

How to get started as a consultant

Vital factors include strong business network and ability to generate ideas

Debbie Yong

Expertise, experience, reputation. You have these attributes, but may still want a break from the corporate world.

Why not try consulting?

Those new to the field may offer their service on a freelance basis to test the market first before registering their outfit as a business entity.

"If you plan to be a one-man show, you may not even need to set up a business entity," said The GMP Group's senior manager of corporate services Josh Goh.

"But if you aim to develop your business further, it would be more practical to register it to protect yourself from liability issues."

The type of company you set up will determine the extent of your personal liability.

Another tip is to prepare an at-a-glance biodata for your prospective clients, rather than a lengthy resume.

Usually just a single page, it includes personal particulars such as birth date, religion, gender, race, nationality, residence and marital status, followed by a chronological listing of education and work experience.

It should also highlight recognitions received, well-known events one has spoken at or companies worked with. Such information helps lend credibility and build up one's reputation, Mr Goh added.

A resume is usually more detailed, comprising up to five pages, summarising one's employment, education and other skills. It may highlight specific skills customised to target the job profile in question.

For that added edge, a strong

business network, passion for generating ideas, concepts to handle changing market dynamics as well as an understanding of industry and economic cycles are keys to success, said Mr Dhirendra Shantilal, senior vice-president, Asia Pacific, of recruitment firm Kelly Services.

Network as much as possible – such as by attending networking sessions, seminars or talks – to meet other business people, he said.

Other channels include job associations, university alumni communities, job sites and social network-

ing platforms.

How about the consultancy's name? Someone who has built up a solid reputation in his field may want to name his company after himself.

However, GMP Group's Mr Goh said this may run the risk of facing another company with a similar name, or having employees tarnish your name as your firm grows into a larger business.

His advice to anyone choosing this route is to be really "hands on" in developing the company's im-

age, and to choose the staff carefully.

Unless one's name is already known for a particular expertise, Mr Paul Heng of Next Career Consulting Group Asia feels that consultants should pick a company name that "clearly tells people what business you are in".

The present gloomy economic outlook does not make it easy for people striking out on their own.



Adding value

"It's not about how many years of experience you have. That does not automatically give you that right to consult. It's about how much value you can add to a company."

DR LYND A WEE (right), who started retail consultancy Bootstrap, on how consultants can help companies to look anew at what they are doing

Mr Heng said: "Businesses are reluctant to spend money. If there is no real need to engage external consultants, they will not do so."

But the silver lining, he added, is that budget-conscious firms may now look to smaller consultancies rather than big ones.

Indeed, difficult times may lead companies to look anew at what they are doing.

"When one is in a business for too long, one may develop blind spots. Consultants can provide a fresh perspective," said Dr Lynda Wee, who started retail consultancy Bootstrap after years of work in private and public institutions.

"It's not about how many years of experience you have. That does not automatically give you that right to consult. It's about how much value you can add to a company," she said.

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Need A Job? is held over this week

since March, either at the Singapore Recreation Club or over coffee with clients.

"Once people become aware of your passion, it's quite interesting how people support you in whatever ways of can. That is the power of word-of-mouth advertising," she said.

So far, she has counselled about 20 clients one-on-one. They plan to have fortnightly meetings with up to 20 people per session.

Support groups for retrenched people are also in the pipeline, she said. She charges about \$100 an hour for consultations.

She also attends monthly networking sessions held by the International Coaching Federation in Singapore.

"Corporate life has been good and it has also given us that wealth of experience that we can now share with people," Ms Lim said.

Debbie Yong

He makes sure food safety criteria are met

He watches what you eat – literally.

Mr Lawrence Low is a food safety consultant. He started his company, Gourmet Food Safety Consultancy, three years ago after having worked in the industry here and in China for more than 14 years.

He has since taken on two full-time and one part-time staff.

Said the holder of a master's degree in food technology from the University of Reading in Britain: "Three years ago, I found that there were not too many consultants who truly specialised in food safety."

The 37-year-old notes that Singapore's lack of raw materials drives

up manufacturing costs. He sees a challenge for the food industry, which needs to be competitive, yet maintain high safety standards.

His clients, mostly large food manufacturers, hire him to review their plants and set up a system of processes to help meet food safety requirements from the authorities like the Agri-Food and Veterinary Authority in Singapore.

With a high demand for food safety auditors, he notes that the industry has attracted its fair share of fraudsters.

"Anyone who comes in can self-declare himself as a food-safety consultant. People join because

they see this as a money-generating area but their background is IT or electrical and mechanical engineering," he said.

He earns between \$10,000 and \$15,000 monthly during "good months", when he handles about three to four clients at a time.

There are months too without any client.

Mr Low feels that accreditation makes a difference to ensuring a good reputation.

He is an approved auditor under the International Register of Certified Auditors (UK) and one of only four registered HACCP consultants – assessed and approved by the Singapore Institute of Food Science and Technology – in Singapore.

HACCP, or Hazard Analysis and Critical Control Points, is a production-monitoring process that aims to identify and reduce hazards in food production.

Debbie Yong

She provides career counselling to over-40s

Though her company's website is not ready, she has already got potential clients knocking on her door.

Such is the power of networking, said Ms Helen Lim, 62, who started human resource consultancy Silver Spring last December.

The company, run together with five partners, aims to provide people, particularly those over 40, with career counselling advice and help them find employment, especially if they have been retrenched or are facing retirement.

Her partners come from backgrounds ranging from finance and information technology to sales and supply-chain management.

Ms Lim herself is a former hu-

man resource director who has worked in large multinationals and public sector firms. The economics graduate from Monash University took an early retirement in 2005.

She said: "We wanted to continue to build something and leave a legacy that creates opportunities not just for ourselves but also for others around our age." Her partners are aged between 45 and 64.

Referring to their company name, she said: "We want to help our clients put the bounce back in their lives."

And though the company has no plans to establish a physical office, she and her partners have been meeting at least once a week