

Top 10 Tips for Building a Profitable Speaking Business That Endures

So you're new to speaking and wondering where to start. I've been an educator for the past 22 years and a CSP since March 2009. I've worked with many, many thousands of people over the years and have maintained many of my client relationships for over 10 years, some over 20 years. Here are my top tips for building a profitable speaking business. Enjoy....

1. **Be the expert.** Strive, strive and then strive some more to be the expert in your subject matter. Make sure you know everything you can about your subject and embrace the concept of lifelong learning. Learn every day. Read, watch, listen, test, experience. Then repeat.
2. **Be famous in your own lunchbox.** Peter Sheahan CSP CPAE is well known in PSA for encouraging us to ask ourselves the question: *which guy are you?* Forgiving the gender bias in the question the point is, what do you want to be known for? Over 2 decades ago I created a vision board (a vision board is essentially a visual representation of how you'd like your life to look in the future). On my vision board I said I'd like to be one of the top three presentation skills experts in Australia with a focus on persuasion. Fast forward 22 years and now I'm known in corporate Australia as an expert on persuasive presenting in business. Ask someone in the corporate world if they've heard of Michelle Bowden and they'll say 'yes, she's the presentation skills girl'. In fact I knew I had hit on something exciting when clients started telling me that my 2-day Persuasive Presentation Skills Masterclass was referred to in-house as the 'Michelle Bowden course'. They'd use my name in a sentence as a synonym for presentation skills. Instead of saying are you attending the presentation skills training next week they would ask, 'Are you going to Michelle Bowden next week?' Instead of saying, 'Have you just completed some presentation skills training?' they'd say, 'Have you just been to Michelle Bowden?' Work out what you want to be known for and then stick to your knitting so that people don't get confused because you're really everything to all people instead of an expert in one niche. I have to say that over the years people have tried to sway me from my passion with suggestions for other topics I should present and I've been resolute in my commitment to the content I love which is persuasive presentation skills. Stay strong and stick to what you love rather than confusing for your customer with too many offerings.

3. **Decide on your unique target client.** Your unique target client (UTC) is your ideal client, the person or people you know you can most help with your expertise. And although you could probably help everyone to a certain extent with your expertise, the UTC is the person you actually want to work with. It's a delight and a pleasure to have them in an audience. Focus on these people first! Work out what makes them tick. Get the point where you can describe them in great detail. What is their gender? Age? Role? Responsibility? What do they love? What do they hate? Where do they hang out? Where do they relax? What's important to them?
4. **Find out what they want and give it to them.** I had the honour of interviewing the remarkable and incredibly generous Terry Hawkins CSP for a speaker resource I created some years back before she moved to the US to carve up the speaking circuit over there. I asked her how to make sure you are relevant as a speaker and this was her answer: "find out what they want and give it to them". Once you know who your unique target client is work out which content will best assist them, and what products or services you could create so you can help them in a variety of ways. Some people don't want to pay for your expertise so give them a resource such as a white paper for free on your website and just stay in touch on a casual basis. Others want to test you out, or they just want to learn a little bit from you before buying anything too comprehensive or expensive, so offer a book, an audio resource, a low cost video program, a You Tube clip that's downloadable for free or a free pdf full of photos of yourself with testimonials and be in touch with them reasonably regularly. Others want to full luxury service full of content and resources so make sure you have a package full of luxury to offer at a luxury price. Find out what they want and give it to them.
5. **Stay relevant.** Some years back there were speakers around who were experts in engaging Gen Y in the workplace. Now the trend is to engage millennials (even though millennials are Gen Y!). So if you are the Gen Y guy you need to understand you'll miss out on bookings unless you rename, and reshape your content and expertise. Stay in touch with current and future trends so you can estimate what your audience is going to need both now and in the future and make sure you are always giving your audience what they want right now, not what you've been doing with little effort for the last few years!
6. **Be everywhere.** You want your UTC to bump into you in a variety of different ways and on a regular basis. Embrace every form of PR that you can. Take the opportunity to assist journalists with their articles or TV/radio pieces, write blogs that can be distributed by a relevant third party and embrace social media. Every time your client logs into their social media accounts i.e. LinkedIn, Facebook, Instagram etc. they should see something valuable from you. Post regular tips or copy that hits their sweet spot and helps them resolve something they are dealing with in their life or practice. I have created a series of gorgeous little graphics, some brief 'to-the-point' articles and some more lengthy theoretical articles that are more academic in style. I also post up testimonials, success stories and my favourite TED talks or articles written by experts other than me that will help my UTCs with their persuasive presenting. I have a TV channel and an on-line magazine that goes to over 25,000 people around the world that's completely free and shareable. That's what you want, people sharing what you do with everyone they know!

7. **Build and maintain lifelong relationships.** Zig Ziglar CSP CPAE once said, 'they don't care how much you know until they know how much you care.' Once you know where your UTC hangs out, make sure you are everywhere they are! Make a plan to meet the people who need what you've got and then keep a database so you can keep track of the relationships long term. And take a leaf out of Zig's book and be sure to care about the people you meet. Remember the little things they say to you. Know everything you can about people. Kirsty Spraggon is an Australian speaker who has made it big. She hosts her own TV show in the US. www.kirstytv.com She'll be the next Oprah. Kirsty is one of my best friends and to be honest, most people who know her would say the same. She's also, amongst many things, a relationship-building expert. In a chat we were having one day she described how she sees rapport. She said 'find the part of you that matches with a part of them to make something meaningful.' In other words find something that connects you to the other person. Remember you are always influencing and a single inappropriate remark or uncaring gesture could tarnish your personal brand as a speaker for some time so manage yourself and always strive to serve others.
8. **Know your competitors.** Whilst you don't want to get all worked up about your competitors it's important you are on top of what they are doing. If I had worried about how many competitors there were in the area of public speaking/presentation skills I would never have started. I think back in 1992 when I first started looking at setting up my own business there were 500 presentation skills trainers in the yellow pages. Yes I said yellow pages! (it's a huge book full of people's business phone numbers that Telstra used to produce in the olden days when I was young!) Please don't let the number of competitors, or the power of your competitors' brand put you off your game. Let your knowledge of what they offer and how they do it empower you and motivate you to be better than their current best. What do they do better than you? Fix it if you can. What do they not do as well as you? Make sure you stay ahead. What differentiates your styles and approaches? Ensure you are able to articulate that when asked by a client why they should book you instead of your competitor.
9. **Be known by Bureaus.** A speaker bureau is like a third party who will introduce you to their clients if they think you might be the right speaker. Understand that a speakers bureau is therefore an eternal marketing arm for you and your keynote. Whilst some of the most successful speakers in Australia don't get a lot of bookings through speakers bureaus it's fair to say that bureaus can really help you to increase your speaking bookings and client reach. Step one for enticing a bureau to put you forward for speaking opportunities is get some proof you have what it takes to wow the bureau's client. So make sure you create a great showreel. In addition, produce brochures about your keynote that are bureau friendly (i.e. no personal phone numbers or links to your personal website). Remember the bureau doesn't want the client to go direct to you if they've introduced you in the first place, that's not how it works. Honour and respect the role the bureau plays in your business. And be clear that the bureau's client is not you, the speaker. The bureau's client is the company booking the keynote. It's essential that you respect that relationship and don't try anything fishy like going direct, or speaking unprofessionally about the bureau or offering to undercut your prices. Remember the Australia speaking industry is a very small world and everyone knows what everyone else is doing, so manage your brand accordingly.

10. **Polish your craft.** All of this is worth nothing unless you are constantly striving to be the best speaker you can be. So find out who runs world-class master classes in public speaking, presenting, and group facilitation here in Australia and around the world and learn from them. Go to their trainings, listen to their audio products, read their books and grow, grow, grow. Masterful speakers can articulate their points with confidence, credibility and charisma. Masterful speakers manage their nerves, hold the audience in the palm of their hand, make them laugh, make them cry, manage their behaviour so everyone gets the best from the presentation. Masterful speakers use stunning visuals, facilitate interactivity and embed their learnings. Most importantly masterful speakers serve their audience in a way that is worthy of remark in a context outside of the presentation. Be remarkable with your analysis, your design and your delivery as a speaker and the rewards will be yours.

Speaking is the best profession in the world. We are so massively blessed to be given the opportunity to touch people in a meaningful way through the art of speaking. My very best wishes to you. Enjoy the journey.

Michelle Bowden is an authority on presentation & persuasion in business. Michelle is a CSP (the highest designation for speakers in the world), co-creator of the PRSI (a world-first psychometric indicator that tests your persuasiveness at work), best selling internationally published author (Wiley), editor of How to Present magazine, producer of Michelle Bowden TV, and a regular commentator in print, radio and online media. Sign up for Michelle's FREE How to Present magazine TODAY <http://michellebowden.com.au> and visit her gift shop to purchase her essential resources for speakers especially her best selling book called How to Present and her Audio Series called Tips from the Masters <https://michellebowden.com.au/shop/>

