

# Are You a Pro or the Authority?

Establishing yourself and your company as an authority helps to focus your vision and can create additional successes.

BY MARK RICHARDSON

When someone asks what you do for a living, many people generally respond by highlighting the industry (i.e., grow plants), the projects (sell plants to big box retailers) or maybe you simply tell them you are the owner of a horticulture business.

Then the conversation might lead to your experience or tenure at your job. This often gives someone a better understanding whether this is a vocation or an avocation. Is it a new venture for you, or are you a seasoned professional?

I think it is fair to say most business owners would refer to themselves as professionals. I also think it is fair to say that most try to present themselves as an expert to a potential customer.

While you might think of yourself this way and potential clients may feel this, the real question to ask is, "Is it really a differentiator from the hundreds of other growers?"

REFOCUSING

I sit on a board of directors of a media and marketing company that specializes in creating authors and marketing their services. Recently the company began focusing less on publishing books (the product) and more on how to position and to make their authors "The Authority" in their fields.

The company has discovered that this theme and direction is a game changer for many of the clients (book authors). The company not only has grown its publishing/marketing business but is now making its clients a lot more successful.

BECOMING AN 'AUTHORITY'

So, begin to think about looking at yourself as not just one of the thousands of growers but

as an "authority" on plants and how to produce them. If you want to say this with honesty and pride you need to begin to *really position* yourself as an authority.

What does it mean to be the authority? Here are few of the things that help define an authority:

- Your knowledge is highly valued.
- Your knowledge is available to many.
- You help make fewer mistakes.
- You know how to communicate complex things.
- You are known and are branded as the authority.
- When you look in the mirror you see the best.

So, how do you position yourself to be the authority at something?

First, pick an area of specialization that you can focus on (ideally something you are passionate about and really excel at). It might be related to a specific product type (bedding plants, perennials, edibles, etc.). Or it could be a specific condition like water issues, weather conditions or energy effectiveness.

Next, invest the time into being the expert. Put in the time reading and studying. Continue to educate yourself and to take classes and seminars. Make a commitment to stay current and constantly improve and stay relevant.

You should also try to earn as many credentials and certifications that are relevant to your business. For example, when you go into the doctor's office you always see all the certifications and diplomas on the wall. They are there for you to see this person is an authority in a specific specialty of medicine.

Then you really need to focus on putting yourself out there. Write a blog, do a podcast

or work with the media to establish yourself as the authority in this specialty. Try to invest time on the marketing and media element of this process.

Once you've done these things, then you can begin to refer to yourself and company as the authority in your specialty. This might be a simple elevator speech or weaving the word "authority" into conversation.

WHY?

Normally I begin my columns with "why" this is important, but in this case I want to use the "why" as a conclusion.

People will pay more for the authority. Generally, there are only one or very few authorities (as opposed to thousands of so-called experts). An authority stays focused if they want to stay the authority. I think this is one of the biggest challenges for many people ... always chasing the next shiny object.

Your team will rally behind you or the business if you are perceived as the authority. Your marketing and messaging can become much more targeted and clearer if it is focused. As the authority, the business decisions and vision are simpler.

While you need to be patient in this process, you can become the authority and reap the rewards, sustainability and pride that it brings. ■

Mark Richardson is a business growth strategist, author and columnist. He authored the best-selling book, "How Fit is Your Business," as well as his latest book, "Fit to Grow." Both books are available at [www.amazon.com](http://www.amazon.com).

EDITORIAL

Editorial Director **Tim Hodson**  
616.520.2161 • [thodson@greatamericanpublish.com](mailto:thodson@greatamericanpublish.com)

Managing Editor **Jasmina Dolce**  
616.520.2162 • [jdolce@greatamericanpublish.com](mailto:jdolce@greatamericanpublish.com)

Retail Editor **Abby Kleckler**  
616.520.2163 • [akleckler@greatamericanpublish.com](mailto:akleckler@greatamericanpublish.com)

Assistant Editor **Ana Olvera**  
616.520.2171 • [aolvera@greatamericanpublish.com](mailto:aolvera@greatamericanpublish.com)

Multimedia Designer **Amanda Mackey**  
616.520.2157 • [amackey@greatamericanpublish.com](mailto:amackey@greatamericanpublish.com)

ADVERTISING

Vice President, Group Publisher **Bob Bellew**  
616.520.2164 • [bbellew@greatamericanpublish.com](mailto:bbellew@greatamericanpublish.com)

Integrated Media Consultant - East Coast  
**Amanda McAdam**  
708.560.4046 • [amcadam@greatamericanpublish.com](mailto:amcadam@greatamericanpublish.com)

Integrated Media Consultant - West Coast  
**Kim Sammartino**  
630.901.4735 • [ksammartino@greatamericanpublish.com](mailto:ksammartino@greatamericanpublish.com)

Production Assistant **Samantha Orsi**  
616.520.2148 • [sorsi@greatamericanpublish.com](mailto:sorsi@greatamericanpublish.com)

STAFF

Corporate Office ..... 616.887.9008

Classified Advertising Manager **Kim Meyers**  
616.520.2137 • [kmeyers@greatamericanpublish.com](mailto:kmeyers@greatamericanpublish.com)

Audience Development **Becky Stovall**  
616.520.2138 • [bstovall@greatamericanpublish.com](mailto:bstovall@greatamericanpublish.com)

Business Manager **Sally Ostman**  
616.520.2136 • [sostman@greatamericanpublish.com](mailto:sostman@greatamericanpublish.com)

Creative Director **Kristina Howell**  
616.520.2168 • [khowell@greatamericanpublish.com](mailto:khowell@greatamericanpublish.com)

COO **Kimberly Baker**  
616.520.2135 • [kbaker@greatamericanpublish.com](mailto:kbaker@greatamericanpublish.com)

CEO **Matt McCallum**  
[mmccallum@greatamericanpublish.com](mailto:mmccallum@greatamericanpublish.com)

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BLV Licht- und Vakuumtechnik GmbH	7
Hurst Boiler	11
MasterTag	15
OASIS Grower Solutions	12

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