

## HOW TO "MAKE IT" IN THE SPEAKING BUSINESS

by **Ross Shafer**

Dear Man, Woman, Relative, Teacher or Friend Who Wants To Speak Professionally,

I've done a lot of seemingly dumb things in my life. Stand-up comedian, house painter, pet shop owner, TV host, radio personality, and spent most of those years...respectfully unemployed. But through persistence and dedication (to my core interests and values) I stumbled my way into "the speaking business." Since 1994, have been fortunate enough to be able to call it an actual career. So now, about three times a week, I am asked to give advice to people who want to be professional speakers. I wish I knew the fast-path-to-success for you. But it's a different road for everyone. I started out as a comedian who got the occasional "corporate gig" and then quickly transformed into a business speaker. (It only took a short 15 years!)

There are several ways to learn more about professional speaking, though. I have been a member (off and on) of the National Speakers Association since 1982... and I have been a Keynote speaker for that organization at their national conventions. The one thing I've learned is that this business looks waaaay easier than it is. However, if you want to do keynote speeches, teach seminars, or train employees, I've collected some source material for you to get you on your way. After you read these books you will have one of two reactions. #1 You will realize how much work this will be and decided to keep your day job....or #2 You will want to "moonlight" and test yourself as a part time speaker while you continue to earn a living doing your regular job.

Here is an EXCELLENT and comprehensive book about the details of the speaking business. This book is a must: <http://www.goldstars.com/products/008.html>

One way or another you need to be familiar with the National Speakers Association. It is the major trade association for the speaking business. NSA holds two-three national meetings each year - plus hundreds of local chapter meetings where you can meet other speakers, network, and learn best practices. Join a local chapter and start networking. <http://www.nsaspeaker.org/>

Business stories for speakers. Every speakers must use relative business stories to connect with an audience...but where do they come from? You can collect them from your personal or business life...or you can 'borrow' great ones that have become public domain. Though published in 1990, this is an excellent book jammed full of stories and jokes you can use or adapt to your topic. Joe Griffith is an icon of the

speaking industry - and now retired - but his ability to collect great stories is legend. Click here to get his book, Library of Speakers Stories:

[http://www.amazon.com/Speakers-Library-Business-Stories-Anecdotes/dp/0138269750/ref=sr\\_1\\_3?ie=UTF8&s=books&qid=1231886061&sr=1-3](http://www.amazon.com/Speakers-Library-Business-Stories-Anecdotes/dp/0138269750/ref=sr_1_3?ie=UTF8&s=books&qid=1231886061&sr=1-3)

Dottie Walters and her daughter Lilly have been in the speaking game for at least 4 decades. They have seen it all...and documented most of it. Though Dottie is now in 'speaker heaven' Lilly carries on the family tradition with this book devoted to being successful as a speaker. [http://www.amazon.com/Secrets-Successful-Speakers-Motivate-Captivate/dp/0070680345/ref=pd\\_sim\\_b\\_4](http://www.amazon.com/Secrets-Successful-Speakers-Motivate-Captivate/dp/0070680345/ref=pd_sim_b_4)

Ok, now I'll throw in my two cents worth. Contact Kiwanis Clubs, Rotary Clubs, and any other local service organization in your town and ask them to book you to speak...for FREE. You need stage time (lots of it) and you need an audience to hone your speech. You also need an audience in order to videotape yourself and create a demo reel. Demo reels (which are turned into Flash videos and linkable on your website) are invaluable tools of the trade. Speak as often as you can...and it doesn't matter if the audience size is 10 or 10,000.

You need to create demand for YOU. Just like any other product, an organization has to see a real value in having you speak to them. What are giving them that they can't figure out themselves? Word of mouth is your best viral marketing device. Be SOOOOO good that people talk about you. Pretty soon, your phone or web site will have people trying to find you. Don't expect a speaker's bureau to 'sign you on' until you are doing 50+ paid dates a year. They already have a roster full of speakers they trust to do a great job. A 'great' job to *them* is a speaker who generates "spin off" business. Spin offs are additional dates they can book because you 'killed' the audience the first time. Get good enough to unseat someone who is already a proven commodity and you'll succeed in this business.

**SIDE NOTE TO ENTERTAINERS:** If you are a singer, comedian, or variety artist who wants to add "business content" to your presentation, the preceding protocol is exactly how you graduated from MC...to middle act...to headliner...to TV star...to Movie star...to Oscar winner. The very same 'rules of advancement' apply in the speaking industry. Superstars never got there overnight. They grew an audience one gig at a time...constantly improving and perfecting their 'art.'

A question I hear often is, "What is the hot topic that will get me hired?" I can't tell you because I don't know...seriously! There is no such thing as 'the hot topic.' So don't try to guess or pursue what you should be talking about. Hot topics change all

the time. Forget about following the pack. Speak and write about your passion. The audience (and the money) will find you if you're good.

**Finally, you must write a book!** Write several books. Keep writing books. Publish or perish is a dead serious axiom of the speaking business. What do you write about? Your passion. Your curiosities. The stuff that keeps you up at night. Clients will always hire authors who can also perform well in front of people over non-authors. Authors have instant credibility because it proves you dedicated a certain amount of time to a subject and then published your findings. And, don't think you have to get it published by a known publishing house. Publish it yourself. Google "on demand publishing" and you'll see how easy and cheap it is to get a book published and for sale on Amazon. Start getting your book together today.

All right, that should give you a good start. Good luck to you! It's a really fun business if you're willing to devote 10-15 years to making it. (only half kidding about the last part ;-)

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