging consultant looks like. Visit

<http://www.blogs.pn>

for information on blogging

or email

namecritic@blogs.pn



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