



Marketing advice – what are you getting?

Marketing Talk owner Sherryn McBride (pictured) knows too well how difficult it can be offering guarantees to clients for a service, which is intangible.

Though it was difficult to put in place, marketing consultant Ms McBride does provide a hard guarantee for her services.

"It's not as cut and dry for service as a product, for sure," Ms McBride said.

She felt some services were more measurable than others – an accountant should complete tax accordingly, an ISO optimiser should mean your website is well ranked and if you want your computers networked, that should happen. "There are definite expectations and you could put a service contract on that," Ms McBride said. "But a service contract doesn't work for me."

With 25 years experience managing state branches for national and multinational corporations and consultancies from market research, mining equipment and electrical consumer goods; to philanthropic marketing, arts administration and community partnership brokering, Ms McBride ironically branched out to run her own business when she was in need of a break.

She handles all aspects of a business' marketing strategy, dealing with photographers, graphic designers, videographers and so on.

The most common thing Ms McBride found with new clients was the need for fresh ideas and new ways to get their business noticed. "Generally they are anticipating I'll come up with something creative," she said. "But it's purely perception.

"They may want their logo rebranded, but once it is in the hands of the graphic designer, it's about interpreting what you want."

"Perceptions can be difficult – for me, the only way I could have a guarantee, like a service contract, is because it comes with 'a listen'. I will be listening, putting aside the time and asking the right questions. I have to tease out the personality and uniqueness of the business.

"Only then do we start talking expectation, strategy and action plans."

Working with a new client is tricky, as they see the hourly rate and want good value for money. "Their expectations are high and they assume you are going to deliver on that," Ms McBride said.

"But you're an outsider. A marketing manager within the business would have all week to come up with a plan for their boss, whereas as an outsider they anticipate you understand everything about the business really quickly.

"My guarantee is if you're not happy with the marketing value I've added to your business, don't pay the invoice. And there's a tipping point for people who will give it a go – I've been called on it three times since putting it in place in 2004.

"In Perth, the six degrees of separation is down to about three degrees, so you can't afford for your reputation to be damaged. You're best to wipe the invoice and write it off as a bad experience.

"As a consultant, reputation is everything."

Ms McBride left her last full-time job in 2003 when she reached tipping point and left to reconnect with the things she loved. Between travelling over east to visit her son and taking courses in food and wine, eight people asked her to work on projects with them – so it was a natural progression for her to pick up her own business.



Ms McBride loves the lifestyle of being her own boss and found it cathartic to take control of her own working life and schedule, which is family friendly.

"I did 'suits and boots' for 25 years," she said. "Small business people can morph into new markets quickly when they see a niche.

"When the economic impact was at its worst, I thought the small business community would be the one that would suffer the most, so I came up with value packages to sit within the market and a training voucher guarantee approval."

Ms McBride finds customers considering hiring her can be convinced with the guarantee.

The biggest problem she sees within small business management is owners who put all their eggs in one basket.

"Find a niche and stick to it. Businesses will find one big client and work around that; but you have to look at diversifying and having a few disciplines, so when one market is down another one is up."



My guarantee is if you're not happy with the marketing value I've added to your business, don't pay the invoice.