

Growing Pains: A Learning Process for Rebranding and Repositioning Your Consulting Practice

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In this article, the author shares her personal experience of the process of evaluating and rebranding her consulting practice. Looking back over 7 years of experience as an independent consultant, she explores the importance of learning, drivers, rebranding and repositioning, and lessons learned. This article also provides practical tips for effective rebranding and repositioning.

The Journey So Far: Opportunities and Obstacles

The year 2000 marked a significant turning point in my career as I reviewed my personal and professional development plan; I began to think about a career as an independent consultant. At the time, I was director of strategic developments for Talent and Skills 2000 (TS2K), a pan-London social regeneration project that focussed on developing the employability and entrepreneurial skills of unemployed young people. In recognition of my work, I was among a select group of women awarded the title, “Women of the Year,” at the Millennium Festival of Women’s Work. In 2001, I was a finalist in the “European Union of Women of Achievement Award” for “contributions to pan-European understanding and progress, and for providing inspiration to others.” This became a great springboard for launching my consulting career. It was one of the timeliest moments in my career. As Ravi I. Jayakaran (2008) said, “The reality is that opportunity will usually occur but once in a life time.”

Taking Stock

So what were my unique selling points? It was a rich blend of values, passion, a track record of success, as well as experience in strategic development in the arts and not-for-profit sector. My vision was to help individuals and organisations realize their fullest potential. At the time, I recognized that there was a demand for my talent and skills, as well as opportunities to provide services through existing networks and relationships. Having sought professional advice, I decided not to invest in marketing at that stage. However, I commissioned the design of a

business card using the description, “Salmon Consulting,” followed by, “Strategic and Organisational Performance Consultant.” I still use the same business card and it continues to create the same engaging response from people, “What do you do?”

During the first 18 months of consulting (2001 to 2003), I had three major assignments and the success of one of the assignments created the opportunity to lead the organization that I was helping to establish. Being values driven and passionate about the vision and objectives of the organization, I agreed. I had not considered the implications or impact that the decision would have on my plans for Salmon Consulting. Having put my consulting practice on hold, my advice to anyone who is seduced into an executive role after launching an independent consulting career would be to pause and seriously think about it. Consider the benefits to you and your consulting career. If you must, do it for a fixed time with clear objectives, but first get professional advice.

In 2004, when considering the re-launch of my consulting career, I assessed the situation. The benefits to me were the development of an incredibly rich experience, connection to a network of new and existing stakeholders and relationships to individuals and agencies that were committed to supporting my consulting career. As one corporate executive said at the time, “Consulting opportunities ... better play to your experience and relationship skills.”

Over the past 3 years, I have developed my niche through providing consulting and interim management services to public and third sector organizations and have built a reputation for helping individuals and organizations improve their performance through “learning,” in order to achieve their individual and organizational objectives. The added dividend for me was an annual increase of revenue and profits targets.

While leading my consulting practice, I have also been headhunted and have explored a select number of job opportunities. While I made it to many final interviews, the honest reality is that the jobs were never for me. My eclectic career and experience of different industry sectors in executive, non-executive and consulting roles did not always work in my favour.

While the preparation for these job interviews was demanding and at times a distraction from developing my consulting work, they were great learning opportunities that enabled me to showcase my talent and skills to potential clients.

Personal and Professional Development and Learning

One of the means to developing a successful consulting practice is to engage in continuous personal and professional development. Capitalize on every opportunity to learn. A year ago, acting on the advice of a respected director from an executive search company, I decided to work with a coaching consultant to:

- Assess my career in terms of: “Where I have come from? Where I am now? Where I want to be in the long term?”
- Explore my values, vision, strengths, motivation and potential areas for development;
- Make a decision about where I would like to be in the long term and the options for achieving this;
- Shape my resume and present myself in the market place.

At the end of the 4-month process, there was a mass of evidence from a range of sources, including feedback from past and current clients, results of self-assessment tools and a track of

achievements to support my decision to invest in the development and growth of my consulting practice. Having invested in leading and developing individuals and organizations, it was time for me to focus on developing and leading myself. However brilliant you are at developing others, you cannot do it effectively for yourself by yourself. This is something that I have learnt and have acted on very early in my career. Always seek support and help from those whom you trust and where there is mutual respect.

Rebranding and Repositioning

I commissioned the services of a marketing and communication specialist to help contextualise and facilitate the rebranding and repositioning of my consulting practice. I had previous experience of working with this consultant on the rebranding of a logo for one my clients and liked her approach. I also trusted her judgement.

My principal objective for rebranding was to maximise on accomplishments and create a compelling future for my consulting practice that would enable it to develop and grow over the next three to five years. I wanted the new brand to reflect what was uniquely special about me, what made me the most desirable choice and what I could do differently to create the maximum impact through helping and supporting individuals and organizations.

The outcome and impact of the work from my “Portfolio of Professional Practice,” as well as coaching sessions were part of the preparation process. I agreed to an initial two sessions that were designed to help clarify what I wanted in terms of identifying my professional identity and brand, my core messages, as well as facilitating my move from consultant to consultancy.

The first issue I explored as part of this rebranding exercise was the brand name, “Salmon Consulting” and the title, “Strategic and Organisational Performance Consultant.” These terms were relatively unknown in terms of my professional identity, often raising questions about what I actually do. Professionally, I am known as Maureen Salmon. When I first started consulting, I would not have considered using “Maureen Salmon” as my professional identity or brand. Yet, it has evolved into my professional identity.

As part of the rebranding and repositioning process, I researched the name Maureen. Maureen is a name that has new meaning. To illustrate, it is used in a PR campaign <http://www.hellomaureen.co.uk/> that exemplifies positive images of Maureen. The British Formula 1 racing driver Lewis Hamilton tells the story of the van that his father bought to take the family on his racing tours when he was a child. His mother named it Maureen. This for me indicates “routes to success.”

It is ironic that I am now known professionally as Maureen Salmon. I realized that who I am as an individual matters to clients and they clearly defined me in terms of my values, interests and strengths. This has proven to be an ideal base on which to build my professional business model. I have not yet made the decision whether to include “Maureen” as part of my new brand name, even though my name has been a strong brand image for my existing clients. The question I needed to ask was what my name would mean to new clients, markets and potential associates?

The second issue I explored was service provision and delivery. I offer a broad range of services, which are very much a reflection of my eclectic career background and the need to be flexible in order to meet the needs of clients. Moving forward, I intended to hone in on the services that are in line with my unique selling points.

The third issue was how to make the transition from consulting to consultancy. As part of the process, I researched and reviewed a number of web sites of women who worked as

independent consultants, but who ran consultancies where they worked with associates. The use of my first name also raised the issue of revealing ones gender identity and whether this helps or hinders ones business development and growth.

Since I started the work on rebranding, I have won a contract to design, develop and deliver an international leadership development programme. This is a special assignment that combines my strategic and leadership development skills. The learning from this assignment will help to shape future services for leadership development nationally and internationally.

The impact of the rebranding process has so far been a positive driver for action and prioritization of my consulting practice. This demonstrates that you can begin to reap the benefit of your development investment from the start of the process and that the benefit is not something that will magically appear only at the end of the process.

Core Actions

As I go forward, my core actions for completing this rebranding and repositioning process will include:

- Developing a new business model and business plan with a menu of services with related strategies in marketing/communication, revenue and profits growth;
- Expanding my “external” core messages to reflect vision, current social, cultural economic and political trends;
- Designing a new logo based on my personal brand that capitalizes on my unique selling points;
- Designing and launching a new web site.

Learning Points and Practical Tips for Rebranding and Repositioning

During this process, I have learnt many important lessons that helped to increase my confidence and enthusiasm for rebranding and repositioning, but it is not an easy or “instant” process. Here are some practical tips for rebranding and repositioning:

1. *Mindset shift*
A mindset shift entails becoming adept at giving professional advice and being schooled in the art of facilitation. It involves a high degree of creativity, innovation and cultivation of a visionary spirit.
2. *Continuous personal and professional development*
In order to ensure continuous development, a high level of self-awareness and self-assessment is needed.
3. *Quality time*
Quality time is essential in order to critically reflect and learn from one’s own and other people’s experiences, both positive and negative.

4. *Focus is important*
During the process, be prepared to say no to opportunities that don't play to your strengths or fit into your development plans.
5. *Deep understanding of the external environment*
Develop a deep understanding of the external environment, including existing and new clients, competitors, consulting/consultancy markets and the wider social, cultural, economic and political environment.
6. *In-depth understanding of existing and new clients*
Understanding your clients is important if you are to not simply meet, but exceed expectations.
7. *Discipline*
Discipline is reflected in developing a plan of action that includes milestones and completion of deadlines.
8. *Review and Refresh*
The consulting market is over-crowded and is constantly changing, so be prepared to continuously review and refresh your brand and market position.

My final word of advice to anyone wanting to go this route is to be bold, take a calculated risk and focus on the outcome and impact of the fresh brand.

Recommended Reading List

1. Jayakaran, R. I. (2008). A time to consult: Strategies for expanding your strategic consulting career. *Journal of Practical Consulting*, 2(2).
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About the Author

Maureen Salmon has worked in the public and not-for-profit sectors in key leadership, senior management and consulting positions. Her clients have included The Foundation for Women's Health, Research and Development (FORWARD) East Homes, RSM Robson Rhodes and London First. Maureen works in an international context, leading programmes on leadership, entrepreneurship and diversity. She is currently leading on the delivery of the Cultural Leadership Programme, "Powerbrokers International Leadership Placements" in partnership with organisations in the Caribbean, United States and South East Asia. Maureen shares her experience and influences change through mentoring, coaching, speaking at events and contributing to publications.

She has a Master of Arts in Arts Management from City University London and a Professional Certificate in Teaching and Learning in Higher and Professional Education from the Institute of Education, University of London. She is a member of the Institute of Business Consulting, an associate member of the Chartered Management Institute and a fellow of the Royal Society of Arts.

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Reference

Jayakaran, R. I. (2008). A time to consult: Strategies for expanding your strategic consulting career. *Journal of Practical Consulting*, 2(2).