

AICN Welcomes a New Network in New Hampshire

The Alliance of IEEE Consultants Networks Coordinating Committee (AICNCC) wants to congratulate Madeleine Lowe and the IEEE New Hampshire Section Consultants Network on the formation of an Affinity Group.

This newest Consultants Network became official on 10 December 2009. If you want to wish them well, check the [IEEE-USA Web site](#) for contact information for the New Hampshire Section Consultants' Network. If other groups want to form a consultants network, the IEEE-USA Web site also contains step-by-step instructions about how to become a formal network. We encourage new consultants networks to register as "Affinity Groups." After groups form a network, they can take advantage of IEEE's branding and resources, and also qualify for funding through IEEE Section rebates.

If IEEE members belong to Consultants Networks, but you don't see their network's contact information on our Web site, please contact Daryll Griffin at d.r.griffin@ieee.org.



Reenergizing Your Local Network

From time to time, the Alliance of IEEE Consultants' Networks Coordinating Committee (AICN) receives requests for assistance from a new network, or a network wanting to become more active again. On occasion, Gary Blank, immediate past AICN Chair and current Vice President of IEEE-USA's Career & Member Services, travels to meetings to hold day-long sessions on establishing or reenergizing your network. Following are some helpful hints to get your own network started or reenergized. **Attend Monthly Section Meetings**



First, network chairs need to know that they can't do it alone. Chairs need a core group of three to four people Who want to network with other consultants in their geographic area. If you don't know other consultants with those interests, you need to go find those people. How do you find them? Attend your monthly IEEE Section and Chapter meetings, and start networking. You may want to develop a brief presentation at the meeting to solicit participation. You can also contact an AICN Committee member, who may know of someone in your community who might be a good fit.

Start With Something Social

Second, once you have your core group established, start with something social. Have fun before you start working!

Make your first meeting strictly social, and practice your networking skills — always valuable for consulting. Don't schedule any presentations or long speeches — just a heavy dose of networking to find out what topics interest people. You may also meet a few more people to add to your core group. Also, remember the golden rule for having a successful meeting: *"Provide free food and they will come."* Most networks have registered as Affinity Groups and qualify for funding through IEEE Section rebates. Dormant networks may want to explore this benefit, to offset some of the meeting costs.

Have a Strong Organization

Third, create a strong program activities committee. Strong programs will bring network members out to your meetings. Maybe not to every meeting, but if a network has an interesting program that strikes a chord, members will take time out to attend meetings. Once again, be sure to build in time for networking at all meetings.

Be Innovative

Fourth, be as innovative as possible when it comes to planning your meetings. If you are creative, you can give your members what they want, but also broaden your topics to include: legislative updates' how to work with the U.S. Small Business Administration; or moving from consulting to entrepreneurship, for example.

Additionally, incorporate social networking websites into your network activities. Many businesses have set-up Facebook and LinkedIn groups to augment communications and the services they provide. Twitter is also an excellent way to notify members quickly about a hot lead on a new

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How to Land Your First Client

By Michael W. McLaughlin

Consulting is a big — and growing — business.

The market for consulting services is estimated to be between \$130 billion and \$150 billion annually. Professional consultants are among the highest paid workers, earning more than many doctors, lawyers, and other professionals.

It's not surprising that consulting is attractive to many people who want to launch a business. After all, if you have a saleable skill, it's an easy business to enter. On the flip side of the coin, consulting is fiercely competitive. Just ten firms own almost 40% of the consulting market share in North America alone, and they fight for every opportunity to grow.

Today, clients have instant access to legions of experts at the click of a mouse, and they have found low-cost, offshore alternatives for many consulting projects.

But the beauty is that many of the large, lumbering consulting firms focus on thin slices of the market. That creates an opportunity for smaller firms and individual consultants familiar with guerrilla methods to snag their share of profitable business.

So, how do you break into consulting?

Think about Your Fourth Client First

As a new consultant, you should be able to generate a project — or maybe several — through your networks of friends, past employers and colleagues. After all, research shows that clients use their networks to select consultants more than any other method, and no doubt, they know someone who knows you.

Unfortunately, your address book alone won't sustain your consulting business long-term. If your goal is to build a sustainable consulting practice, the real question isn't how to get your first client, but how to create a business that will attract the second, third and fourth clients to your practice.

Before you ask your contacts — or anyone else — to hire you as a consultant for that first project, ensure your success by taking a longer view of your business. Work hard to land that first client, but also put the marketing and consulting fundamentals in place that will secure your future as a consultant.

Start with these four simple tips:

- Know exactly what to say — in one minute or less — to prove you are the best consultant a client can find.
- Create a marketing strategy that emphasizes action over planning.
- Become a master of the consulting process, not just a subject-matter expert.
- Win with value and results, not price.

Have Something to Say...

Prospective clients rarely look for consultants until they have a pressing need. In other words, "we just can't do it ourselves; let's get outside help fast." A recent client admitted that his team had been spinning its wheels trying to resolve a complex transportation problem for three years before they hired consultants and gave them four weeks to come up with a solution. They did. The point is, that when most clients are in the market for help, they want it yesterday. And they want the best consultants they can find, at an affordable price. So, take the time to define what makes you the best consultant a client can find.

Many consultants mistakenly believe that by defining their expertise broadly, they'll appeal to a wider audience and land more clients. The less specific you are, the less likely it is clients will think of you when they need help.

Why would clients turn to you for their most important projects? Be prepared to answer these questions during your first conversation with them:

- What, exactly, are you offering? Is it strategy development, financial management, operations improvement, sales and marketing advice, technology development, change management assistance, or something else?
- Why is it needed? What specific business problem or opportunity will your services address?
- How will the client be better off after having worked with you?
- What's really different about your firm, its services, results, or approach?
- What quantifiable benefits and results can your client expect?

If you can't articulate the answers in a minute or less, keep working. You may only have that one minute to make a first impression on a client, so make it count.

And Someone to Say It To

The market has no shortage of prospective clients, but truly profitable projects can be few and far between. If you want to work for the most profitable clients, you'll have to compete for and grab their attention. And for that you must have a plan — a real one.

Many veteran consultants haven't looked at their marketing plans since first creating them. As a result, they drift from project to project, getting by on meager profit margins. Guerrilla consultants, however, leave the low-profit projects for others. They focus on attracting and keeping the clients that give them the opportunity for financial and professional growth. Guerrillas begin that process by creating a one-page marketing plan that lays out how to get and hold onto profitable clients.

Forget the reams of fancy charts, detailed analyses and bullet-proof competitive intelligence. You can draft your first marketing plan in seven sentences:

- Sentence one explains the purpose of your marketing.
- Sentence two explains how you achieve that purpose by describing the substantive benefits you provide to clients.
- Sentence three describes your target market(s).
- Sentence four describes your niche.
- Sentence five outlines the marketing weapons you will use.
- Sentence six reveals the identity of your business.
- Sentence seven provides your marketing budget.

As you create your marketing plan, remember: you are building a platform from which to consistently communicate your ideas to prospective clients. That's the fastest way to launch a new practice, because prospective clients equate the success of a firm with consistent visibility. So, create a marketing plan that maximizes your visibility in the market. Over time, keep your business networks healthy with constant attention; establish a credible Web presence; speak for industry and trade groups; participate in studies and surveys; publish articles; and make contributions to your targeted industry association and local business community.

And, most importantly, once you begin your marketing program, never stop. You'll reap the benefits for the long haul, if you stick to your marketing guns.

When a Client Asks What Time It Is, Don't Take His Watch

Perhaps the most serious challenge facing consultants is client skepticism. In a study by business analysis firm Ross McManus, only 35% of clients are satisfied with their consultants.

Part of the problem is that many consultants are deep subject-matter experts, but less familiar with the consulting process. Before you get too far into the business, get a firm grasp of the fundamentals of consulting, including how to:

- Qualify each project to determine your ability to win the work and earn a profit. These two factors don't always go hand-in-hand.

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Secretary Chu Announces \$47 Million to Improve Efficiency in Information Technology and Communications Sectors

On 6 January 2010, Energy Secretary Steven Chu announced that the Department of Energy is awarding [\\$47 million for 14 projects](#) across the country, to support the development of new technologies that can improve energy efficiency in information technology (IT) and communication technology sectors. The data processing, data storage, and telecommunications industries are a crucial part of the American information economy. The rapid growth of these industries has led to an increase in electricity use, but improvements in these sectors' energy efficiency can provide significant energy and cost savings. The energy efficiency projects announced today will reduce energy use and carbon pollution, while helping to develop a strong, competitive domestic industry.

"These *Recovery Act* projects will improve the efficiency of a strong and growing sector of the American economy. By reducing energy use and energy costs for the IT and telecommunications industries, this funding will help create jobs and ensure the sector remains competitive," said Secretary Chu. "The expected growth of these industries means that new technologies adopted today will yield benefits for many years to come."

The *American Recovery and Reinvestment Act* is providing funding for research, development and demonstration projects in three subject areas. Projects may include aspects of more than one topic area:

Equipment and Software – These projects will focus on the core components of a data or telecommunications center, such as servers and networking devices, as well as software to optimize equipment energy use.

Power Supply Chain – These projects will develop technologies to minimize the power loss and heat generation that occurs as electricity moves through the ever growing number of server-based IT and communications systems.

Cooling – This effort will seek to demonstrate ways to cool the equipment used in IT and telecommunications work more effectively, and with less power than current methods.

The \$47 million in federal funds for these projects will be matched by more than \$70 million in private industry funding, for a total project value of more than \$115 million.

Each project promises significant reductions in energy consumed by information technology and communications systems. One company, Power Assure, Inc., estimates its new power management software, which more efficiently regulates server energy usage by turning servers off and on

when needed, could reduce energy use by 50 percent in data centers and large server farms.

Another company, Federspiel Controls, is developing a new dynamic cooling system that employs variable fan speeds, adjustable air inlets, and wireless temperature sensors to continually monitor and adjust temperatures. The company estimates conventional static cooling systems now typically consume 25 percent of the energy used in a data center.

Information technology and telecommunications facilities account for approximately 120 billion kilowatt hours of electricity annually — or three percent of all U.S. electricity use. Moreover, rapid growth in the U.S. data center industry is projected to require two new large power plants per year just to keep pace with the expected demand growth. Without gains in efficiency, the industry would face increasing costs and greenhouse gas emissions, along with challenges to the reliability of the electricity service.

The projects below have been selected for awards. The lead applicant is listed below. The specifics and final details for each award will depend on contract negotiations between the grantee and the Department of Energy:

Equipment & Software Projects

IBM T.J. Watson Research Center (\$1.6 million)

SeaMicro Inc. (\$9.3 million)

Alcatel-Lucent, Bell Labs (\$300,000)

California Institute of Technology (\$300,000)

Power Supply Chain Projects

Lineage Power Corporation (\$2.4 million)

BAE Systems (\$222,000)

Power Assure, Inc. (\$5 million)

Hewlett-Packard Company (\$7.4 million)

Columbia University (\$2.8 million)

Cooling

IBM T.J. Watson Research Center (\$2.3 million)

Federspiel Controls, Inc. (\$584,000)

Yahoo! Inc. (\$9.9 million)

Alcatel-Lucent (\$1.8 million)

Edison Materials Technology Center (\$2.8 million)

Source: U.S. Department of Energy Press Release

IEEE-USA Consultants Database Member Profile

IEEE-USA Consultants Database: Sample Profile - John Smith, P.E.

In this newsletter, we have heavily promoted the benefits of joining IEEE-USA's Consultants Database (an exclusive, online database available to U.S. IEEE member independent consultants for members in good standing with their local IEEE Consultants Network). Prospective clients, fellow consultants and engineering industry partners search this database on a daily basis for consultants with relevant qualifications to provide expertise for their projects.

In addition, consulting assignments are posted on its Assignment Board, so database members can pick and choose assignments to pursue. The annual fee for a listing in IEEE-USA's Consultants Database is only \$79 for IEEE Members. Following is a fictitious example of what a consultant profile looks like.

Listing/Contact Information (Sample Profile)

John Smith, P.E.

Professional Engineer
IEEE Member
Partner
Dave Paul Associates, Ltd.
Happyville, CA
Telephone: (213) 555-1212
Fax: (213) 555-1515
Email: johns@ieee.org
Website:

A 200- or 1600-character maximum description of your consulting specialty:

Consulting engineer specializing in EMI and EMC, which includes regulations (FCC, CE, FDA, MIL-STD-461), radio frequency interference, electrostatic discharge (ESD), EMP, lightning, power disturbances. Clients include medical, computer, industrial, vehicular, military, utilities. Services include training, design, and on-site troubleshooting. Registered PE, 20 years experience.

Available for contract engineering? Yes

Key (searchable) Phrases

Electromagnetic Interference
Electromagnetic Compatibility
Electrostatic Discharge
Grounding and Shielding

Actively seeking international assignments? Yes

Technical Categories/ Specialties

Electromagnetics, including EMI, EMC and EMP
Circuits and Printed Circuit Design
Computers
Medical
Vehicular
Embedded Systems, Hardware
Software and Controls
Expert Witness
Training

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consulting contract. Social networking websites not only provide an extra means of communication, but also another way to promote your network activities.

Also consider turning one of your meetings into an annual fundraising event for the network. Maybe an annual holiday party can become a party and silent auction. It takes a bit of planning, but after a few years, it could morph into a special event that people look forward to – one that provides funding for future activities.

Don't be afraid to borrow from your fellow networks. If another network is doing something that works, feel free to borrow that idea and follow suit. You can check the IEEE-USA website for the latest consultant network workshop listing.

While you're being innovative, don't forget the basics for any successful program:

- Send your event notice early and often by e-mail four weeks out; then, e-mail again two weeks out. Another e-mail a week before, and a final follow-up e-mail the day prior to the event is usually effective. These notices provide enough time for people to plan to attend.
- Make sure your notices attract attention. Sell the benefits of your program, so people will want to participate.
- Keeping an up-to-date emailing list is critical to success.

Services Are Key

Lastly, if possible, in addition to meetings, try to create another additional service that network members can use. This additional service could be as simple as forwarding this newsletter to your network members every quarter, or having your chair start a blog about topics that affect local consultants.

To summarize — don't strictly rely on speakers and PowerPoint presentations to have a successful network and meetings. We believe that using these ideas will help provide the necessary spark that reenergizes your network. And all network chairs are always welcome to e-mail or call the IEEE-USA office for assistance in jump starting your network.

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- Scope projects, so you and the client know what work will be done and the anticipated results. Your profit can evaporate, if you have an ambiguous statement of the project scope.
- Find the pricing strategy that's fair to clients and protects your bottom line. Pricing services is as much an art as a science, and there are at least fifteen different pricing strategies you can use.
- Prepare proposals that make the most of this time-consuming activity. Make sure you're talking to the decision-maker, and that the project has funding.
- Deliver flawless work and communicate effectively with your client.

Do those five things well, and you'll have more client work than you can handle. If you're new to the business, interview consultants about how they handle different aspects of the business. Read books, articles and reports by leading thinkers in the field. Consider joining one of the many professional associations for consultants. You can save years of learning things the hard way.

The End is the Beginning

Your clearest path to a new client is your network of former employers, and others who can make introductions to get that first project kicked off. Keep in mind, though, that consulting begins and ends with results.

To succeed, you must offer and deliver undisputed value to your clients and everyone else in your network. Value is also the foundation on which you must build your marketing. Your network of colleagues won't support you or your business, if your value is questioned anywhere along the way.

So, before you launch your practice, give these ideas some thought. They'll help put you on the road to long-term success.

This article is reprinted here with permission from the author. Michael W. McLaughlin is the co-author, with Jay Conrad Levinson, of *Guerrilla Marketing for Consultants*. Michael is a principal with Deloitte Consulting LLP, and has over twenty years of consulting experience with clients in businesses of every size, from small start-ups to some of the world's highest-profile companies. He is also the publisher of *Management Consulting News*. For more information, visit GuerrillaConsulting.com.

AICN Newsletter

The quarterly publication of the Alliance of IEEE Consultants Networks

Spring 2010

In Memory of AICN Co-Chair Bob Adams...

In early May, AICN Co-Chair Bob Adams, P.E., passed away after a lengthy illness. Bob graduated from the University of Kentucky, with a degree in Electrical Engineering. Over the years, Bob served IEEE in many different ways.

In January 2010, William Kassebaum and Bob Adams had taken the positions of AICN Co-Chairs. Long-time AICN Chair Gary Blank (1999-2002 and 2008-2009) paid the following tribute: "Bob introduced me to IEEE-USA. I was his AICN Chair in 2002. He nominated me to replace him as the IEEE-USA VP of Member Activities in 2002, campaigned for me, and also got me elected to the IEEE-USA Board in 2002."

"Many years ago, when I was a candidate for Region 4 Director-Elect (before he became Director Region 4), Bob was my campaign manager. His passing is a significant loss for all of us," Blank said.

Will Kassebaum said Bob was a tremendous asset to the Central Indiana Section, Region 4, IEEE USA and IEEE. Further, Kassebaum said: "Bob encouraged many in their IEEE careers. He certainly was a mentor to me, and I was greatly looking forward to working more closely with him. He will be missed."

IEEE-USA President-Elect Ron Jensen commented that Bob was a mentor to him, and encouraged him in his volunteer career with the IEEE. "Our prayers are with Chloe Ann and the family," Jensen said.

If you would like to read more about Bob Adams, his [obituary is included in The Indianapolis Star](#).



Webinar: Consulting 102

The Alliance of IEEE Consultants Networks (AICN) is holding the second in a series of webinars on 17 June 2010 at 2:00 pm EDT. This webinar will be most informative, addressing issues consultants deal with every day.

Consulting 102

This webinar will address the most important challenge facing consultants "How To Find Clients." As a continuation of the Consulting 101 Webinar (introduction and how to get started) this webinar will present several proven methods for finding clients for consulting services and also how clients find consultants.

This webinar is a free presentation. You can register for this event and also view the Consulting 101 webinar at <http://www.ieeeusa.org/careers/webinars/>.



How Much Should You Charge? Find Out in the 2009 Profile of IEEE Consultants

The results of the 2009 Consultants Fee Survey are in!

As a consultant is preparing a proposal or negotiating a contract, one of the primary concerns is deciding how much to charge. To establish a fixed price, or a fee that is both competitive and fair, the consultant needs to know what other consultants working in similar fields are charging. In response to this need, the Alliance of IEEE Consultants Networks (AICN) conducts national fee surveys of its members. This *2009 Profile of IEEE Consultants* provides the profile of typical self-employed and independent technical consultants, including their education, experience, business practices, median earnings and hourly fee.

To review the results, purchase your copy of this new IEEE-USA E-Book at <http://www.ieeeusa.org/communications/ebooks/>.

Member Price: \$9.95; Non-member Price: \$19.95



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Employee or Independent Contractor? ... Déjà Vu All Over Again?

Organizations representing self-employed independent contractors are gearing up for another battle in a long and contentious war in Congress — over the “common law test” that the Internal Revenue Service uses to decide whether workers should be classified as employees, or as independent contractors, for federal tax purposes. This year’s fight takes place in the midst of growing federal and state budget deficits, and widespread allegations that many businesses treat certain workers as independent contractors instead of as employees, to avoid paying Medicare and unemployment insurance taxes and providing other benefits for these workers. To address these concerns, Congress and the Obama Administration are proposing new legislation and regulations intended to rewrite applicable tax code provisions, and crack down on the misclassification of workers.

Here’s some background on these initiatives and underlying worker classification issues:

Common Law Test — Under current law, the determination of whether a worker is an employee or an independent contractor is generally made using an extremely subjective common law test. This test includes 20 questions. The answers help to establish whether or not a worker is subject to the control of an employer or service recipient, not only with respect to the nature of the work performed, but also the terms and conditions under which the work is performed and related services are provided. (1)

Significant consequences — for individual and corporate taxpayers — can result from the classification of a worker as an employee or independent contractor. These consequences relate to withholding and employment tax requirements, as well as a taxpayer’s ability to exclude certain kinds of compensation from income, or take tax deductions for certain business expenses. Some consequences favor employee status, while others favor independent contractor status. Employees, for example, are allowed to exclude the cost of employer-provided pension, health and life insurance benefits from gross income for federal income tax purposes. Independent contractors, on the other hand, can establish their pension plans and make tax-deductible contributions to those plans.

Significant tax consequences can also result if a worker is misclassified, and subsequently reclassified, as a result of an IRS audit. For employers and service recipients, such consequences may include penalties for failure to withhold taxes, as well as disqualification of employee benefit plans. For workers, the consequences commonly include liability for self-employment taxes, and denial of eligibility to deduct certain business-related expenses.

After years of contentious and often unresolved disputes between taxpayers and the Internal Revenue Service over employment tax classification decisions, Congress enacted a statutory alternative to the common law test in 1978.

Section 530 of the Revenue Act of 1978 — Section 530 allows taxpayers to treat workers as independent contractors, regardless of their employment tax status under the Common Law Test, if they have a reasonable basis for doing so. A reasonable basis includes a judicial precedent, a prior IRS audit or longstanding industry practice. If a taxpayer meets one or another of these criteria, the IRS is prohibited from reclassifying its workers as employees, even prospectively. Section 530 also prohibits the IRS from issuing regulatory guidance about the appropriate classification of such workers. (2)

Obama Budget Proposal — The Obama administration’s FY 2011 budget proposal includes provisions that would allow the IRS to issue regulatory guidance on employment tax classification matters and to reclassify workers found to have been misclassified, even if such a reclassification would otherwise be prohibited under Section 530. (3)

To enforce this proposal, the President’s budget earmarks \$25 million for 100 additional tax compliance officers. The IRS has already announced plans to audit 6,000 companies for compliance with current law.

The budget document anticipates that the resulting crackdown will generate at least \$7.3 billion in employment tax revenue over the next 10 years. A number of states, including California, Illinois, Massachusetts, Montana, New Jersey and New

York, are also stepping up their enforcement of employment tax laws, often by enacting stricter penalties for taxpayers that misclassify workers. (4)

Current Congressional Initiatives – In addition to the President’s regulatory reform proposal, key members of House and Senate tax-writing committees have introduced bills to modify existing statutes governing employment tax classification practices. Last year, Representative Jim McDermott (D-WA-07) and Senator John Kerry (D-MA) introduced the Taxpayer Responsibility, Accountability and Consistency Act of 2009. This legislation (S 2882/HR 3408) would amend relevant sections of the Internal Revenue Code and the Revenue Act of 1978 by expanding taxpayer reporting requirements, changing the Section 530 safe harbor rules and increasing civil penalties for noncompliance.

Similar legislation has been introduced in Congress in the past, only to die a slow death in the face of continuing disagreements about the best way to reform the always contentious employment tax classification process. Proponents of employment tax classification reforms, including many AFL-CIO affiliated labor unions, have long argued that businesses deliberately misclassify employees as independent contractors to reduce their federal and state tax obligations, and to avoid having to pay for overtime and other employee benefits.

Small businesses and self-employed workers in the construction, direct sales, transportation and computer consulting industries — where the use of independent contractors is pervasive — are usually among the loudest critics of the proposed reforms. Although everyone agrees that the employment tax classification statutes could use greater clarity, there always has been, and continues to be, vehement disagreement on how best to codify and implement appropriate changes.

Section 1706 of the 1986 Tax Reform Act – Disputes about the proper classification of technical services workers, including engineers and computer specialists, that began in the early 1980s culminated in Congress enacting Section 1706 of the 1986 Tax Reform Act.

Section 1706 effectively revoked the Section 530 Safe Harbor protections, but only for “engineers, designers, drafters, computer programmers, systems analysts, and other similarly skilled workers” in brokered (three party) relationships involving individual workers, technical services providers (staffing firms) and client companies. As a result, workers who provided technical consulting services to clients through a staffing firm were once again obliged to comply with the 20 factor Common Law Test for employment tax classification purposes. (5)

Sustained efforts in the late 1980s and early 1990s by organizations representing independent contractors and self-employed consultants – including IEEE-USA and the National Association of Computer Consultant Businesses – to persuade Congress to repeal Section 1706 were unsuccessful.

Legislative Outlook – The 111th Congress and the Obama administration seem determined to re-engineer current laws and regulations governing the classification of workers as employees or as independent contractors for federal employment tax purposes. In view of the very real likelihood of Congressional action in the coming months, IEEE-USA will re-examine the need for an updated position on this controversial issue. Suggestions from readers on what position, if any, IEEE-USA should take will be very much appreciated.

Sources

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Vin O’Neill, is an IEEE-USA Senior Legislative Representative, and lobbies Congress and federal regulatory agencies on professional careers issues, including education, employment, health care, immigration reform, offshore outsourcing, retirement security, and tax issues of special concern to IEEE’s US members.

(Reprinted from the March 2010 issue of Today’s Engineer)

Obama Administration Announces Nearly \$100 Million for Smart Grid Workforce Training and Development

For consultants interested in teaching and instructing, U.S. Secretary of Energy Steven Chu announced in April that the Department of Energy has awarded nearly \$100 million for 54 smart grid workforce training programs that will help prepare the next generation of workers in the utility and electrical manufacturing industries. These projects will leverage more than \$95 million in funding from community colleges, universities, utilities and manufacturers to develop and implement training programs. The selectees estimate that the programs will train approximately 30,000 Americans. These workers will help to modernize the nation's electrical grid, and implement smart grid technologies in communities across the United States.

Secretary Chu made the announcement while visiting a PEPCO engineering and service center in Rockville, Maryland, that is receiving \$4.4 million in funding that PEPCO estimates will train 700 new and existing employees. This funding is the Obama administration's latest investment to develop the smart grid, and builds on the more than \$4 billion in *Recovery Act* funding for smart grid deployment and demonstration projects nationally.

"Building and operating smart grid infrastructure will put tens of thousands of Americans to work," said Secretary Chu. "Today's investment will help ensure that we have the work force in place to meet this need. This is a great opportunity for workers to upgrade their skills and earn more, or for laid off workers from other industries to start fresh in a new and growing field."

The programs will focus on training activities that support electricians, line workers, technicians, system operators, power system engineers, cyber security specialists and transmission planners. The selections include support to develop and deploy training programs broadly, as well as to conduct actual personnel training for current and future employees. Workers will receive training on transmission and distribution systems, as well as new intelligent grid systems, such as smart meters, phasor measurement sensors and advanced communication networks.

The award selections support two types of workforce training initiatives:

- **Developing and Enhancing Workforce Training Programs for the Electric Power Sector (Topic A)** — 33 projects have been selected to receive \$41.6 million in *Recovery Act* funds for the development of new training programs, strategies and curricula related to the electric power sector and the smart grid. These new programs include projects at universities, community colleges and technical schools that will help serve as models for training or retraining workers across the country. The awards also include support for the Strategic Training and Education in Power Systems (STEPS) initiative, which will develop cross-disciplinary electric power system programs at university and college levels.
- **Smart Grid Workforce Training (Topic B)** — 21 projects have been selected to receive \$57.7 million in *Recovery Act* funds to conduct workforce training programs for new hires — including displaced workers and military veterans— and retraining programs for electric utility workers and electrical equipment manufacturers to further enhance their knowledge of smart grid technologies and implementation. These projects will help ensure utilities and manufacturers have the necessary trained work force to support ongoing smart grid deployment projects, including Smart Grid Investment Grants and Demonstration Projects funded under the *Recovery Act*.

View the full [list of selected projects](#). Source: U.S. Department of Energy Press Release, 8 April 2010

Survey Results Released Regarding Independent Contractors Struggles

The Freelancers Union, a nonprofit organization representing independent contractors, has released a survey examining how the current social safety net does not protect those who work on an independent or contract basis. The Freelancers Union conducted an online survey of more than 3,000 independent workers from across the United States, to find out how independent contractors are managing during the economic downturn. The survey report appears intended as a catalyst to kick start discussions on policy change for how the social safety net should be designed to protect independent contractors. Although this is an advocacy piece, it does reveal some interesting information. For example, survey respondents spent more than 17,000 hours pursuing unpaid wages; and average survey respondents were unable collect nearly \$6,000 in fees for services owed to them.

For those interested, this [survey report](#) may provide for some interesting reading.



Consultants Can Also Access Assistance from the SBA

Last summer, 2009 IEEE-USA President Gordon Day signed a [historic agreement](#) between IEEE-USA and the [U.S. Small Business Administration \(SBA\)](#). The agreement establishes a strategic alliance between the two groups for the purpose of encouraging and fostering the creation of new, high-tech businesses.

SBA provides aid, counsel and advice to small businesses by providing them with financial, contractual and business development assistance. SBA also advocates on behalf of small business interests within the federal government.

The alliance between IEEE-USA and SBA will help improve communication between the agency and U.S. technology entrepreneurs. Under the agreement, SBA will provide IEEE-USA with information on SBA programs, products and services. The agency will also share information on its resource partners, provide speakers to participate in IEEE-USA events to discuss SBA financing, government contracting, and other business topics; invite IEEE members to attend local SBA-sponsored events; and offer training at IEEE-USA-designated locations.

This alliance has been heavily promoted through IEEE-USA, but mainly directed toward our entrepreneurship community. A common thread between both consultants and entrepreneurs are that most, if not all, are small business owners.

Merriam-Webster Dictionary differentiates entrepreneurs from consultants: "One who gives professional advice or services as an expert is a consultant." "An entrepreneur is one who organizes, manages, and assumes the risk of a business or enterprise."

We believe most consultants also assume the risk of managing a business, so they may find SBA resources very useful. As a start, IEEE-USA recently sponsored a joint webinar with SBA outlining its products and services. The IEEE-USA webinar, "[How the SBA/IEEE-USA Partnership Can Help Engineering Entrepreneurs](#)" is a general overview of SBA that touches upon the partnership, and the range of services/products that will benefit IEEE's U.S. members.

Also, consultants should be on the lookout for other IEEE-USA/SBA joint activities that may provide insight on how to grow your small consulting business.

Reprinted, in part, from the July 2009 issue of Today's Engineer "[IEEE-USA Forms Alliance with Small Business Administration](#)" by Russ Harrison.

AICN Welcomes a New Network in Houston

The Alliance of IEEE Consultants Networks Coordinating Committee (AICNCC) wants to congratulate **Richard Gillette** and the IEEE Houston Section Consultants Network for meeting MGA Board Operations Manual requirements to form an Affinity Group.

Their official formation date was 10 March 2010. If you want to wish them well, check the [IEEE-USA website](#) for contact information for the Houston Section Consultants' Network. If other groups want to form a consultants network, the IEEE-USA website also contains step-by-step instructions about how to become a formal network. New consultants networks are required to register as "Affinity Groups" to the Alliance of IEEE Consultants Networks. If groups do form a network, they can take advantage of IEEE's branding and resources, and also qualify for funding through IEEE Section rebates.



If IEEE members are out there who belong to Consultants Networks, but you don't see the network's contact information on our website, please contact Daryll Griffin at d.r.griffin@ieee.org, so we can bring you into the AICN fold.

Send in Your Recommendation for an IEEE-USA Award

The 2010 Alliance of IEEE Consultants Networks Coordinating Committee (AICNCC) is encouraging Consultants Networks and Consultants Network members to think about who maybe deserving of one of IEEE-USA's many awards. IEEE-USA Awards are given to recognize professionalism, technical achievement, and literary contributions that increase public awareness and understanding of the engineering profession in the United States.

IEEE-USA gives awards and recognition to recognize excellence, outstanding service, and contributions in furthering its objectives. IEEE-USA's Awards and Recognition Committee administers the awards program, and award recipients are announced each year at a special Awards Ceremony held in conjunction with IEEE-USA's annual Professional Activities Conference.

The 2010 AICNCC wants to promote Consultants Networks – and nominate members who have added value to the consulting profession; helped build and maintain active networks; and have made significant technical and literary contributions to increase public awareness and understanding of the engineering profession in the United States. July 31 is the deadline for submitting awards nominations.

For more information about IEEE-USA's Awards and Recognitions, visit: <http://www.ieeeusa.org/volunteers/awards/index.html>



Lessons from Bootstrap to Billions

a 5 part webinar series on entrepreneurship by Dr. Dileep Rao

Webinar: Lessons from Bootstrap to Billions

Dr. Dileep Rao, author of *Lessons from Bootstrap to Billions*, will lead a series of IEEE-USA webinars for future and seasoned entrepreneurs. The webinars will be based on Rao's book, which illustrates how, contrary to currently popular belief, entrepreneurs can bootstrap to success. *Bootstrap to Billions* shows entrepreneurs and managers how business giants used alternate financing options to grow. The first webinar in this series is on 20 May. Register at: <http://www.ieeeusa.org/careers/webinars/2010/Bootstrap-to-Billions.html>

AICN Newsletter

The quarterly publication of the Alliance of IEEE Consultants Networks

Summer 2010

AICN Welcomes a New Network in Baltimore

The Alliance of IEEE Consultants Networks Coordinating Committee (AICNCC) congratulates Dr. Wole Akpose and the IEEE Baltimore Section Consultants Network on the formation of an Affinity Group.

This newest Consultants Network became official on 22 April 2010. If you want to welcome them, check the IEEE-USA Web site for contact information for the IEEE Baltimore Section Consultants Network. If other groups want to form a consultants network, the IEEE-USA Web site also contains step-by-step instructions about how to become a formal network. We encourage new consultants networks to register as *Affinity Groups*. After groups form a network, they can take advantage of IEEE's branding and resources, and also qualify for funding through IEEE Section rebates.

If you don't see your consultants network's contact information listed on our Web site, please contact Daryll Griffin at d.r.griffin@ieee.org.



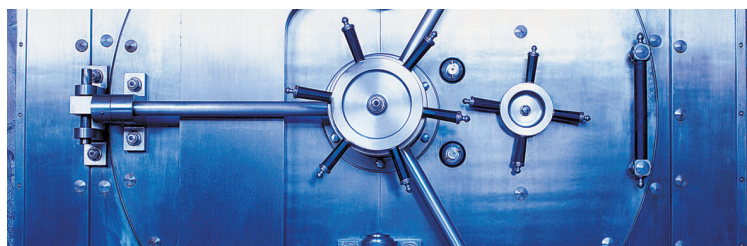
Legislative Update

Congress Still Has Time to Pass Legislation that Could Positively Affect Your Consultant Practice

In late March 2010, President Barack Obama signed into law legislation that will, in time, overhaul the U.S. health care system. As a service to the many independent consultants who have one-person shops or businesses across the country, AICN inquired as to whether this health care overhaul would have any immediate effects on independent consultants. After speaking with an insurance executive, and IEEE-USA government relations staff, we believe that we can safely say that for now, it appears that independent (cont'd. on page 3)

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Help Safeguard Your Income and Business With Disability Insurance

By Terence B. Bernier

As a self-employed consultant or technology professional or small business owner, your business depends on you. So if you become injured or ill and can't work, how will you continue to pay your personal and business expenses?

Your safety net of savings and other assets may not stretch as far as you believe, particularly if a disability keeps you from working six months or longer. In fact, the average length of a disability lasting at least 90 days, for Americans between the age of 25 and 55, is 3.8 years.¹

If your business is comprised of several employees, you may have access to group disability insurance and workers' compensation plans that can help you. But workers' compensation will only pay if you're injured on the job. (cont'd. on page 4)

For questions, comments or submissions
please contact Daryll Griffin at +1 202 530 8337
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www.ieeeusa.org/business

IEEE★USA

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Contract Engineering: A Viable Career Alternative

By Paul Kostek

The following article is reprinted with permission from IEEE-USA E-Books, Best of Today's Engineer: On Consulting. This e-book is available for purchase for \$4.95 to members and \$9.95 to non-members at www.ieeeusa.org/communications/ebooks/

In today's job market, employment opportunities vary tremendously. While most engineers still seek permanent, full-time positions, many have turned to equally viable alternatives: contract engineering and consulting.

What's the Difference?

Contractors typically work through a contract firm that assigns them to companies for particular projects. The contract firms pay the contractors an hourly rate, and then collect fees (generally 40 to 50 percent more than the contractor's hourly rate) from the third party company. Perhaps one of the most attractive aspects of being a contract engineer is that the contract firm finds assignments for you. Sometimes, contract work opens doors that might otherwise not be available to you. In fact, contract positions sometimes lead to permanent full-time positions.

As a consultant, however, no firm does your marketing or administrative work for you. You are on your own. You have to find assignments, work the assignments, bill and collect your fees and, of course, continually market your services for future assignments. Wearing all of these hats simultaneously can create time management challenges, among other things. To survive, you have to be sure you address these areas consistently. You can't wait until you're nearing the end of one assignment to begin looking for a new one, or to negotiate further work with your current client.

As a consultant, you should explore incorporating or establishing a sole proprietorship. Though not required, such business structures are worth considering. One excellent resource for setting up your business is the IRS Small Business Resource, www.irs.gov/businesses/small/index.html.

Negotiating Power?

As a contractor, the company looking to fill assignment positions will drive your hourly rate. You can set a target rate for yourself, but you will have to negotiate your final rate with the contract company representing you. Some contract firms set specific rates, forcing you to "take it or leave it." Often, the supply of engineers and the demand to fill positions will play roles in the rates offered.

Tax Incentives for Contractors

One advantage you have as a contractor, rather than as a consultant, will be per diem. Contract firms' standard practice for the past few years has been to split contractors' hourly rates into salary and per diem. For example, they may split a \$55/ hour rate as \$33.00 in salary and \$22.00 in per diem. This practice can amount to a considerable savings for contractors, since per diem pay is nontaxable income.

Retirement, Medical Coverage and Training

Some contract firms offer access to or provide benefits such as 401(k) plans and medical coverage. Most often, though, you'll have to pay for your medical and life insurance. Some firms also provide training for contractors, as do some employers.

However, most companies look for engineers with current skills, so be sure to plan on developing skills on your own, if necessary. Monitor the industry to be sure your skills are both current and in demand.

Do Your Homework and Be Prepared

Contracts can run from as little as 90 days to three years or longer. In general, contract agreements are not firm, and contractors or the company using them can end the agreement — or extend it — at any time. I've had six-month contracts turn into three-year assignments, and 12-month assignments end after just four months. Be prepared and be flexible.

Before accepting an assignment, research the company you'll be working for and check on the project you'll be working on. Learn the company's history with using contractors and be sure you know up front how viable the project is. Also, part of being a successful contract engineer is to develop contacts within companies and contract firms. A good network will keep you employed. Finally, many contractors experience slow periods. Prepare yourself for the down times by having sufficient savings to tide you over.

Contract engineering can become a career in and of itself, or can be a stepping stone to move into full-time consulting, or a full-time position. Contracting offers flexibility that will enable you to work for different companies — perhaps even in different industries — and to develop a wide range of skills. And in times when full-time employment is not available — or is not what you're looking for — contract engineering can be a great career alternative.

For More Information

One of the best resources for anyone interested in contract engineering is *Contract Engineer Weekly* (www.ceweekly.com), which lists contract firms and open positions. You can also contact the IEEE-USA Consultants Network, a resource contract firms use frequently.

Paul Kostek is a principal at Air Direct Solutions, a systems engineering services provider. He has served as chair of the American Association of Engineering Societies (AAES), as IEEE-USA President and as Region 6 PACE Coordinator.

(Legislative Update cont'd. from page 1)

consultants would be treated like *individuals* under the new health care mandates. The new mandates are as follows:

Individual Responsibility/Fines

Effective 2014

- Requires all U.S. citizens and legal residents to have qualifying "minimum essential coverage"
- Penalty for not obtaining coverage will be the greater of two: a flat dollar amount or percentage of income
- Fixed dollar amount \$95 per adult in 2014, increasing to \$695 in 2016, plus a COLA adjustment thereafter -- or one percent of income in 2014 increasing to 2.5 percent in 2016, and thereafter

Employer Responsibility

Effective 2014

- Employers with more than 50 workers who do not offer their Full Time Employees (FTEs*) the opportunity to enroll in coverage, and at least one employee obtains subsidized coverage on Exchange, must pay a fee: \$2,000 for each FTE employed, minus first 30 employees
- Employers with more than 50 workers who offer "minimum essential coverage," but any employee receives subsidized coverage on Exchange must pay fee equal to the lesser of \$3,000 for each employee receiving subsidized coverage, or \$2,000 for each FTE employed, minus the first 30 employees

**Full Time Employee = an average of 30 hours per week, calculated on a monthly basis.*

While independent consultants will be required to purchase health care coverage, they should not have to worry about being considered "employers," and thereby having to abide by the strict regulations for regular employers.

Employee or Independent Contractor?

Following up on a piece we ran in our spring issue, we reported that the 111th Congress and the Obama administration seem determined to re-engineer current laws and regulations governing the classification of workers as employees, or as independent contractors for federal employment tax purposes.

As we reported, disputes about the proper classification of technical services workers, including engineers and computer specialists, that began in the early 1980s culminated in Congress enacting Section 1706 of the *1986 Tax Reform Act*.

Section 1706 effectively revoked the Section 530 Safe Harbor protections (Section 530 allows taxpayers to treat workers as independent contractors, regardless of their employment tax status under the Common Law Test), but only for "engineers, designers, drafters, computer programmers, systems analysts, and other similarly skilled workers," in brokered (three-party) relationships involving individual workers, technical services providers (staffing firms) and client companies. As a result, workers who provided technical consulting services to clients through a staffing firm were once again obliged to comply with the 20 Factor Common Law Test for employment tax classification purposes.

According to Harvey J. Shulman, a Washington, D.C. attorney representing technology companies and entrepreneurs, who said he would be very surprised if Congress enacts any legislation this year that further narrows the safe harbor for the use of independent contractors, or otherwise changes the definition of *who is an employee* for IRS tax purposes. Shulman believes that it's impossible to predict what legislative provisions might be tacked onto a bill. So, if changes to these provisions were to move forward, the chances seem greater in the House, but would face greater opposition in the Senate from Republicans and moderate Democrats. Also, since almost everyone believes that there will be more Republicans in the next Congress, Mr. Shulman believes the outlook is even dimmer in 2011-12 for more restrictions on the use of independent contractors. But again, who knows for sure? Shulman still believes Section 1706 is ripe for repeal or change and has suggested that IEEE-USA continue the pressure to get changes made to Section 1706, and for possibly restoring the Safe Harbor protections repealed in 1986.

(Disability Insurance Cont'd from page 1)

If you're like many technology consultants, your business doesn't qualify for these plans. So what can you do?

Unless you qualify for disability pension payments for veterans, Medicaid (which is for people with very few assets) or your disability is caused by a vehicle accident (and your income is covered by your auto insurance), you most likely only have two viable options: Social Security and private disability insurance plan.

Let's explore these two options.

Social Security

Besides providing retirement benefits, Social Security also offers disability benefits. The program bases its payment structure on your salary and how long you've been contributing to Social Security.

Although Social Security offers a long-term program of support, there are several restrictions and disadvantages:

- You must be unable to work in any job, not just the one you hold.
- You have to be disabled five months or more before you can start collecting benefits.
- Your benefits may be reduced if you collect payments from other sources.
- Benefits are modest and are subject to federal income tax.
- The disability claim process is time-consuming, and many claims are denied.

Private Disability Insurance Plans

If you own your own business or are a consultant, purchasing private long-term disability coverage helps protect not only your income but the viability of your business. Disability insurance can be used to help cover your overhead, help pay your personal expenses and may even pay you as you rebuild your business following a disability.

Tax Advantages

An advantage of a private plan is the tax factor. Under current tax law, if you pay the premiums yourself, they may be considered a tax-deductible business expense. In addition, if you become disabled, you may be entitled to the full benefit amount you choose. This differs from taxable employer plans, whose benefit amounts are reduced by taxes.

Before purchasing disability coverage, you should consult with your financial or tax advisor for more details on how your premiums and benefits may be impacted by taxes. Specifically, you should ask your advisor the following questions:

- *Will I be able to deduct my disability insurance premiums as a business expense?*
- *If I become disabled, will my benefits be subject to state and federal income tax? If so, at what rate would my benefits be taxed?*
- *What other disability benefits would I be eligible for (such as Social Security, military pension, etc.) and how would they impact the amount of disability benefits I receive from a private policy?*

Additional Benefits to Consider

Private coverage can vary widely. Here are some benefits you should look for in a policy:

- **Provides monthly income benefits for 60 percent or more of your income.** Most policies only cover a certain percentage—usually 60 percent—of your gross monthly income. (Your gross monthly income typically includes your wages, salaries, commissions, fees and other amounts received for your business services and before deduction of income or social insurance taxes and after deduction of your normal business expenses. It does not include income from interest, dividends, rent, royalties, annuities, other insurance or other unearned income.)
- **Pays based on the “own occupation” definition of disability.** Some policies pay benefits if you can't work in your current occupation (called own-occupation). Other policies won't pay benefits if you can work in any occupation for which you are qualified (any occupation). Own occupation provides more coverage but is usually a little more expensive.

“According to a new survey, Americans seem much more inclined to insure their cars and homes than what pays for them—their paychecks. While 84 percent of Americans “strongly agree” that you need to insure your car, and a similar number (80 percent) feel it's critical to have homeowners insurance, only 48 percent say that it's imperative to have disability insurance.”²

- **Offers choice of waiting periods.** A waiting period is the period of time you have to wait—after being diagnosed by a doctor as totally disabled—before benefits will begin to be paid. Even if you're self-employed, your doctor will determine whether you can work or not. If your doctor determines you are totally disabled and provides documentation as part of your disability claim, you will begin to collect your disability benefits after you satisfy your waiting period. In general, you should look for coverage that offers choices of waiting periods from 30 days up to 360 days. Generally, the longer you can wait, the lower your premium will be.
- **Provides a long benefit payout period.** Some plans only pay benefits for two to five years, while others pay up to age 65.
- **Pays residual benefits.** This allows you to collect benefits if you're able to return to work part-time.
- **Pays rehabilitation benefits.** Some plans pay benefits for rehabilitation to help you get back to work.
- **Offers optional cost-of-living adjustments.** This feature allows you to increase your disability benefit if the cost of living increases. Some plans include this automatically.
- **Waives your premium if you become disabled.**

Important note about disability insurance coverage

It's important to note that many private plans include limitations for self-employed individuals just starting out in their business. These limitations are designed to prevent fraud or misrepresentation on disability claims. Unfortunately, there have been instances among small business owners to start a business and then claim disability in order to not work and collect income. Limitations often include a set benefit amount the individual can collect if he/she becomes disabled within the first year of business, a restricted waiting period and shorter benefit payout period. These limitations may be removed once the individual has established his/her business.

Where To Purchase Private Disability Insurance Coverage

You can purchase coverage as an individual in the open market through a local sales agent, the Internet, or through an association group plan such as one from IEEE Member Group Insurance Program.

As an IEEE member, you can strengthen your business and personal financial safety net with the IEEE Member Group Disability Income Insurance Plan. The plan was specifically designed for technology professionals. It's a flexible plan that lets you choose the benefit amount you need, the waiting period, the length of coverage, and more. It's also available at affordable group rates.

For more information,* call toll-free 1-800-493-IEEE (4333) or visit the product page at www.ieeeinsurance.com.

The Group Disability Income Insurance Plan is underwritten by: New York Life Insurance Company, 51 Madison Avenue, New York, NY 10010 on Policy Form GMR

1. Source: 1985 Commissioner's Individual Disability Table A.
2. LIFE Foundation, LIFE Foundation Urges Americans to Protect Their Paychecks, May 3, 2010. Viewed at www.lifehappens.org/content/view/756/479 on 7/20/10.

*including features, costs, eligibility, renewability, limitations and exclusions

This plan is administered by: Marsh U.S. Consumer, a service of Seabury & Smith, Inc., 12421 Meredith Drive, Urbandale, IA 50398
AR Ins. Lic. #245544 • CA Ins. Lic. #0633005 • d/b/a in CA Seabury & Smith Insurance Program Management
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How to help determine how much your monthly disability income benefit amount should be?

When deciding on your monthly disability income benefit amount you may wish to base this on your monthly gross income. To determine your amount, take your last year's annual gross income (before income taxes but after deducting business expenses), multiply it by 60 percent and then divide it by 12.

Here's an example:

Annual gross income: \$100,000
 $\$100,000 \times 60\% = \$60,000$
 $\$60,000 \div 12 = \$5,000$

Following this guideline, the member should select a monthly benefit of \$5,000. This member should not choose a higher benefit amount because if he did, he would pay premiums on it but then would only be allowed to collect 60% of his income, which is \$5,000. This percentage prevents individuals from collecting more income while disabled than while they're able to work. Remember: Benefits collected through most private disability plans are not taxed.

By Terence B. Bernier, Managing Director, Administrator, IEEE Member Group Insurance Program

Get Interactive: New Issue of IEEE-USA in ACTION Available

IEEE-USA has launched the second issue of its new, interactive online publication, IEEE-USA in ACTION. Made possible by the U.S. dues assessment, this new publication is free to all IEEE members. IEEE-USA in ACTION is your new source for learning about the programs, products, services and activities that IEEE-USA has to offer, and to find out what IEEE-USA is doing on behalf of U.S. IEEE members.

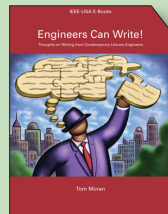
To view the new issue, go to: www.nxtbook.com/nxtbooks/ieeeusa/ieeeusa_0710/



New IEEE-USA E-Books

Engineers Can Write!

This new IEEE-USA E-Book features engineers whose success in the literary world — including award-winning poetry, short stories and novels — is as strong an argument as you will find to any claims that engineers can't write. Tom Moran, author of *Engineers Can Write!*, explores differences and similarities between writing and engineering, and offers some tips for conceptualizing writing to improve reports, articles, proposals and other documents.

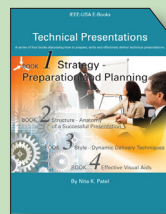


Member Price is \$4.95
Non-Member Price is \$9.95

To purchase, go to: www.ieeeusa.org/communications/ebooks/

Technical Presentations Book 1

Without a strategy and appropriate preparation, a technical presentation can be unfocused, irrelevant or fail completely. Book 1 of this new, four-part E-Book series outlines a framework to help you prepare for your next presentation.



Member Price is \$9.95
Non-Member Price is \$19.95

To purchase, go to: www.ieeeusa.org/communications/ebooks/



As you know, AICN Coordinating Committee members are always willing to hit the road to meet with people wanting to start or restart IEEE Consultants Networks. Long-time AICN member, Bob Gauger, took time out from a vacation to meet with IEEE members in Cedar Rapids, Iowa, who had expressed an interest in starting a Consultants' Network in Cedar Rapids. Gauger gave an overview at a meeting sponsored by IEEE's Women in Engineering and Life Member groups in Cedar Rapids. However Cedar Rapids Section member Raman Aravamudhan, is spearheading the effort to start this new network.

Gauger talked with the group about consulting; how to get started; how to form a network; and answered many questions about being a consultant. Aravamudhan's plans for this new network, including expanding its reach by possibly involving IEEE members located in nearby Minnesota and Wisconsin, who are currently not being served by other networks. He also plans to start a monthly roundtable, and have monthly lunch meetings with potential members to discuss common issues.

We include this piece in the AICN Newsletter, so that more established Networks have the opportunity to reach out to this new group to offer encouragement and advice. Don't be shy about sharing your experiences. I've already spoken with the key IEEE members involved, so I know they are waiting to hear from you — see below.

Key personnel in Cedar Rapids are:

Section Chair - Shana Fliginger, sefliginger@ieee.com
Section Program Chair - Tim Schoenfelder, tim@timschoefelder.com
Raman Aravamudhan - amudhan@ieee.org

IEEE-USA Consultants Database Gets Major Upgrade

IEEE-USA has completed major upgrades to its [Consultants Database](#)! These upgrades are based on database members' input. And we believe the upgrade will improve the usefulness of the service and the user's experience.

The major new feature of this upgrade is making the member database profiles accessible to web crawlers like Google, and other search engines. The updated software will also now perform the following tasks:

- Update a consultant's web listing, when changes are made to the listing
- Make the e-mail links on the web-path page call a form that sends emails to the consultant, keeping the e-mails from being harvested for spam

Another upgrade is a feature that includes statistical collection of database member hits, per consultant. This feature will:

- record the number of times a consultant's listing is displayed as a table of contents link
- record the number of times a consultant's listing is displayed in full
- record the number of times the system runs a search
- collect monthly stats and save them, per consultant
- display the stats for a consultant in tabular form

Other upgraded features include adding the *reCAPTCHA* feature that will require a human being to submit all searches once the search criterion has been set. This feature will protect against data harvesting. And we've also improved some features on the "Assignment Posting" page that will give us greater control, to make sure only legitimate assignments are posted on the assignment page.

We believe these enhancements will increase the usage of this database by those seeking services from independent engineering consultants. We're hoping these new upgrades entice those consultants who've yet to become a member of our Consultants' Database to join. We're also hoping that members review their profile and make any necessary changes, so they can take advantage of these upgrades. The best news is that we have upgraded and increased functionality of the Consultants Database, but we are not increasing the annual subscription fee of \$79. To subscribe go to the IEEE-USA website and click [Consultant Services](#).

Tips To Optimize Your Profile

In addition to the upgrade, we've put together a list of tips to help Consultants Database members get better results from their database listing.

Tips to Optimize Your IEEE-USA Consultants Database Profile:

1. The effectiveness of your profile is closely linked to how well it performs on the Database's search engines. Using the best key words and phrases to describe your expertise is essential. Make sure those terms are the ones that prospective clients might use to find you (even if they're not the ones you'd deem most precisely descriptive of your technical practice).
2. It's useful to use the key terms more than once — and in more than one field — in your listing. For example, you can use the slogan field to repeat a key phrase. You might even give your consulting practice a name that would contain a key term or phrase.
3. Searches are case sensitive, so you might also want to use your key terms more than once in a field — once with initial caps, and once with all lower-case.
4. Make sure spelling and punctuation are correct and consistent with standard practice, and that there are no typos (for example, a missing space that would cause the search engine to run two words together).
5. Make sure to list your e-mail address. Many clients prefer to have initial contact via e-mail. If you're reluctant to publish your main e-mail address, consider setting up a Google gmail, or other free e-mail account, and use that for your Consultants Database e-mail address (but be sure to check it regularly, if you do).

Consider listing a website, and establishing one for your consulting practice, if you don't have one already. Doing so will allow potential clients to see more relevant information about you, and influence their decision to make an initial contact. If you do link to a Web site, be sure it is one used exclusively for your professional practice, and it doesn't contain non-professional content. If your listing has not been generating sufficient leads thus far, trying these tips, along with the new database upgrades, should provide an opportunity for you to increase your chances to land new business leads.

If anyone has questions about IEEE-USA's Consultants Database, or further questions regarding the new features, please send an email to d.r.griffin@ieee.org.



Using Social Media to Attract New Business

By John R. Platt

Twitter, Facebook, LinkedIn, Blogger, Foursquare. So many social networks, so little time. What's a busy business owner or consultant to do? Which network is likely to bring in the most clients with new business?

Barbara Bix, managing principal at [BB Marketing Plus](#) of Newtonville, Mass., has the answers, based on more than a decade of helping companies leverage their online presence. Bix recently spoke to the [IEEE Boston Section Consultants Network](#), and later discussed social media strategies with *The Institute*.



Why Social Media?

"The power of social media is that you stay at the top of the minds of people who care about you the most," Bix says. "You want people to follow you because you're a thought leader, you have a unique specialty, or they're your friends." Participating in social media networks keeps you in front of your friends, peers, and customers, so they think of you first when they have a problem that needs solving.

"You think people are thinking about you, but they're not unless they 'see' you often," Bix points out. And they need not only to know that you exist, she continues, "they also need to know every single thing you do, in case they're looking for someone to do that very thing. Updating your status in small, frequent doses on Twitter or Facebook is a great way to do that."

"You have to 'drip' on them," Bix says. "People are predisposed to reading quick drips, and your drips on social media sites are searchable. You need to be out there often, because otherwise no one will remember you."

Where do you start? Whether you're a job seeker, a working professional, or a consultant, the first place you need to be online is wherever your customers or peers are, Bix says.

To find that place, ask around. Find out what others in your industry are doing. Search the Internet for where discussions are taking place. Pick a person you know who is doing a good job in your industry, and start copying them. See which networks they use, how they use them, when they post, and how they reply to other people. Use that as a model. Then, as you get more comfortable, spread out and start doing your own thing.

Build Your Network

Before you start getting too involved on whichever social network you choose, make sure you have a good online presence and a network of people who know you. The best place to start that, according to Bix, is [LinkedIn](#), a social media site dedicated to professional connections.

Join LinkedIn and create a professional profile that lists your skills and where you have worked. Then, build your network by linking to other professionals you know. "The people who know and love you are your best referral prospects," Bix says.

Every time you complete a project, update your LinkedIn status. "If you're not updating your LinkedIn status regularly, you're leaving money on the table," Bix says. "Be specific and state the value of what you did." For example, post something along the lines of: "I just helped a company reduce its costs by ..."

She also recommends joining groups on LinkedIn where you can participate in discussions and answer questions that others post. That helps to show you as a thought leader in your field, and expose you to potential clients.

Become a Blogger, Too

The next thing you should do is decide whether to blog. There are many reasons why you should. "For one thing," Bix says, "it really boosts your search engine rankings. For another, writing about your industry and field makes you an instant expert whether you are or not."

"Keep the blog narrowly focused," Bix says, "and provide wise insights that will make your readers feel like you know your customers' needs."

How do you get people to read your blog? It's not a case of, "If you build it, they will come." You need to promote it. E-mail your friends and colleagues about it. Submit each entry to Digg, StumbleUpon, Reddit, and similar social bookmarking sites. Add a link to your blog on your LinkedIn profile, and include the link in your e-mail footer. Tweet about it (we'll get to that later). Meanwhile, create viable content that keeps readers coming back for more.

Even if you don't start your own blog, take some time to comment on others' blogs. Adding your input to what the authors post demonstrates your expertise.

You can create a free blog in minutes at [Blogger](#), [WordPress](#), and other services.

Twitter Strategies

To establish your presence on [Twitter](#), use the search field on the Twitter home page to find people talking about your industry. For example, search for "microprocessors" or "IEEE." Once you find those people, follow them. If you read any updates that are relevant to what you do, repost them to your own followers, a process known as [re-tweeting](#). Remember to add some words of your own.

Act like a curator, Bix suggests. Put some incisive commentary in front of the re-tweet. "You're adding value for your target audience and also continuing to show yourself as a leader. It also shows that you have an interest in what others are saying. For example, if people take the time to update their status, it's important to them, so comment on it," she says.

Facebook and Google

Facebook is a double-edged sword, Bix says, because "you can't control how others link to you. But it is where your closest relationships are. It wouldn't hurt for your sister to know what you do."

On the other hand, your professional connections might not be using Facebook, and your friends might not want to know about your profession. Make the call based on your industry, and where you're going to be seen the most, Bix advises.

It's important to know what people are talking about in your field, so Bix suggests setting up [Google Alerts](#). The free service sends you links to news stories or blog posts based on the search terms you enter.

Another way to promote yourself is to review a popular book on [Amazon](#). "Say something controversial," Bix advises. "The book will sell, and people will read and comment on your reviews."

For more advice, visit Bix's blog, [The Top Line](#).

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ieee-usa today's engineer

Consulting 101

By Steven F. Barrett, PH.D., P.E.

Have you ever thought about performing consulting work? Or thought about starting your own consulting company? If you have, you're not alone, but there are several things you need to consider before becoming a consultant.

As an electrical engineer, your skills are in demand. Many companies and individuals require the design services and skill set of an electrical engineer, but do not have the resources or long-term requirement to add one to their permanent staff. Consulting engineers fill this need.

Serving as a consulting engineer has many benefits. Aside from the obvious financial incentive, serving as a consultant allows you to practice and refine your engineering and design skills. Also, consulting work may provide a much needed bridge between more permanent positions. This is especially important in the rapidly changing and challenging economic landscape we currently face. Furthermore, some engineers have relied on fulltime consulting work as their primary source of income.

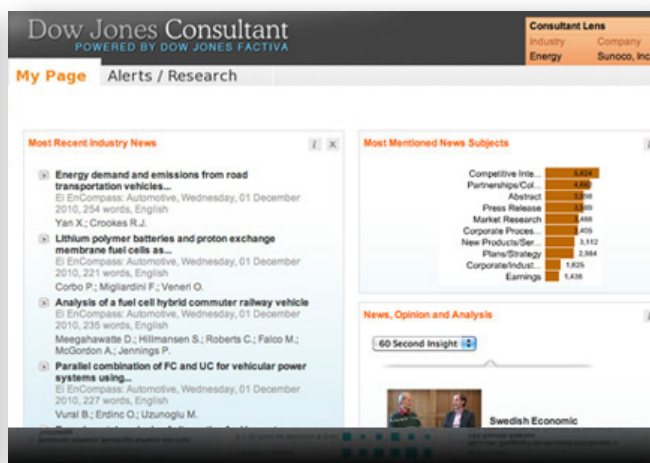
Read the rest of the article in the November issue of IEEE-USA Today's Engineer at: <http://www.todaysengineer.org/2010/Nov/consulting.asp>

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The third issue of IEEE-USA's interactive online publication, *IEEE-USA in ACTION*, is now available online. Made possible by the U.S. dues assessment, this new publication is free to all IEEE members. *IEEE-USA in ACTION* is your source for learning about the programs, products, services and activities that IEEE-USA has to offer, and to find out what IEEE-USA is doing on behalf of U.S. IEEE members. View the new issue at: http://www.nxtbook.com/nxtbooks/ieeeusa/ieeeusa_1010



Dow Jones Launches Website for Consultants



Dow Jones has created an online service geared toward consultants, aptly named “[Dow Jones Consultant](#).” The service will provide targeted news filtered from 28,000 specialized publications and 900 newswires, so consultants will have accurate information to identify opportunities, act on emerging trends, and help consultants demonstrate expertise to clients. In addition, Dow Jones plans to provide customized news via a newsletter, or integrate news into an existing application, intranet or mobile device.

The Dow Jones Consultants website gives no information as to whether this service can be geared toward engineering consultants. It also does not include any pricing information. But it may be a service that helps complement the engineering consulting news and information you already receive from your local networks and AICN.

2010 Profile of IEEE Consultants

IEEE-USA has released its *2010 Profile of IEEE Consultants*. This annual e-book has been hailed as a great resource for independent consultants — to help them decide how much to charge when they are preparing proposals, or negotiate contracts. Past readers have shared that they believe this publication helps them establish a fixed price or fee that is both competitive and fair, because the up-to-date data provides consultants with need-to-know information about what other consultants working in similar fields are charging. The data contained in this e-book comes from a national fee survey of IEEE members. This survey was conducted in the early summer of 2010, so the data is the most recent information you'll be able to find regarding consultants' fees. To purchase, go to: www.ieeeusa.org/communications/ebooks/.

