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Take Your Startup Viral

These entrepreneurs grew their businesses by teaching others the tricks of their trade. You can, too.

By Amy Reinink | February 5, 2010

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Allison Nazarian, Delia Passi and Starr Hall

For years, copywriter [Allison Nazarian](#) watched potential clients pass her by.

Again and again, she heard from business owners who needed copywriting services, but who didn't have the money or inclination to hire someone to provide them.

Then, about three years ago, she figured out a way to get their business: she taught them to do her job.

The "copywriting 101" course Nazarian developed to teach entrepreneurs how to do their own copywriting eventually morphed into a thriving [business](#) that has let Nazarian grow her client list and increase her earning potential.

Nazarian is one of many entrepreneurs to grow her business by teaching others the tricks of her trade. Below, she and other entrepreneurs who have made their knowledge into a product offer tips for making the transition.

Serve an Unmet Need

Delia Passi had had no doubt there was a market for a [business](#) that taught others how to sell to women when she founded Medelia, a company that does just that.

At the time, Passi owned a publishing company geared toward women, and was so good at selling to a female audience, other publishing companies were asking her to share her expertise.

"I was asked to speak at a lot of events, consult for a lot of publishers and coach a lot of employees," says Passi, who launched [Medelia](#), which teaches [businesses](#) and other clients how to sell to female consumers, in 2002.

"Otherwise, I never would have left the publishing industry to start the company."

Similarly, Starr Hall wasn't looking to get into a new market seven years ago, but feedback from her customers changed her mind.

Hall owned a public relations and [marketing agency](#) at the time, and it had more business than she could handle.

"There are only so many hours in the day, and there was only one of me to go around," Hall says. "I started thinking, 'How can I take my services and

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knowledge and package and sell it?"

The answer came in entrepreneurs' responses to Hall's speaking engagements about social media and internet marketing.

"Entrepreneurs knew they should be into social networking and Internet marketing, they were jazzed about it, they were excited about the concept, but they really just didn't want to do it themselves," Hall says.

So Hall designed [SmartyVA](#), which launched last year, to give customers two choices: They can hire a [virtual assistant](#) to either develop a social media plan for their business, or to develop a plan and then implement it for them.

"I basically figured out I could not only package my services and training, but I could teach people how to do it virtually," Hall says.

Establish Your Expertise, and Don't be Afraid to Share it

Passi says entrepreneurs can establish themselves as experts in a given field by carving out a niche in already-crowded marketplaces.

Once they find a specialty, she says entrepreneurs should prove their expertise in that field by publishing books and [papers](#) on the topic. She has written a book, [Winning the Toughest Customer, The Essential Guide to Selling to Women](#), and has written articles that appear in publications spanning the globe.

"Medelia is the leader in teaching others how to sell to women," Passi says. "There's no one else who specializes in it. I'm it. Once you really determine what you niche is, you can make sure you're known as the expert in whatever that niche is."

Nazarian, too, found that sharing her expertise in two books about copywriting helped establish her as an expert in her field.

Still, she says she had to get past the idea that she'd be putting herself out of work by teaching others a skill she got paid to do.

"Once I got past the fear aspect, I realized that the folks who are taking me up on the do-it-yourself copywriting are the clients who are never going to hire a copywriter," says Nazarian, who still takes on copywriting work herself. "So it's not like I downsized myself out of a client so much as I am serving a group that wasn't being served before."

Know how to package yourself. Nazarian says she quickly learned she had to market her training as simple and user-friendly, not academic and intense. Her first book was titled [Copywriting 101 for Small Businesses, Entrepreneurs, Coaches and Consultants](#). Her second: [One Minute Copywriter](#).

"I took what sounded cumbersome and school-like and made it sound easy, quick and do-able," she says. "I'm into providing really quick ways people can get good copy."

Passi says developing a simple seven-step sales process and branding her program "[WomenCertified](#)" has helped crystallize the complex art of selling to female consumers.

"You need to have a program you can duplicate," Passi says. "There are a lot of people with an expertise. The question is whether they can transfer that knowledge and create a franchise around it."

Teach Other Teachers

For Passi, creating a franchise around her knowledge meant training a cadre of assistants to teach clients.

She now employs 35 "specialists" who are trained to teach clients her "WomenCertified" program, which lessens her workload and helps net more clients than she could on her own.

"I wish someone had told me years ago that it's better to create a product around your expertise rather than try to be a one-man-band and blanket world with your knowledge," Passi says.

Hall, too, says she benefited personally and professionally from training hundreds of "smarties" to teach clients about social media and internet marketing.

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"No matter how you cut it, there are only so many hours each day you can be working with clients," Hall says. "If you don't package your services, you will run yourself exhausted--and cap your potential revenue."

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