

Speaking your way to success

One authentic step at a time

by Robin Wheeler

I have been a professional speaker for over a decade now and, to be frank, I have grappled with many difficulties in that time. Lately, I have derived great benefit in being a member of the Professional Speakers Association of Southern Africa (PSASA).

As an entrepreneur in the speakers industry, there are numerous specialised challenges to deal with. It can be a rocky road to establish your service and build your brand in the market. There is no substitute for experience yet that can be emotionally costly to come by. Glamorous and lucrative as it may seem from the outside, being a speaker, like being a musician, is a tough and sometimes dirty job behind the scenes.

Once you are established, you can still feel isolated from your peers and supportive input in your vocation. This is because of

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the solitary nature of the work and due to the fact that there is an inherent tension surrounding sharing industry insights.

Speaking is about appearing successful and confident, so what happens until you are both and, thus, able to appear authentically as such? How do you get from starting out to making a living through your talks? There are so many aspects to address and difficult learning experiences to survive. How do you handle these alone and stay on the journey?

How do you gather valuable material, prepare presentations, develop and continually refine your brand, market yourself, network effectively, plus handle and incorporate feedback?

How and what do you charge?

What terms and conditions do you put in place to ensure that clients hold up their end



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About the artist

As a visual facilitator, Roy Blumenthal works internationally enlivening conferences, events, meeting and talks. He paints paintings of people's ideas as they speak. As a speaker, he talks on creativity, and is a professional member of PSASA. View his portfolio of pictures and animated summaries online at <http://royblumenthal.com/portfolio>. Contact him on roy@royblumenthal.com.



of the deal, and respect your offering?

How do you handle difficult clients and other intense learning experiences?

How do you shift people out of their comfort zones in a way that they still find palatable and rate highly?

How do you manage your energy and handle hours on your feet giving so much, combined with extensive travel?

How do you write, publish and promote books, and produce merchandise like audio programmes and DVDs?

How do you organise and run public seminars, become a keynote speaker, and

PSASA uncovered

PSASA is the only body representing professional speakers in South Africa.

PSASA has over 200 members in four chapters around South Africa, and meets every month to listen to great speakers, discuss speaker-related issues and share solutions.

Through its Academy for Professional Speakers in Johannesburg, PSASA runs regular training sessions for up-and-coming speakers.

Affiliated to the International Federation for Professional Speakers, PSASA shares world speaking trends and influences international decisions affecting the speakers industry.

PSASA is hosting the 2009 Global Speaker's Summit, held in Cape Town between 16 and 19 April 2009. This biannual gathering of the world's best speakers (Singapore 2005, Dubai 2007) is a 'must-attend event' if you perceive speaking to be part of your future. Visit www.globalspeakerssummit.org.

write for the media? How do you build enduring relationships, a database and a blog? How on earth do you do all of this in a deeply personal yet highly critical, fairly fickle and significantly stressful industry, without giving up a hundred times before you become a seasoned expert? Well, for one hugely helpful thing, you join the Professional Speakers Association of Southern Africa (PSASA). I have never been one for memberships and associations; it took me time to buy into it, but even at this stage in my career, in the short while I have been involved the association has already shown itself to be a truly beneficial one, for many reasons.

Empowering fraternity

First, my community is suddenly much closer. Instead of my peers being distant images of individual success, they are close companions and confidants in mutual success. I went from feeling single handed and challenged to feeling communal and 'in the same boat' as everyone else. This was a palpable relief, and a significant help. I also came to appreciate how far I have travelled and what a strong brand I have. Second, each of us has strengths, in our talents, areas of expertise and networks. These make us feel unique and valuable about who we are and that we are able, with awareness, to strengthen and capitalise confidently on our message. When our talents are pooled through professional association, a quantum leap occurs that benefits us all as well as the industry. Even our unique vulnerabilities become assets because they make us real. Speaking for a living is not about image but authenticity.

Third, the best way to grow is to give, and the best way to receive is to contribute. Feeling good about adding value to other people and their businesses is as useful as learning from them. At PSASA, you do both abundantly. The overall effect is ongoing growth for everyone involved, the strengthening of industry standards and fortified marketing of the profession. The gains for members through networking, exposure to content, and contact with

personal inspiration from fellows is remarkable, regardless of your level of experience.

Building stakeholders

The benefits spread way beyond the speakers, trainers and coaches into the conference industry, people-development circles and client bases throughout the market. Conference organisers deal with reputable practitioners who deliver results and set standards wherever they go. Corporate training and development divisions improve through input from exemplary free agents. And, of course,

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paying clients gain optimal outcomes.

PSASA holds monthly, regional administrative meetings followed by networking and secret-sharing sessions. There are also quarterly Academy for Professional Speakers workshops, which cover basic and advanced topics presented by industry leaders. And there is the annual conference packed with top talks for the public on hot, value-adding themes.

In addition, you get to take part in events like the Global Speaker's Summit, hosted in a different city around the world every second year. You get to meet and network with speakers and trainers from other associations, representing every corner of the earth, who inject your being and business with priceless insight. That boosts your confidence, as does sharing your expertise with newer players in the industry. And all of it is real fun!

So far, each PSASA gathering has been a positive leap forward for me and I have returned to my business enriched. Once you are in the flow, you find yourself wondering why there are people who still choose to 'float' alone. **35**