

## Episode 68: Marketing Strategies to Reliably Grow Your Consulting Business—with Jeffrey Scott

Deb Zahn: Hi, I want to welcome you to this episode of The Craft of Consulting podcast. So on this podcast, we're going to answer a really important question for all consultants, and that is, what should you be doing to market your consulting business? Where should you be spending your time, your energy and your money that's going to have the highest yield?

My guest, Jeffrey Scott, who's a consultant and coach, is going to get on and talk about what he does, and how he built this extremely impressive marketing machine that delivers the results that he needs.

Jeffrey is a leading authority on how to grow and maximize profits in the green industry. So he had his own landscape, lawn, and irrigation business, which he built it to a successful \$15 million company. And now he's a consultant and coach who helps others do that. And again, he's going to really be generous in sharing with you what he does with marketing so you can make the best choices possible. So let's get started.

Hi. I want to welcome my guest today, Jeffrey Scott. Jeffrey, welcome to the show.

Jeffrey Scott: Thank you very much, Deb, for having me.

Deb Zahn: So let's start off. Tell my listeners what you do.

Jeffrey Scott: I am a consultant in the landscape business profession. I help landscape business owners improve profitability, dramatically grow their business, and regain their freedom and joy of being an entrepreneur.

Deb Zahn: That's a great way to say it. I like the joy part, especially. And how did you become a consultant?

Jeffrey Scott: Started after I went to business school in Europe. And I started doing corporate consulting right out of business school. And so, I cut my teeth really at the corporate level. And then I came back to the USA. I rejoined my family's landscape business. And then I decided to go back into consulting, but this time helping what we call SME. Small and medium size enterprise, privately held companies in the landscape niche.

Deb Zahn: That's great. So you combined those two worlds, which is wonderful.

Jeffrey Scott: I did.

Deb Zahn: And one of the things that I really liked about your approach to marketing your business is when I say multi-pronged, I mean there's a lot of prongs. Is that you've got books, and videos, and articles, and social media newsletters, and

sort of those typical things. But also podcasts and webinars, peer groups, assessments, and events. And so that is one of the best breadths of marketing that I've ever seen. But it also goes pretty deep, which is one of the reasons I wanted to talk to you. So we're going to get into the detail of some of those in a minute but describe your overall marketing philosophy and strategy as it relates to your business. How did you come to market the way that you do?

Jeffrey Scott: Well, I've always been a big believer in marketing. And when I grew my landscape business, we focused heavily on the marketing aspects. And so I've always been mentored. When I took over the family landscape business, I was mentored by other people. I hired outside marketing experts to help me. So it was always a big part of what I was doing to run my business and also to bring in professionals. And so when I decided to go into consulting again, you have to start off slowly. You can't build just a big bonfire. You have to use that as a metaphor. You've got to put one log on, and then another log, and then another log. And so I did it slowly over time.

I followed Alan Weiss, who is a big believer in all sorts of marketing. And so that was really helpful and instrumental in the growth of my consulting business. I hired an outside marketing firm, just like I did when I ran my landscape business. And that helped. And then later on, I upgraded to another outside marketing firm, Lisa Larter, who I believe has been on your show.

Deb Zahn: Yes.

Jeffrey Scott: You must know Lisa well, right?

Deb Zahn: Definitely. She's wonderful.

Jeffrey Scott: It's a process where you keep adding logs to the fire and then you keep creating systems, and habits, and momentum and just different strategies that allow you to keep the momentum going as you're building up your bonfire, so to speak.

Deb Zahn: Yeah. And I liked the systems and habits because consistency is so important. And Lisa will tell us that until she's blue in the face. That consistency is so important. But I was also impressed that if you look at your marketing, each element is not a standalone. That it either points to, or leverages other things. Or is part of multiple ways that you can tell the same story, but in different ways. So if you have articles that go with videos, and then there's testimonials that go with that. I'm really impressed with that strategy of not just having a whole bunch, but doing it very deliberately in leveraging the different pieces you have. Do your outside marketers do that for you, or has that sort of been your multiple logs on the fire, and they all work together?

Jeffrey Scott: It's a good strategy to do. To use different content over and over to connect things together. My clients, it's really for my client's benefit because it provides them a network, kind of like a safety net or a net of different ways for them to

learn. And everybody learns differently. Some by audio, some by video, some reading. And so it's to the audience's benefit to do it this way. And so that's how I do it. My marketing firm helps me with that a bit. Yes. And some of it's just a best practice that I've sought to implement over time.

Deb Zahn: That's great. And how do you prioritize what you personally spend your time on relative to marketing?

Jeffrey Scott: Well, I try to prioritize multiple things at once, which is sort of counter to the definition of priority. But, I'll just give you some examples. So I write a newsletter. I used to write it monthly. And sometimes I would skip months. When you're not doing it often, you almost devalue it in your own mind. And so at some point I switched to weekly. Which you might think is, sounds like more work. But it actually got easier. It got easier for me to write, to think. I could make them shorter, easier to write. And so that priority is every week. So there's one priority. And that's much easier than doing it monthly, hard to believe. And it's more fun. And I get to help my clients more because within a month I can address different issues.

It allows me to be more in the moment with what's going on in the news. So there's that. When I'm planning events, they just get plugged in over the calendar year. And so then they get prioritized as need be or as they're coming up and going to happen. I recently started a podcast and I did that. Well, I had one for a few years, a shorter version. And I decided to do an interview style, like yourself here.

And I decided to do that for me. I'm just going to pick people I want to talk to and have conversations with them. And so that's another priority that kind of gets layered on. Yet it's a lot of fun. And so you get to meet people, and learn new things, broaden my network. It allows me to reach out to my audience with more free value to offer them. And so that's layered on my schedule. You have to be good at scheduling to make all this work. You've got to be good at once a week, looking at your schedule. Every day, looking at your schedule. Time blocking. I think I'm always reprioritizing because like many entrepreneurs, I tend to be over ambitious and then...You know that, right?

Deb Zahn: Yeah. Guilty.

Jeffrey Scott: And so then I fill my schedule too much and I got to take things off the schedule. And so I'm actually going to go through an exercise this week. I'm going to make a list of things I need to stop doing.

Deb Zahn: Very nice.

Jeffrey Scott: And I'm doing that, not as a general exercise, "Hey, that's good to do." But I'm doing it as I really want to go deeper in a certain market and area. And to do that, I realized I'm going to have to just say no to more things on the left and

right. Someone's going to pay me to go speak at a luxury event, luxury customer service event. It would be great. I would be so good at it. Because I really understand how to serve the high end. I'm going to say, "No. No thank you for the money. I'm going to keep that time to myself." And so I'm going to come up with a list of these things that are either concrete that I should...Some things I should have said no to. And I'm just going to put them up there. And remind myself, it's too late. Some things I'm going to say no to. And then some sort of conceptual areas where in the future, I will say, no.

Deb Zahn: I think that's a wonderful exercise for actually any consultant to take. How do you stay disciplined in holding onto the no's, so that you actually end up saying, no?

Jeffrey Scott: I will let you know.

Deb Zahn: That's for a future podcast. The just-say-no follow-up podcast.

Jeffrey Scott: Once I write the list.

Deb Zahn: That's right.

Jeffrey Scott: I tend to just say yes. And it's like, "Oh my God, enough of that."

Deb Zahn: Yeah. It's a common ailment among consultants is we think our job is to actually say yes to anybody and anything. But every time you say yes, you're actually saying no to other things. You just aren't conscious of it because you're filling all of your time. I think is a great exercise. So if you were talking to a new consultant who now is faced with the task of marketing and they've not done it before. What would your advice be in terms of what are the first couple logs you would suggest they put on the fire?

Jeffrey Scott: Well, I have one of my background here. I don't know if people will be able to see it.

Deb Zahn: I'll take a picture and post it.

Jeffrey Scott: Writing a book. Yeah. There you go. Writing a book I think is excellent. And I've written three books. I'm working on my fourth. It's just a great all around tool. Like you talked about how these tools interconnect. And so if you have a book in your toolbox, from that you can do almost anything else. You can do videos, audios, you name it, talks, et cetera. And so I wrote a book to help codify my ideas. To use it as a large business card to create speaking opportunities. So I don't know if that's what you're asking about.

Deb Zahn: Yeah.

Jeffrey Scott: What would be a first step, but I think that's a critical one.

Deb Zahn: I think that's a great one because you're right. You can then take that and use it as pillar content to create videos, blogs, tweets, you name it. And if you're working with outside marketers, you now have something you can hand to them and say, "Mine this for the fabulous things that I'm going to say in other arenas."

Jeffrey Scott: People have been asking me when I'm coming out with my audio book, especially on this book here, *Become a Destination Company*. And to do the audio book, you have to do it very professionally. So I've been thinking of just reading my book chapter-by-chapter interspersed in my new podcast series. What do you think of that?

Deb Zahn: I love that idea. Yeah. I listened to an audio book where instead of just reading it blandly, he added additional stories. So you got something extra out of it because he could embellish in ways that he couldn't necessarily in just reading the book or pack everything into the book. And I found that much more engaging. And I remember thinking this would make a great podcast. Just break it down into a series of chapters and give them a little bit more than they could get from the book.

Jeffrey Scott: I'm doing it. Thank you.

Deb Zahn: All right. I'm excited. Now, one of the things that you do is you also have peer groups, which actually isn't something I've seen a lot of other folks do. Can you describe what that is and what it does for your business and your clients?

Jeffrey Scott: It's a group coaching method, combined with a networking opportunity and experience for my clients. I do work one-on-one as a coach. And I'm really more of a coach than a consultant. It took a little process to figure that out, what am I?

Deb Zahn: Yeah.

Jeffrey Scott: Isn't there a child's book, What Am I?

Deb Zahn: Yes.

Jeffrey Scott: So I never thought of myself as a consultant. And then at some point I said, "I'm a consultant." I started doing consulting. But then I realized it's the coaching that's really the most important part because consulting is time limited. It's a limited exercise to help a company create a strategic plan or what have you. But it's the coaching that creates the implementation. And so I am more of a coach because that's what's needed. There's a lot larger need for coaching than straight up consulting. And so the peer group is a group coaching platform and it allows my clients to learn from me and from each other.

Deb Zahn: And is it all, I mean, in these days everything's done virtually. How is it structured? Is it virtual time together? Is it a Facebook group? How do you actually put that together?

Jeffrey Scott: The pillars are in-person meetings and not virtual. Although, I'm doing some of them now virtually. There are virtual components for staying in touch with each other. And there are other components like a WhatsApp group and not actually a Facebook group. I might add something like that to bring my multiple peer groups together. So it's a series of communication platforms connected together. In-person, virtual, email, WhatsApp.

Deb Zahn: And so they really feel part of something, but in a variety of different ways.

Jeffrey Scott: I am a community builder.

Deb Zahn: That's great. Well, and that's the saying, "They might come for the content, but they stay for the community." Deliberately constructing that I think is a great idea. And then you also have events, which again, is something else that I think other consultants should consider. Obviously, we're still in the COVID world. So it's a little thrown off right now.

Jeffrey Scott: I'm rolling out my next event at the end of August.

Deb Zahn: Knock on wood.

Jeffrey Scott: Knock on...I guess wood will do. Sure. We'll take wood.

Deb Zahn: Yeah, in sunlight outside. How did you start doing events? How did that come about?

Jeffrey Scott: I've always thought about it. I always wanted to. Went to events that Alan Weiss held. See what works and copy it.

Deb Zahn: Yep.

Jeffrey Scott: That's all you need to do. Find somebody who's got it going, got it going on.

Deb Zahn: That's right.

Jeffrey Scott: See what works, adapt it to your company market, et cetera, and copy it.

Deb Zahn: What have the events done for your business? What have you seen that it actually made an impact in your business success?

Jeffrey Scott: My clients hire me often after they've met me somewhere. And so I go to speak...Other people's speaking events, and then holding my own event. It puts me in more control.

Deb Zahn: Yep. And you get to create an experience for them that you want them to have.

Jeffrey Scott: Correct.

Deb Zahn: Love that.

Jeffrey Scott: On the date that I want it to be.

Deb Zahn: Instead of, and now I have to fly where, when? Because you're going to go to someone else's event.

Jeffrey Scott: Exactly.

Deb Zahn: I love that. Now, the other thing I want to highlight because again, I've seen a lot of consultants do videos. But what I really liked about yours is there was a mix of two different types. So one where you're adding value, something that has utility to your clients. And then there are testimonials with results. But it's not just like, "Hey, Jeffrey's a great guy. I love him." They're constructed like case studies, essentially. But instead of coming out of your mouth, they're coming out of your client's mouth. I thought that was just a remarkable way to do it. Again, I'm going to assume everything was completely deliberate. When you're approaching doing videos, what's your strategy? Why do you do them? And when did you start?

Jeffrey Scott: Well, I started working with Chad Barr who promoted videos. And so that got me started. Now, everybody does them all the time. In terms of testimonials, I bought a monopod as opposed to a tripod that I could carry around with me easily and put my iPhone onto it. And then I bought a little mic wire like three feet long that I would just plug into my iPhone, clip it onto one of my clients at one of my events and I could just record them. And I would ask them ahead of time to record a testimonial. Sometimes I would just sort of give him three points to talk about and to think about. And so that's maybe how it comes across as a case study, right?

Deb Zahn: Yeah.

Jeffrey Scott: So you just start them. You do them. You add to them. That's how it works.

Deb Zahn: I love your little mobile kit that you take because that's really taking advantage of sort of these gatherings that you've created. So you don't have to call someone, ask them, set up a time, make sure all the technology works and do all of that stuff. You've just got it ready to rock and roll.

Jeffrey Scott: Correct. And they don't have to be perfect. I mean, I have some videos that are pretty darn nice, close to perfect, but content is critical. Can they hear you? Can they see you? Are you smiling? That's just as important as this perfection. It's really more important. The content, the delivery, the emotional connection. Is it

easy to consume? All that is more important than how professional it looks, unless you're selling maybe some kind of series in which case it should look professional. But even then I think the definition of professional really has expanded.

Deb Zahn: Yeah. Yeah. Particularly as technology, it's easier to get decent technology in your hands. Any other advice you would give to new consultants who are going to start marketing themselves? Anything you would say not to do?

Jeffrey Scott: That's an open-ended question, isn't it?

Deb Zahn: It sure is.

Jeffrey Scott: What's one thing you tell them? And that'll give me time to think about the answer.

Deb Zahn: I tell them to focus on developing a connection and not seem overly sales-y because that sort of 'ick factor' can turn a lot of people off. So focus on value and making a connection. And not, in any avenue, it doesn't matter what type of marketing you're doing. And less making it about you and sale, sale, sale.

Jeffrey Scott: When I first started consulting, I worked with a gentleman before Alan Weiss. I'll have to think of his name. It'll come to me. He was the past president of NSA, National Speakers Association. Maybe you can riff them off and then it'll come to me. When I first started off as a...I started off as a speaker, and I realized, speaking is great for marketing. You have to do it. You need to become proficient at it. You need to become really good at speaking. But it's not a good business.

I realized the speaking business model was terrible. Terrible. Can I say that again? Was terrible when you measured your success by how many days you were away from home.

Deb Zahn: That's right.

Jeffrey Scott: Terrible. Yikes. But learning to speak really well is really important. And I spent time learning how to become a better speaker. And I recorded myself, and I'd watch those recordings. So I did a lot of self-work as well as professional work with others. And so, there you go. There's a piece of advice.

Deb Zahn: I especially like the recording. So I got trained early on in my career when I was still in employment, on presenting. We got trained in presenting in training. And they recorded us. And then we had to work with a coach. And you have no idea what bizarre facial tics you have. Weird things you do with your hands. You're swaying back and forth. You don't know unless you see yourself on video. If you're doing anything physically that's distracting or you're doing anything vocally that is distracting or reduces people's desire to listen to you.

And as well as just can you get to the point, you're succinct, you're engaging. And unless you can see yourself from the outside, I think it's really hard to know if you're doing it really, really well. And it's painful. It's painful to look at. Especially I remember some of the earlier videos and I'm like, why am I allowed in public? That's just awful. And then the later ones were like, "OK, this is what we're talking about."

Jeffrey Scott: Absolutely.

Deb Zahn: And so, when you switched from speaking is not my business model. And so, how do you use speaking now? It sounds like it's more about marketing than business. But how have you switched up when you go and speak for other folks?

Jeffrey Scott: Well, I think we covered it in part. I'll speak at other events. I'll have my own events. Speaking also helps me put on good videos, participate in webinars, podcasts. You have to be articulate and succinct. It's just part of the mix. And it's an important part. And I think as you get more successful, and this is true even for my clients, you get more successful and you forgot about what you did when you were starting off that made you successful.

Deb Zahn: That's right.

Jeffrey Scott: And if you forget to keep doing those things, your success can hollow out. I mean, some things change. I started off doing some cold calling. I don't obviously do cold calling anymore. But I did spend a lot of time reaching out to people early on. I need to still do that now. I did spend a lot of time speaking early on. And I should keep doing that, even if it looks like, well, I don't need to. I can just coast on that. The calls come in anyways. No, it's all part of the engine that drives that momentum. And all companies have to realize this. I tell my clients this. I tell myself this. And so you have to remember the core things that you did early on that we'll call critical that you have to keep doing them.

Deb Zahn: That's great. I love that advice. It's almost like not putting oil in your car and then saying, "OK, we're good." And then never checking it again. That's great advice. Now, obviously we're in the midst of the COVID pandemic. How has that changed the way that you do marketing? If so, how?

Jeffrey Scott: I have done more free marketing. I mean, marketing is free. So I've done more. I've looked for more ways to help my clients. So giving back to my clients now. And I've participated in more free events to help other people, webinars and things like that. And so, I think with COVID, I've tried to ramp it up.

Deb Zahn: Yeah. And you have a great video. I think I'll put a link to it in the show notes where you did a video specifically for your clients on what they can do in the midst of the COVID pandemic. And it was crisp, and clear, and immediately actionable. And I thought it was one of the versions that I'd seen of relevant

content that is something that they can pick up and use today, even if they're not having you help them with.

Jeffrey Scott: Awesome. You've got to give conceptual ideas and specific actionable ideas. Too many consultants...All right, back to tips for consultants here. Too many consultants, experts, people I even compete with. They're just afraid to be specific. Either, they don't know.

Deb Zahn: Right. Right.

Jeffrey Scott: OK. God forbid, maybe. Or they're afraid. I can't give it away. The person won't need me. We, as experts, know that's not true. And it's important to do both. To lay concepts out there at a high level, lay out steps at a medium level, get down into details at a specific level. It's important to do all that when you are marketing, so that it attracts your clients. So they get immediate value, just like you said, right? So they get immediate value and then they would like to work with you or hear more from you.

Deb Zahn: Right. Or even if they never come back to you. And this has been my experience, they tell other people how wonderful you are. And they become an ambassador for you. I have found that by being generous with giving away things that are valuable, regardless of whether or not they hire me, what it almost does in some of their minds, in the client's minds is, "Wait, she's giving that away? Wow. What is she charging for?" And the truth is I have a lot more than if you come to me and you work with me, then take that value. And now it's much more than what you got by looking at a short video.

Jeffrey Scott: Yeah. I just practice what you preach. I just did that with my newsletter this morning. I decided to take a chunk of IP, intellectual property, that I use for coaching. And I took a big piece of it or a piece of it, and I crafted it for my newsletter and I put it out in the world.

Deb Zahn: Nice.

Jeffrey Scott: And one of my peer group member clients, who I don't really coach hands-on, but I do spend time with. He went on LinkedIn and he said, "Oh my God, just when I thought I learned everything I could from you. Bam! You put this out there." And so that's why you share and you keep sharing.

Deb Zahn: I love that. That's wonderful. So let me ask you this final question. And I always ask it, but I think it's particularly relevant, particularly given the crisis we're all in. So I think part of being a consultant is also having balance in your life. However, it is that someone defines that. How do you work balance into your life?

Jeffrey Scott: My wife works with me in this business. We work together. So that's my dynamic. Others might say, "I could never do that." But for us, it works. And so when we both want to go on a vacation, we just plan it into our schedule.

Deb Zahn: Nice.

Jeffrey Scott: This idea of balance, it probably is more like a what's that ice cream...I don't know. Some ice cream-

Deb Zahn: ...Right, right, right. Where everything's mixed in together?

Jeffrey Scott: Yeah. I think that's what it is. It's just a good mix.

Deb Zahn: Yeah.

Jeffrey Scott: We might go to dinner. And I mean, we go to dinner, she might get mad at me for picking up my iPhone. OK, don't do that. But we might take time to talk about business and that's OK. And so what we decide is OK and not OK. For example, if I went on my iPhone to look at who knows what, personal stuff during our dinner. Big no-no. But we might decide to talk about work over dinner and that's a big yes-yes. And so I think you have to take time out to reenergize yourself. Going to the gym, working out. You have to do things that help your body stay balanced and your brain stay refreshed. My wife and I every evening or most evenings, end of the day, we'll just review the day.

And on purpose, we'll look for two or three positive things that we each did, even if the day was really, really boring.

Deb Zahn: Wow.

Jeffrey Scott: And that's just a way to find the good, find the success, find the positive. I think balance is not quite the right word. Because balance might imply you go to dinner and you don't talk about work.

Deb Zahn: Yeah.

Jeffrey Scott: But for me, balance is about, we ended the day feeling really positive. And to me that's really important. So there's something else more important out there, at least for me. And I would think for many people, that they find a balance of positive energy as opposed to a balance of where they spend their time.

Deb Zahn: That's great. I love that. And just like you said, find what works and steal that. So I'm going to steal that today because my husband's now working at home and we're actually in the same industry. He's been a consultant before. He's not now, but he has been. I like the find two or three things that were positive and share that. I think everybody could use that right about now.

Jeffrey Scott: If there's a negative, it'll come out in the conversation, or if there's a problem. But most people, when they get together and share, they tend to just nag, or gripe, or share negatives. So we really force the positive introspection.

Deb Zahn: I love that. That's wonderful. Well, that is a perfect way to end this. Jeffrey, thank you so much for joining me on the show today.

Jeffrey Scott: Deb, it's been my pleasure. Thank you.

Deb Zahn: Absolutely. Thanks so much for listening to this episode of the Craft of Consulting Podcast. I want to ask you to do actually three things. If you enjoy this episode or you've enjoyed any of my other ones, hit subscribe. I got a lot of other great guests that are coming up and a lot of other great content, I don't want you to miss anything. But the other two things that I'm going to ask you to do is one is, if you have any comments, so if you have any suggestions or any kind of feedback that will help make this podcast more helpful to more listeners, please include those.

And then the last thing is, again, if you've gotten something out of this, share it, share it with somebody you know who's a consultant or thinking about being a consultant, and make sure that they also have access to all this great content and all the other great content that's going to be coming up.

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