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## BUSINESS

# MIND YOUR BUSINESS

## What's an irresistible name for a unique new service?

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**Q:** I am a former contractor with a business guiding homeowners through the remodel process. I help clients figure out if their dreams are feasible, then help them develop a budget, define the scope of work, interview contractors and monitor the work as it progresses. The problem is that there's no generally accepted name for this service. Few people know it exists. I call it "remodel coaching," "facilitating" or just "hand holding." But without a name, it's hard to know how to promote the service. Any suggestions?

-- Baffled in Berkeley

**A:** Your situation reminds me of other emerging services such as life coaching or personal organizing.

Today it's not unusual to run into people who have hired a coach to help them meet their career goals, or an organizer to help keep their personal affairs in order.

But 20 years ago, hardly anyone had heard of these concepts. "This person has a winning idea in a category that doesn't yet exist," said Philippe Becker, who runs the San Francisco marketing firm Philippe Becker Design. "In our world of branding, that is both the greatest opportunity and greatest challenge."

You're right that you need a catchy, descriptive phrase for what you do. Ask friends to help brainstorm a bunch of possible phrases. Narrow them to a few top choices.

Then create your own informal focus group to test the phrases. Marty Neumeier of Neutron, a design and

branding think tank in San Francisco, suggests calling up about 10 past and potential clients.

"Tell them, 'Here are four ways I can describe myself. Which one catches your interest?'" Neumeier said. "Then ask why that particular word resonates with them. Ask which word would cost the most and which would deliver the most value."

There's more to this choice than simply describing your service accurately. It may be that clients would be willing to spend \$100 an hour for "dream home consulting," but only \$20 an hour for "remodel hand holding."

"You're in a new space, which gives you an opportunity to charge a premium if you do it well because there's no competition," said Neumeier.

Once you've figured out how to describe what you do, it's time to spread the word.

I asked some veterans of the coaching and organizing professions what they did to acquaint people with their once-unheard-of services.

Pam Richarde, past president of the International Coach Federation, said coaching schools used newspaper and magazine coverage in the early 1990s to let people know about their work.

"Media was a big part of it, and then defining ourselves by creating a code of ethics, exams and systems of credentials," she said.

And Barry Izsak, president of the

National Association of Professional Organizers, said his colleagues did a lot of word-of-mouth marketing in the early days.

"The way that professional organizers of yore marketed themselves, before people knew to look them up in the Yellow Pages, was word of mouth," Izsak said. "Print up business cards and flyers. Tell everyone you know. Do speaking engagements. Join networking groups."

Remodel coaching is novel enough that -- especially in our housing-obsessed region -- it seems like a natural for news coverage.

So consider hiring an experienced publicist to help craft an approach to the media. Or get some free PR help from your local Small Business Development Center. (See [www.sba.gov/aboutsba/sbaprograms/sbdc/index.html](http://www.sba.gov/aboutsba/sbaprograms/sbdc/index.html) for a center near you.)

And do word-of-mouth marketing among allied professions. Who do homeowners talk to when they're thinking about remodeling? Real estate agents, hardware stores, contractors, architects, interior designers, neighborhood associations ... let all these people know about the service you offer.

I bet your business takes off like wildfire among the many homeowners who feel overwhelmed by the cost and complexity of a major remodel.

And then your problem won't be explaining what you do -- it will be differentiating yourself from all the other "remodeling coaches" who jump into the field.