Have you ever struggled to describe what you do in a way that your prospective clients really hear you? Do they nod and say “Oh, that’s nice” or do they immediately recognize you as the person who can help solve their most important problem?

If you aren’t getting the response you want, your problem may be that you are talking about yourself instead of the other person. We infopreneurs often lead off with a litany of the services we provide or the specialized resources to which we have access. Unfortunately, this laundry-list approach sends the message that we are more interested in what we are selling than in who our prospective client is and what that person’s biggest concerns are. Instead, try a story-telling approach.

Humans are story-telling animals; it’s how we managed to convey knowledge from one generation to the next before the written word. We are wired to learn through a narrative. You can tell a short—and I mean really short—story that has all the features of a full-length drama and that highlights how much your clients benefit by your work.

I call these mini-stories marketing vignettes, and I encourage solopreneurs to write a half dozen of these vignettes, for use on a web site, social media and in face-to-face conversations whenever someone asks, “So, what do you do?”

Each vignette should consist of no more than three or four sentences or about 100 words. The story will describe a situation a client is in, what the client got from you at the end, and how the client benefited. You don’t discuss how you did the work, what resources you used, or even what kind of work you did. The truth is that most of your clients don’t care what you do or how you do it. They just want you to solve their problem.

The vignettes don’t have to describe actual client situations; in fact, they should be sufficiently anonymized that a client would not recognize her own project. If you are just starting your business or pivoting to a new market and you don’t yet have any examples, think creatively about what would be the most important goal your clients are facing and how you could enable them to meet that goal. If you draw a complete blank, it may be time for some informational interviews. I led a First-Year Members meeting on the art of the informational interview on March 1, 2017; you can find the link to the recording in the members-only area of the AIIP website at www.aiip.org/Members-OnlyWebinars.

As you write your vignettes, focus on what happens after the project is finished—what are your clients able to do now that they couldn’t do before? How have you made a tangible improvement to their job? And while you’re at it, outline the budget you think represents the value you offer your clients for this kind of work. While you may not include that information, it helps you focused on describing the highest ROI possible.

Here’s what a marketing vignette might look like:

[Describe your client’s situation]

My client was considering moving into the organic personal care market.

[Describe what your client gets from you]

I provided my client with a customized analysis of the market, with the key issues and strongest competitors highlighted.

[Describe what the client does as a result of your work]

My client decided to focus on organic baby care products, realizing this was the one area in which they had a clear advantage.

[Describe the budget]

My client paid $10,000 to avoid making a million-dollar mistake.

The virtue of this exercise is that it takes the focus away from you and your services and puts the attention to where it belongs—on a positive outcome for your client. An additional benefit is that you can put these vignettes up on your web site; they are a far more effective way to showcase your value than just listing your services.

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