

My Secret Weapons

By Linda Tapp, ALCM, CSP

I started my safety consulting practice almost 8 years ago. Over this time, I have found many people, companies, websites and products which I happily refer to other consultants and anyone starting their own business for that matter. I call these things my secret weapons and I would like to share some of them with you. You may be very familiar with some of these but you have probably not heard of all of them. Also, they all may not be right for you but you might want to at least check them out.

The first weapon is Elance. If you have not heard of or used Elance, I think you will be pleasantly surprised. At Elance (www.elance.com) you can find most types of design, including website, and writing and other creative services for very reasonable prices. At Elance, you post a project description and very quickly, you start to receive bids from individuals and companies around the world who want to work on your project. I have posted 4 projects through eLance and I have been thrilled with the results. One word of warning though – any designer friends you have may be appalled that you would select design services in this way. When I mentioned to a local graphic designer who had quoted me \$750 to design a book cover that I had received bids for the same work through Elance ranging from \$70 - \$225, she was horrified and lectured me that I would get what I paid for. Fortunately, she was wrong.

If you do prefer working the traditional way with creative folks, I highly recommend two local companies I have worked with. MH Design company can provide you with excellent graphic design services (such as logo or business card design) and excellent prices with quick turn around. They can be reached at 856-428-1148. I also highly recommend Cybergnarus for website design (www.cybergnarus.com). For a reasonable rate you can get a professional, highly effective one-page website very quickly – at least enough to give you a web presence which I strongly believe that every consultant needs. Another “real body” I consider a secret weapon is Dr. Liz Criz-Kaegi from CKQuest. Liz owns a research firm (www.ckquest.com). If you want market research, research on your competitors or even research for an article you are writing, Liz can access the “deep web” for you and produce a report on exactly what you need.

The President of Cybergnarus (mentioned above), Carol Harkins, also told me about another secret weapon – PayPal. I have used PayPal myself for years to pay for purchases but I only recently started using it to accept payments. I was all ready to set up a typical shopping cart system (which I would have to pay for) when Carol at Cybergnarus told me about PayPal. I have a website for a safety training book I wrote and now, with Carol’s help, visitors can easily use the PayPal system to pay. Better yet – to my surprise, the PayPal system lets buyers pay with a credit card or through their own PayPal account. If you sell anything through your website, consider using PayPal.

Another secret weapon is eBay. I am sure you have heard of it and you have probably even used it but did you ever try it for office equipment? I was able to get an InFocus

projector for just a few hundred dollars. Other business related supplies I have purchased through eBay include a business card scanner and training class supplies. I have never not been able to find what I need and at a very good price.

Now I don't think that anyone with a computer has not heard of Google but unless you have played around with the "more" button near the Google banner, you may be missing out on what Google can do for you. One of my favorite extras is Google Alerts. You can set up a Google Alert for anything. For example, a Google Alert on "OSHA" would deliver a list of all new mentions of OSHA on the web and in the news (including hyperlinks) to your email once a day. You can set up alerts on your clients to stay on top of what is happening in their industries or even on yourself. If you were quoted in the press or even if minutes from an organization were posted and you were mentioned in the minutes, that will show up in an alert. If you have a fairly uncommon name like me, you will not get many alerts if you set this up and even with my name, I still occasionally get alerts for others named "Linda Tapp" but it is a great (and free) way to stay on top of any media coverage you may be getting. Google also has tons of great stuff that you can access by clicking on the "more" button under the main search area. If you click on "labs" you will see various options in the beta stage. For example, Google is testing a new Google Web Page option which lets you quickly and easily create a web page which is also hosted by Google for free.

Since I mentioned publicity, which is very important for any safety consultant, I want to mention three other web-based weapons (which are really more tools). The first is Blogger (www.blogger.com). The second is relatively new and it is called Squidoo. Squidoo works on the concept that we can all act as a "lens" for everyone else on various topics. Everyone who creates a "lens" on Squidoo is called a lensmaster. I think of each lens as being very similar to a "Body of Knowledge" in that area. For example, for the sake of this article, I created a lens called Safety Consultants and here I list many useful resources for other safety consultants including websites, recommended books, eBay items that may be of interest and a small area for me to provide helpful lists. (A lot of this information will be included in the ASSE Body of Knowledge which has been a Practice Specialties' project for several years). How can you benefit? You can set up a lens on Squidoo (it's free) on your area of expertise. For example, if you specialize on school safety, you could create a lens called school safety. The resources you include would of course link to your articles and website. When someone searches for "school safety", you will also be more likely to get ranked higher in the search results. You can also use Squidoo to find out helpful information. If you want to learn more about marketing, just search on that term and you will be shown many different lenses on that topic.

Two more web based secret weapons are "Backpack It" and "GoToMyPC.com". I actually set up a free Backpack account before I learned about GoToMyPC but I still use it, as well as it's sister site called "BaseCamp". BackpackIt is like having your own company server where you can place files, to do lists, and other information you may want to access from anywhere at anytime. With BaseCamp, you can invite your clients or colleagues to log on to access project files or a joint project you are working on. For example, if I was working under the direction of a corporate safety manager on creating

job hazard analyses for a company with multiple locations, I could post the draft JHAs on BaseCamp as they were completed so the corporate safety manager could log on and check out the progress and the draft JHAs any time he or she wanted. This might not be a big deal for some of the larger EHS consulting firms but for small or solo consultants, this can be a useful tool.

GoToMyPC is now one of my favorite web based companies. When I was getting ready to go on a two-week vacation this past summer, I was frantically trying to think of what files I could possibly need and then started to copy them from my desktop computer to a thumb drive so I could access them from my laptop. Luckily, I discovered www.GoToMyPC.com which lets you access your desktop from any other computer. It takes a lot to impress me when it comes to websites and programs but when I tried this out (there is a free 60 day trial), I was blown away. I am writing this article from my remote vacation spot but I was able to pull up my draft of this article which was stored on my C: drive. I can also access my email account which has been a lifesaver. Give it a try!

Since a lot of these have to do with computers, I would also include SmartComputing Magazine and more importantly, the associated website that you get access to as a subscriber – www.smartcomputing.com. In most small consulting firms, there is usually not a separate (and trained) individual to handle computer issues. SmartComputing Magazine, and all of the documents you get access to as a subscriber, are well worth the \$29 a year for the subscription. I have found this website to be much faster in helping me to solve problems than the help desks that I try to avoid calling since that experience is usually very frustrating and can take hours.

Another of my favorite secret weapons is IStock Photo (www.istockphoto.com). If you do a lot of PowerPoint presentations and are tired of the same old boring clip art, try IStock Photo. As the name implies, these are mostly photos and not clip art but the photos are great and will add a professional look to your materials. Most stock photographs are quite expensive but at Istock, you will usually only pay \$1 per photo.

Finally, my last secret weapon is FedexKinkos (www.fedexkinkos.com). Everyone knows that FedexKinkos can make your copies and many of you have probably tried the “print to Kinkos” capabilities which allows you to print from your home or office computer directly to a local store but where I have found FedExKinkos to be most valuable is when I am doing any sort of training or presentation out of town or if someone else is giving a training class for me in another part of the country. For example, when I was preparing for the recent PDC in Seattle, I researched the zip code of the convention center, found the location of the nearest Kinkos and then sent the files electronically to that FedExKinkos specifying that they would be picked up. It was great not to have to pack and carry a bunch of copies across the country in my suitcase! In other instances, I have had training materials, including binders, printed at the FedExKinkos closet to the training location. If my local trainer could not easily pick them up, I could usually have them delivered directly to the training site. For example, in Atlanta the local FedExKinkos was able to print copies for a class of 25, put the copies in 3-ring binders and then have a delivery van take the binders and other class hand-outs

directly to the facility where the training was being given for a flat fee of \$8. You can't beat that!

These secret weapons are obviously not too secret and I hope you have at least learned one thing that can make your life as a consultant easier. I would love to hear any other "weapons" that you use. Please let me know what people, places and things you can't live without and we can share them in a future newsletter.