

# **How To Make Your Company A Hard-To-Reach Premium Calibre IT Authority**

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**Blog entry**

**W**hen I moved from England to Canada in 1998, my intention was to continue my engineering career as a consulting engineer. However, the highly unionised and protective Canadian engineering “Institution” had other plans for me.

I was told my British education was so substandard relative to Canadian standards that the institution just couldn’t allow me to practise as an engineer. Later I found out that people can purchase their “engineer” titles by joining the British Columbia Engineering Association.

So, after this engineering association almost dragged me to court for fraud (I called myself an engineer without the association’s blessing), I decided that it was time for a change.

After living in true, meritocracy-based, free-market capitalism in the UK for 10 years, all of a sudden I was here in Canada, a semi-communist institution where the unions and the trade associations (a.k.a. institutions to protect organised incompetence) rule the land with an iron hand. Sometimes with a wooden leg, a dickey heart and even with a piece of string.

As my friend and mentor, Robin Elliott is fond of saying...

**“Good professionals practise their crafts. Mediocre ones teach them. Useless ones, who would die of starvation if they depended on their crafts to earn their livings in the real world, form professional associations in order to regulate and certify the very crafts that they are so hopelessly incompetent at.”**

So, it was time for a career change, and I spent more and more time reading and listening to renegade marketer Dan Kennedy.

He recommended reading Robert Ringer’s book, *Winning Through Intimidation*.

Contrary to the title, the book is about how to avoid being intimidated by losers who know they can’t make it in real life so, they either join the government as some low-level pencil-pushing bureaucrats or form “professional” associations and then wreak havoc and rain terror on ordinary, competent citizens.

One concept Dan teaches his students, well, I might as well write disciples, contrary to conventional wisdom, is how to make themselves unavailable to the wide, wild world.

Most business experts talk about how easily available you should be, and that you should live your life with your Bluetooth permanently in your ears and when someone calls, you should stand to attention even if it means you have to leave the dinner table or you have to get off of your spouse in the middle of a heated love-making session.

As conventional wisdom says, you have to be easy to reach.

I would make a correction here...

Your business should be easy to do business with for clients, but it should take some effort for prospects to become clients.

For instance, clients can have direct access to your subject matter experts, but prospects can have access to the receptionist or the subject matter experts’ personal assistants.

Yes, I’m a big advocate of employing a dedicated assistant for every single subject matter expert.

Granted, a good assistant can cost you almost \$100,000 per year in total cost of employment, but this money is handsomely returned to you through the exponentially improved performance of that subject matter expert who'd just been relieved of administrative duties.

I reckon one of the reasons why the military is so effective (yes, it too has shortcomings, but still) is because general don't dig trenches and clean weapons.

This is a totally different concept from having easy and instant access to the business owner or the subject matter experts in the business.

And now look around for a moment, and look at the low-end IT providers that compete on price and eke out a living from RFP to RFP. Most of them are easily available. If you mention to them that you'd like to discuss a potential project with them, they eagerly jump on the opportunity and look forward to meeting you without any form of pre-qualification.

Pre-qualification should be a step-by-step process prospects have to go through before meeting live human beings in your company.

They could meet dead ones, but those are usually buried, so they are not available for meetings.<sup>1</sup>

Anyway, let's look at some techniques how premium IT companies can safeguard their time by controlling access to their already crazy busy people...

But first we have to take a look at how we communicate with the market and...

## **The Difference Between Synchronous And Asynchronous Communication**

Synchronous communication is real time, like phone calls, Skype calls, GoToMeeting, text chat or in-person meetings.

Asynchronous communication is time delayed, like snail mail, email, blogs, forums, podcast or video blogs.

**Advantages and disadvantages of synchronous communication:** You can get an immediate response or feedback to your enquiry, which creates a higher level of emotional bond and engagement between the communicating parties.

The disadvantage is that your responses are more improvised as there isn't much time to think.

The other disadvantage is that it can eat of a lot of your time if you offer synchronous communication with you to too many people.

**Advantages and disadvantages of asynchronous communication:** The advantage is that you have time to craft your response, so it can be more precise and detailed. The other advantage is that you can offer asynchronous access to you to many people without making a mess of your own time management. You can be anywhere when receiving messages, and you respond to them at your convenience.

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<sup>1</sup> This is my gallows humour, coming from a former gravedigger.

The disadvantage is the lack of immediate response and the loss of the “human touch”.

Having clarified this vital difference, now we can examine...

## Tactics For Communication

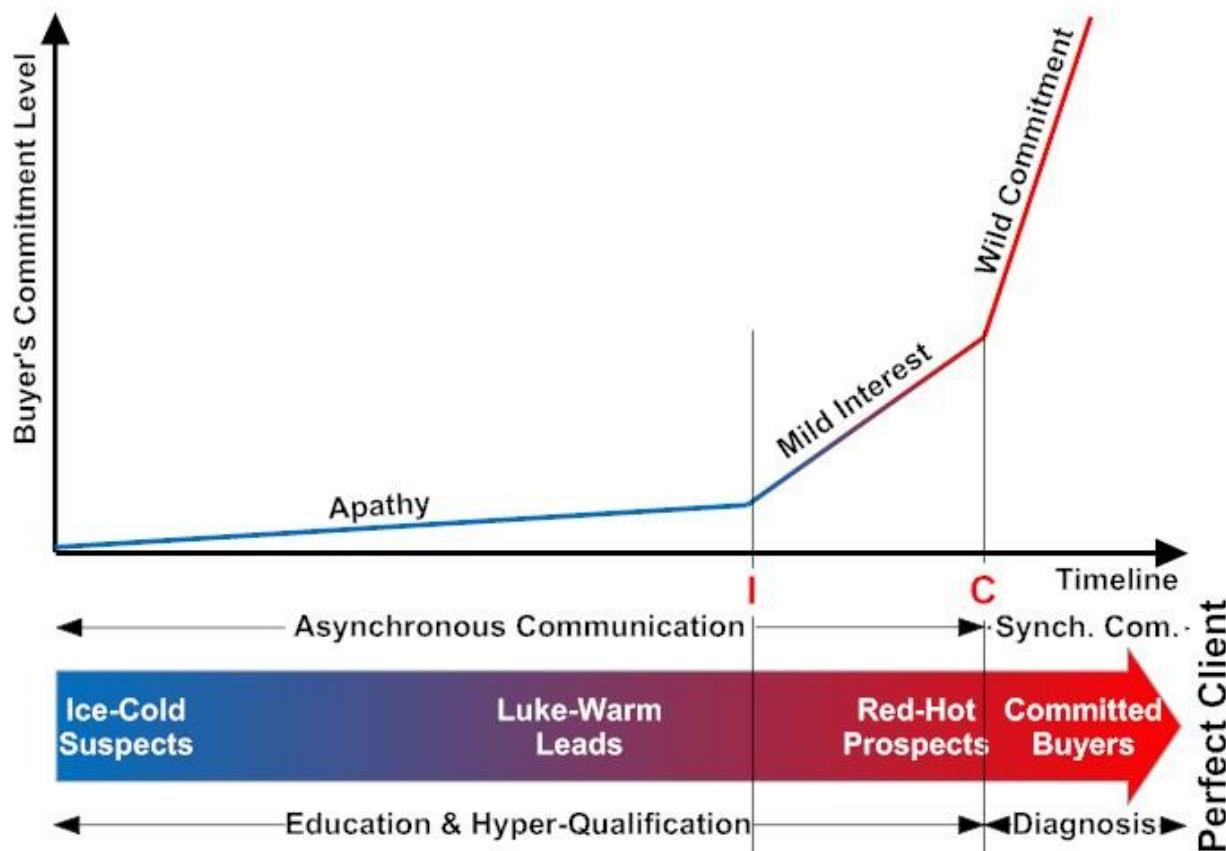
In our communication with the market we distinguish between three stages.

During the **Apathy** stage buyers consume your materials, but they don't even entertain the idea of hiring you. Remember, by nature people try to solve their problems in-house first. Many people regard the engagement of an external expert as a sign of incompetence, and they are willing to struggle for a while to solve their own problems.

The second stage, between points of **I** and **C** is the **Mild Interest** stage. By this point buyers realise that they have very small or no chance of solving their problems in-house, and are willing to consider hiring outside experts. At this point they are digesting valuable information from several experts.

By reaching point **C**, the **Wild Commitment** stage, buyers focus on one single external source, and they are ready to make contact.

During the first two stages, the best option is to use asynchronous communication, because buyers are not ready to talk yet. From point **C** on, you can switch over to synchronous communication.



So, summing up all what we've discussed so far, how can you make yourself less readily available?

So, how can you synchronise your communication with ice-cold suspects, lukewarm leads and prospects and synchronise it with committed buyers?

**Stop answering your phone, except existing clients that have “concierge<sup>2</sup>” access to you.** Set up an outgoing message that instructs callers to send an email to a specific email address with the details of what they want to discuss. On the phone, people may shoot the breeze, but in writing, they quickly get to the point. Then the autoresponder emails them the instructions as to what to do next. Be very very specific in your communication. On your mobile phone, set up separate ring tones for concierge clients. Non-concierge clients shouldn't even know your mobile number, but sometimes they may find out, so you'd better protect yourself.

Set up a general phone number for paying clients and another number for non-clients.

**When an enquiry comes in from a suspect,** in your first response, which starts the self-disqualification process, ask 3-5 very high level questions in your first email response. When your buyers contact you, they have very specific dirt-level issues in mind. Your questions have to pull their noses out of the dirt and nudge them to rise above their businesses and look down on them from high above to assess them from a strategic perspective.

That allows them to take in the whole business in one single intellectual gulp, allowing them to think at a higher level about what they want their businesses to achieve. These questions allow them to separate themselves from their businesses, and evaluate them fairly objectively.

**Create a Project Information Kit (PIK),** which is a detailed (dis)qualification course for prospects. People have to go through a sort of obstacle course in order to gain synchronous access to you. What does a Project Information Kit<sup>3</sup> consist of? It's got some items to stabilise buyers' perception of your company's expertise and credibility.

You can use publications (books, white papers, case studies, articles, etc.), references and testimonials. Although, for the sake of confidentiality, I never use references and testimonials, you may, and that's perfectly all right. Include a detailed buyer's guide to buying the kind of products/services that you sell. It's better if they read your guide than someone else's.

And, rest assured, they will read someone's guide before they buy. It might as well be yours.

Also include the questionnaires that you plan to use during the (dis)qualification process. Explain well why you ask so many questions and why you want to know so many details.

**When buyers request appointments with you,** set them at least one month ahead. One of the worst things you can do to destroy your market position is to meet prospects right away or almost right away. Some may say this is manipulative, but I don't think so.

As a highly effective entrepreneur, you most probably work out of a To-Do list, and you work on

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<sup>2</sup> Just as in a hotel. It's instant access. But make sure you grant this level of access to only a few clients and you charge good money for it.

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.itbusinesswriter.com/services-project-information-kits.shtml>

important and highly profitable issues. Now here comes a request from a prospect wanting to meet you. Would you interrupt the implementation of an existing strategy with a pretty strong and high income potential in order to meet someone with unknown potential? I don't think it's wise.

**Keep as many meetings virtual as humanly possible.** Even if that meeting is with local buyers or clients, do your best to keep them virtual, and grant in-person meetings only to high income projects and opportunities. There is no need to discuss the details of a hard drive replacement in person.

Besides, I hope you don't even waste your people's time and talent on it. It's not exactly premium work that would give great satisfaction to your people. Of course, I assume you employ kick-arse tech people.

And even if it's for virtual meetings, ask prospects to justify their requests for those meetings. By the time you meet prospects, they should know quite a lot about you, so when you meet, you can talk about specifics not merely exchanging pleasantries.

Also, by this time, you've read the returned questionnaires from prospects, and you know quite a bit about them.

**Be careful with strategic alliances:** Many strategic alliances are not worth the effort, because the alliance doesn't produce significantly more value than the individual members. There are extra costs to administer an alliance, so if it produces just a bit more than the original company, then there is no point in wasting time and effort on it.

You're better off to tweak your own operation and make it more productive. That way you're in full control and do whatever you see fit.

One of the hidden agendas of many alliances is all about tapping into alliance partners' databases and flood them with self-promotion.

The other issue is the pricing strategy. What happens when a premium-calibre company sets up an alliance with a budget-calibre company? They are supposed to share the money pretty equally. This is why it's a problem.

When an opportunity comes in, logically the premium company is supposed to scope and price the project. But this is where the budget company starts interfering and can mess up an otherwise premium project.

At the end, the budget partner still gets overpaid and is happy, but the premium partner gets seriously underpaid.

So, just be careful.

## **On Summary**

I know many people who read this article may feel uncomfortable about this screened access concept, but my observation is that the same people waste a hell of a lot of time and energy on granting unlimited access to the wrong people.

They go from meeting to meeting and they submit proposal after proposal, but nothing happens. Great meetings and lots of promises on the proposals, but no projects.

And even if they get some projects, they are “vendor projects”, meaning that fees and prices are heavily haggled down and the terms and conditions are one-sidedly advantageous to buyers.

I know far too many IT companies that get paid nothing upon commencement of their projects, and their clients release drops of money on completing certain milestones.

Can you imagine going to university and suggesting that you pay for the course lecture by lecture? I reckon, the enrolment people would call security pretty quickly.

In my experience, this kind of artificially screened access is a significant factor to establish respected authority status.

Otherwise life can become a sort of reverse Russian roulette in that most people you meet impact your business either negatively or not at all.

I also know that it can take time to fully adopt this “not available” concept, but when you do what you see is that clients will be more eager to work with you and won’t argue over your fees and prices.

Yes, it’s easy to remain a fungible vendor and do lots of begging and bootlicking to acquire clients.

The problem is that to do all that bootlicking, vendors need chameleon-like tongues, which is as much as 1.5 times longer than their bodies. And it would be a pretty poor decision to let that happen, especially from the perspective of normal daily storage of that tongue.

So, I strongly encourage you to think about it and see what you can do to reposition your company as a default go-to expert to your market.

**In the meantime, don’t sell harder. Market smarter and your business will be better off for it.**

## About The Author



Since 1998, after a 16-year industrial stint as an electronics/computer engineer, project manager and technical buyer, Tom "Bald Dog" Varjan has been working with privately held information technology companies and independent IT professionals to market and sell their complex, high-ticket and hard-to-explain IT solutions to high-end, sophisticated clients.

For Tom’s free white paper, “More Brain Less Brawn: High-Leverage Client Acquisition Strategies For Privately Held IT Companies In The Knowledge-Based Economy”, go to

<http://www.varjan.com>

## Additional Knowledge Products to Build Your IT Business

Here are some knowledge products on business development for building your premium-calibre IT business. It's especially for privately held "entrepreneurial" IT companies and solo IT professionals.

These products are sort of workbooks. They explain what is what, then walk you through the "how to..." part of the process. As you read the books, you do the exercises, and by the time you finish reading, all the relevant bits and bobs are in front of you on paper applied to your own unique situation. For this reason, the materials are not long but rather dense.

I hope you find them valuable.

**Winning Yellow Pages Advertising For Information Technology Companies:** One piece of good news is that most people who look you up in Yellow Pages are serious buyers. Another piece of good news is that some 97% of Yellow Pages ads are like eunuchs in a harem. They are physically there but are unable to perform.

The bad news is that your Yellow Pages ads might look like your competitors' ads. But that's great recognition and you can now correct this error.

Some people say, no one uses the Yellow Pages any more. Normally not. But in case of emergency (server down or computer crash), people look up the Yellow Pages and phone the company that is best differentiated from the masses. And remember that emergency work has very very high perceived value. So, take a moment and look at your ads. [Winning Yellow Pages Advertising For Information Technology Companies](#)

**Perfect IT Client Profile Development Toolkit:** We all know the high financial and psychological cost of low quality clients. They pay little but demand a lot. Even when they are happy, they are reluctant to give testimonials and introduce us to their connections. So, it's pretty important to carefully cherry-pick clients and to make sure they come from the top 0.5-2% of the Perfect Client Pyramid.

Yes, these top-drawer companies are hard to "conquer", but in the long-run, they offer the highest return on your marketing investment. But before contacting them, you have to define them in your business. And this is what this knowledge product does. [Perfect IT Client Profile Development Toolkit](#)