The AIIP Guide to Starting Your Own Information Business
This guide was prepared by the Association of Independent Information Professionals (AIIP).

It was revised in 2023 with input from the external communications committee and members of AIIP.

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Welcome & Introduction

“Join an organization like AIIP before you launch your business and be sure to stay active and engaged. Tap into the significant knowledge and experience of smart and generous colleagues.”
Welcome

Information professionals often ask Association of Independent Information Professionals (AIIP) members what it's like to be an independent information professional (IIP) and how they can open a similar business.

AIIP developed *The AIIP Guide to Starting Your Own Information Business* to answer many of the questions you might have as you start to build your company. This guide represents the collective knowledge and experience of AIIP members who’ve built and run successful enterprises. They’ve kindly contributed their expertise and tips to help you create a business you’ll be proud to own.

This short guide will give you a glimpse of the vast wealth of resources, advice and expertise available to a member of AIIP. We know you’ll find it a valuable resource for starting your business.

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#AIIP Top Tips

**You Need AIIP and the Information Professional Community**

“Engage with a coach or mentor early on. Be honest and open to feedback. Let your mentor help you get on your feet and move forward.”

“You may become a solopreneur, but you are not alone. Freedom isn’t solitary. In fact, business freedom might take an ‘army’.”

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**AIIP Resource:**

- [AIIP Getting Started Webpage](#)
Getting to Know AIIP

AIIP is a professional network of independent business owners running diverse info-centric businesses. Members are part of an international ecosystem of information consultants with expertise across a wide variety of industries, services and geographies.

As the leading voice of the independent information industry, AIIP provides essential resources for infopreneur members in more than 20 countries worldwide. Membership includes:

■ Business-building resources
■ Industry partner discounts
■ Warm collegiality and information-sharing
■ Skill-building and professional development
■ One-on-one mentoring and tools to support people at every stage of their business career

Find out more about AIIP’s members here. Our members talk about themselves, their businesses and their work under the We are AIIP tag in our blog.

Our members are active in a wide range of fields and subject areas. An AIIP Business Directory listing our members and their businesses is available on our public website.

The objectives of the association are to:

■ Provide a forum for the discussion of issues and concerns shared by IIPs
■ Promote professional and ethical standards among members
■ Advance knowledge and understanding of the information industry and profession
■ Promote the interchange of knowledge among our members and various organizations
■ Keep the public informed about the work and responsibilities of an information professional
#AIIP Top Tips
There is Incredible Value in Community

“I wish I had known the kind of lifestyle being independent would afford me. Yes, challenges abound and there are times of great stress, but overall, it has been a great privilege to have freedom and flexibility on top of sometimes demanding deadlines. I only wish I’d made the move sooner!”

“As a business owner, you will need professional development, continued learning, technical help and moral support and it will likely come from more than one professional and personal community. Many IIPs leverage multiple organizations, including AIIP, to meet all their professional development, networking and community needs. Tap into the communities of IIPs who have been there, done that, and are still doing it.”
Why do Information Professionals Become Business Owners?

From flexibility to freedom to the ability to earn what you are worth, there are probably hundreds of reasons why people want to become an infopreneur. We asked our members to weigh in on this important question. Here are some of their answers:

**Career Control**

- I am the boss
- I never have to worry about losing my job
- As the owner, I am the most incredibly fantastic boss I've ever had
- Being a business owner provides more internal and external stability, self-confidence and outward credibility than being a freelancer, self-employed or a digital nomad
- If I'm going to work hard and long hours, it might as well be for the benefit of my budget rather than someone else's bottom line

**Flexibility and Freedom**

- I control my schedule and can work when I want
- I can work from home and avoid commuting to work
- I can focus on the things I feel are important to me
- I can take risks and try new things without getting permission from a boss
- I can fire clients I don't like working with and work to attract clients I really like
- I like choosing who I work with and the projects I take on
- I like the ability to choose which tasks I do and which ones I outsource
- Pricing is difficult, but the ability to set my fees provides flexibility that wages do not
- I can live where I want and work with clients in other geographic areas

**Work-life Balance**

- I can focus on my family, friends and interests
- I set my hours and priorities, which means I have a personal life while having a business
- I can have more time with my grandchildren
Personal and Professional Growth

- I have more learning opportunities than if I had a job
- I want to learn about business — everything from accounting to business development to management and so much more
- I get to work on different projects from different organizations
- I can challenge myself to grow in areas that interest me
- I take immense pride in supporting myself in my business for over 30 years
What is an Info-Centric Business?

AIIP is a unique professional association representing independent business owners who provide information-related services. We often call ourselves information professionals or infopreneurs.

We are business analysts, researchers, freelancers, contractors, consultants, knowledge managers, content developers and private investigators who serve diverse clients across a range of sectors on a project, retainer or hourly basis.
AIIP members own businesses covering a huge variety of information specialities

Research Coaching Website Design/Development
Project Management Private Investigations
Training Data Analysis Genetics
Web Content Development
Management Consulting Genealogy Communications Management
Speaking/Presentations
Records Management/Archives Survey Development
Library Services Consulting
Taxonomy/Thesaurus Research
Information Audit/Management
Writing/Editing/Publishing
Freedom of Information/Access to Information
Cataloging/indexing/Abstracting
Patents/intellectual Property Technology Services
Competitive/Business Intelligence
Prospect Research Social Media Management
Data Visualization
Grant Proposal Writing
Database Development
Typical Services Offered by Information Professionals

As business owners, most IIPs offer clients their expertise in research, information, knowledge management and related disciplines. Those IIPs who've transitioned from employment to independent business bring their work experience to client projects.

Some IIPs operate within a niche specialization, such as patent searching, while others offer more general services across a variety of subjects and industries. As technology and society evolve, so do client needs, and IIPs evolve along with them.

Business models vary too. Some businesses provide repeat services to a core group of steady clients who want deliverables such as market reports or statistics. Others offer one-time services and may focus on solving a problem or providing a strategic plan that helps the client for years to come.

AIIP has analyzed the wide variety of services offered by IIPs and members of the association and categorized these services into five communities of practice:

1. **Information Management and Technology**

These IIPs provide information managers, knowledge management consultants, information architects, taxonomy specialists, project managers, and library consultants. For more examples, see [here](#).

2. **Marketing and Communications**

Marketing IIPs are experts in helping clients craft content to better market their businesses, providing services in social media, marketing campaign planning, collateral development, web design, surveys and [more](#).
3 Research

Researchers offer both primary and secondary research services. The range of research projects is as diverse as the expertise each business owner brings to their clients. Their work spans researching companies and their competitors, markets, people, products, chemicals and patents. Here are just a few examples.

4 Training and Consulting

IIPs may also offer training and consulting services, helping clients better understand and implement information strategies to grow their businesses competitively. Some examples of specific services in this broad community of practice are expanded here.

5 Writing and Editing

IIPs with skill and talent in communication offer many services from ideation to creation, editing and publishing, technical writing and web content. See here for more details.
Are you a Service Provider, Contractor or Consultant?

You might be each of these at different points in your information business career, but not at the same time. You may choose not to seek out or accept contracts that put you into one or more of these roles. However, it is important to be aware of the differences. It can help you position your business and your service offerings most effectively. It can also help in how you respond to potential clients. So what are the differences?

**Service Provider**

Service providers offer specific services on a regular or one-time basis to address a client's gaps in capability or resources. They have a skill or knowledge the client cannot currently provide but is essential to their business. This is the way most IIPs work. There are many variables in how this work may present itself, and you can negotiate your fees as a project or a retainer. Examples include:

- Providing a one-time service such as writing a training manual or creating a request for proposal (RFP) document for the client
- Offering ongoing services such as delivering competitive-landscape reports

A professional proposal would include a description of the client's need, the solutions you can offer, your relevant skills and examples of how you have delivered similar projects effectively for previous clients.

**Contractor**

An independent contractor provides services to a company on a contracted or temporary basis and is not an employee. Contractors are often engaged when a company has a resourcing issue, a large project, needs to cover maternity or paternity leave or wants to save on the benefits and overhead of hiring an employee. Companies may require long hours and want you to work on-site at their office.

The work may be repetitive, for instance, uploading data into a new database. Still, contracting offers job security for the duration of the contract and allows you to take as much time off between contracts as you wish without the restrictions of limited paid time off.

Contracting can be profitable, and it's often a way to start a relationship with a client, potentially leading to other longer-term projects.
Consultant

Consultants provide knowledge, guidance, and ideas on how to solve a particular issue, develop a new service or manage a specific project.

When responding to a client's request as a consultant, you need to include at least the following in your proposal:

- A high-level framework of the problem(s) they are trying to solve
- A solution that adopts a project management approach
- A description of roles and responsibilities of key stakeholders
- A timeline with decisions points
- Expected outcomes and positive improvements

#AIIP Top Tips
Think Like a Business Person

“You have to think like a business person and not just focus on the client project.”

“You work is valuable and you must charge accordingly.”

“Being a business owner is about subcontracting, project management, finances, value, accounting, client development, cash flow, pricing and marketing. You need to remember that you have experience and expertise that are valuable. You will work on projects that bring tremendous value to your clients and you should not underestimate or undersell yourself.”
Paths to Success

According to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 21.7 percent of startup businesses fail their first year of operation. Less than 50 percent survive through year five and only a third of businesses make it 10 years.

The U.S. Small Business Administration defines a small business as one with fewer than 500 employees. IIPs are often one-person businesses or at most under 10 employees, which is defined as a “micro-business.” But no matter if you’re working solo or have a few employees, the challenges are similar. Below are factors to consider as you decide to start and build your information business.

Qualities of Effective Business Owners

There are several personal characteristics that successful IIP owners are likely to have or find worth cultivating:

- Curiosity
- Persistence
- Self-motivation
- Initiative
- Creativity
- Determination
- Open minded
- Problem solver

Some Questions to ask Yourself

As you think about whether you’re cut out to be an IIP, it’s helpful to look candidly at where you are in your professional and personal life. Ask yourself:

- Do you have a financial cushion to carry you through periods of little or no work?
- Do you have a support group to help when you’re feeling discouraged?
- Do you know of other people who have successfully gone independent?
- Do you know of other IIPs you can talk with to find out how they did it?
- Do you feel good as you picture yourself in this new role?
Is there a market for what you want to do and the services you want to provide?

Are you willing to adjust your ideas to fit what you learn about potential clients?

Are you willing to carefully listen to what clients want rather than simply knowing what they need (i.e., are you inclined to “think with” the client rather than for them)?

Are you willing to learn new tech solutions where appropriate?

**Paths to Independent Business Ownership**

AllIPers have come to business ownership from a variety of backgrounds. There's no right way and certainly no single way. Below is a selection of real-life paths our members have taken:

- **Full-time job** — developing a business during their personal time
- **Just graduated** — developing business while doing part-time work
- **Laid off** — going independent based on contacts developed at work
- **Laid off** — finally deciding to do what you've dreamt of doing
- **Work part-time** — developing business during off-times

Having resources and people to lean on as you embark on your journey is not only comforting, it’s the fastest way to success. Many AllIP members have walked this path before you and understand the doubts and fears that sometimes accompany starting and owning an information business. For those times when you need more than a friendly conversation, the organization has a wealth of recorded webinars, virtual events and a Peer-to-Peer Support mentoring program.

**AIIP Blog Article:**
- [From Big Business to Solopreneur: A Success Story](#)
Planning for Business Success

How to Turn Your Business Idea into a Marketable Product

Creating a successful business involves a combination of factors. Your market’s appetite and willingness to pay are crucial to business success.

Here are a few questions to help determine if your business idea is viable:

- Given your skills, background, experience, and specialized knowledge, what challenges can you help potential clients address? In other words, what are their pain points and how can you help resolve them?
- Have you researched your market to confirm enough prospective clients are willing to pay the fees you want for the work you’re offering?
- What benefits and economic value will you promise to your clients? Marketers call this a value proposition.
- Do you have the credibility — experience, expertise, track record and qualifications — to attract clients and persuade them to hire you? Take a moment and try completing this sentence “Clients will trust in my ability to deliver the results they need because…”

Having a marketable product is a key component of business success, but it’s not the only factor to consider as you work on your business offering. The work of Simon Sinek shows that having a strong WHY for what you do is magnetic to your clients and a key factor for business success. Look at Simon’s Ted Talk and read his bestselling book Start with Why to find out more about the importance of discovering your business’ why and how it translates into inspirational leadership.

“People don’t buy WHAT you do, they buy WHY you do it. And what you do simply proves what you believe.” Simon Sinek.
Once you've decided there is a viable market for your business, AIIP suggests you reach out to other IIPs with similar offerings and interview them about how they operate, obtain clients and the pitfalls to avoid. Most AIIP members are friendly and very willing to answer questions.

If you’d like more formal assistance, AIIP’s Peer-to-Peer Support program offers a range of mentoring and accountability options to help you navigate business ownership. You can find out about this and other benefits on our website.

#AIIP Top Tips

You Need to Know Your Target Market

“Be able to define your niche very specifically and make sure you love working with those types of clients. It makes marketing far more effective.”

“It’s difficult to market to potential clients when you can’t pinpoint what you do and what results you achieve. You won’t see true success by trying to serve everyone. This is a challenging concept for many new IIPs, especially those who may come from a library or information-centered background that served a varied audience and helped with many different types of research. It sounds counterintuitive to tell you to ignore some projects or potential clients and to avoid offering a vast range of services, but it is good advice.”

“When prospects look at your marketing materials, it should be crystal clear that you are in business to help them with specific activities and solutions. However, if your website talks about everything from botanists to pharmaceutical companies, a potential client will assume that you are unfocused and make assumptions about your expertise level.”
“Be completely clear that the market you want to serve wants, needs and will pay for your services!”

“You need to define your potential clients and know they are willing and able to pay for what you offer. The target market and ideal client you identify when starting your business will likely not stay the same through your years as an IIP. But you have to start somewhere. Who is your ideal client? Who is in the niche you have in mind? Who has the need and budget for the services you want to offer? Who is already paying for services like yours and knows the value of working with an information professional?”
Once you have a clear idea of what products and services you will offer and who you will sell to, it's time to find your first client.

At AIIP, most of us agree that tapping into your existing network is the easiest and most productive way to build your initial book of business. Start by contacting past employers, coworkers, friends and family to let them know you've opened a business and are looking for clients. Include some brief details about the products and services you are offering.

Networking to obtain referrals is a favorite technique among AIIP members. So, whether you decide to do it in person, via social media or via phone calls, learning to network is an invaluable skill that generates results for new and established businesses.

A Word About Mindset

Many business owners find selling uncomfortable and feel hurt when they get rejected. Selling becomes more palatable if you let go of any negative thoughts about being salesy and instead concentrate on the idea that you are using your talent and expertise to help a potential client solve a burning problem or achieve a goal that they can't accomplish without you.

As for rejection, remember that it rarely has anything to do with you, and not everyone you speak with needs or wants what you are offering. And even those that see value in what you are selling may not be in a position to buy. From budget issues to time to other projects that the company is working on, there are hundreds of reasons why a company decides not to invest now.

AIIP Blog Articles:
- Help at Hand for Finding Clients
- The Power of B2B Referrals
- Showing, Not Telling, What You Do
- Getting to Yes
- How to Find Clients: My Strangest Referral Stories
- Engineering Your Networking Experiences
Is a Business Plan Necessary?

A business plan details your goals and how you plan to achieve them. Putting one together forces you to think about the viability of your business at a variety of levels, from products and financing to marketing and sales strategy. You will need a business plan if you want business funding.

A sales and marketing plan turns your marketing strategy into tactical actions and provides a roadmap for reaching your target audience. That plan includes goals, tactics and a budget. Allan Dib's book, The 1-Page Marketing Plan offers excellent guidance on this topic.

Opinions differ. Some successful IIPs never create these documents; others find writing them helps them think through details and uncover matters they need to research.

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**Small Business Development Centers (SBDC)**

These centers make up a network of offices around the U.S. that provide business owners with free consultations with management experts. They are terrific resources for advice and guidance. SBDCs are U.S. Small Business Administration partners.
Fees & Pricing Models

How should you charge for your services, and according to what model? For example, is it better to quote an hourly fee or should you set a fixed price based on estimated effort?

Here are some standard pricing methods:

- A fixed project fee, payable on submission of deliverable or for defined deliverables with surcharges for additional/subsequent work
- A daily or hourly rate billed at agreed intervals or upon completion
- A not-to-exceed budget with an opportunity to authorize more work

General Guidelines for Setting Your Fees

We recommend setting competitive rates your prospects will find appropriate. That said, you can reward good clients with preferential fees or offer an advantageous fee for larger amounts of work. (For example, if the fee for one day is X, the price for 10 days contracted upfront could be eight times X.)

Some IIPs indicate they are less concerned with maintaining a consistent daily rate than earning a certain income. “If they know they will make X, it does not matter whether the work takes 10, 11 or 12 days.”

Quoting Large Projects

In the case of assignments that are difficult to estimate, you can quote for a discovery phase to define the scope before negotiating your fees for the entire project. Using a discovery phase can also help you determine if the project is a good fit for your skills or if you should refer it to another information professional.

Setting your price below the industry norm not only sends an inappropriate message about the value of your work but also does the entire profession a great disservice.
**Value Pricing**

This is a helpful concept for IIPs. With value pricing the client pays for the value obtained regardless of how long it takes to deliver the results.

An often-quoted analogy is the factory owner who calls in an engineer to fix an expensive piece of equipment. When the engineer lands a swift kick and restarts the machine, he quotes his fee as a million dollars. The factory owner is shocked and objects that the service took a few seconds. The engineer responds: “Ten dollars for delivering the kick; the rest for knowing where.”

Some IIPs who've used this pricing tactic say that they initially felt uncomfortable with value pricing because they feared sticker shock on the part of the client. However, after pricing this way for a while, they gained confidence because this method rewards their expertise.

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**AIIP Blog Articles**

- [How to Give Yourself a Raise](#)
- [Having Difficult Conversations with Clients](#)
- [Using a Kill Fee Clause](#)

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**How Much Revenue do You Need to Generate?**

Your business needs to generate enough revenue to support your lifestyle. Knowing how much you need is particularly important during the early months and years before you are fully established.

To work out how much revenue your business needs to generate, add the following numbers together:

- **What do you need to earn to support yourself?** Examples include rent, groceries, insurance, medical costs and vacation time.
- **What is it going to cost to run your business?** Include fixed and variable costs and create a budget for everything you need. For example, don’t forget to
include professional fees for lawyers and bookkeepers as well as expenses for insurance, equipment, training, conferences, business travel, client entertainment, subscriptions, tools, publications and anything else you’ll need to pay for to run your company and serve your clients.

### Calculating Your Fees

To work out your minimum rate, divide your required revenue by the number of days you intend to work.

Even though there are 290 working days per year, as a business owner, you need to allocate some non-fee-paying time for marketing and selling, networking, proposal writing, visiting clients, professional development and running your business. Depending on your business, you may need to allocate 30 to 50 percent to overhead — activities you can’t charge your clients for.

### Revenue and Fee Calculation Worksheet

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ESTIMATED ANNUAL REVENUE REQUIRED</th>
<th>Sample Data</th>
<th>Your Data</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Estimated income needed</td>
<td>$50,000</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Business running costs</td>
<td>$25,000</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minimum revenue you need to generate</td>
<td>$75,000</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>FEE CALCULATOR</th>
<th>Sample Data</th>
<th>Your Data</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Estimated annual revenue</td>
<td>$75,000</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Billable days (290 workdays less 50% non-billable days)</td>
<td>145 billable days</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Estimated daily rate ($75K divided by 145)</td>
<td>$517.24</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
#AIIP Top Tip
Make Sure your Finances can Survive the Ups and Downs

“It’s OK to begin your business part time while a full-time job supports you. Test the waters and be prepared to give up your evenings and weekends.”

“I knew but didn’t appreciate how much non-billable time goes with every project and between projects.”

#AIIP Top Tip
Take Advantage of Opportunities for Development, Networking and Support

“There is a solid community of IIPs out there — you’re not alone. No matter your niche and your type of business, you do not have to do it in isolation. There are books, courses, and of course, AIIP.”

“Partner with others to extend your reach. Share liberally. Be generous with your knowledge.”
Creating Your Business

Visit the AIIP blog for a wealth of business advice and tips. You may find the Business 101 category especially helpful as your business is beginning to take off.
Basics of Planning Your Business

Which Business Structure is Best for You?

Small businesses can choose from a variety of business structures. The forms of company vary from country to country, so you need to check in your country what options are available and the tax implications for each. Each type of business has its pros and cons, so we encourage you to speak with an accountant or attorney to determine what is best for you.

In the U.S. the four main types are:

**Sole Proprietorship**

You are a single owner. Your revenue is treated as personal income for tax purposes.

**Partnership**

You own this type of business with one or more partners. Revenue is treated as personal income, although each partner must prepare their own tax returns.

**Limited Liability Company**

The two key benefits of this business structure are that it protects the business owner’s personal assets and requires pass-through taxation.

**Corporation**

This complex entity is separate from its owner and run by a board of directors and shareholders and the business pays corporate tax. You are considered an employee and taxed accordingly.
**Business Name**

Common options for creating a business name include:

- Your family name followed by information, research, consulting or associates
- A descriptive name based on a subject area
- An evocative name such as Info2Go

Different countries have specific regulations regarding company names, make sure you are aware of any national and/or local regulations pertaining to choosing your company name.

Once you’ve chosen a name, check that it is not already in use by looking it up on an internet domain registry such as Network Solutions or GoDaddy or domain tools such as CheckDomain or the WhoIs registry to ensure your intended domain name is available.

**Business Tax**

In most countries, you will need to register your new business with the government and obtain a business identification number and a tax account. In the U.S., for example, an Employer Identification Number (EIN) is issued to eligible businesses by the Internal Revenue Service.

Similarly, there are guidelines for the types of expenses you can deduct when calculating your taxable income and whether you have to include sales tax on your invoices. Check your state or local government for rules or ask your accountant.

**Insurance**

As a business owner, you may need to purchase a variety of insurance.

**Health Insurance**

You will likely need to purchase health insurance unless you have a spouse or partner who can put you on their employee health policy.
**General Business Liability Insurance**

This is often required if you lease office space. If you have a home office, check your home insurance policy to find out if you are covered.

**Errors & Omissions (E&O) Insurance**

E&O policies cover lawsuits filed by clients who claim you failed to find information you should have turned up or claim your advice caused damage or loss. This type of policy is purchased by research business owners who work in legal, scientific, patent, trademark and other fields where the ramifications of missing information or providing misleading information or advice can be costly and serious. AIIP members with a private investigator’s license tend to have E&O insurance.

A client may insist on E&O coverage for a specific project. However, they may be willing to strike the requirement from boilerplate contract language if you make a convincing case that there is little risk in the engagement.

**Pensions and Retirement Accounts**

This is probably more applicable outside of the U.S. In some countries, depending on the type of company you have formed you may be obliged to set up pension scheme for yourself (if your business structure requires you to hire yourself as an employee) and any people you employ and pay over a certain amount per annum.

**Where to Set Up Your Office**

Many IIPs work from home. Typically, in the U.S., the rental cost of the home office — the proportion of your home’s operating costs as calculated by square footage — is a deductible business expense. This is true in other countries too, check with your local tax authority.
Administrative and Office Functions

Your professional work is underpinned by administrative functions such as record keeping, accounting, invoicing, bill paying, banking, planning, scheduling, ensuring supplies are on hand, managing computer systems and more. Your procedures will evolve as you discover the best way to keep track of your work and handle the routine operational aspects of the business.

One option worth considering is farming out office-related activities to a specialized professional — a Virtual Assistant (VA). A VA provides remote office services giving you more time to focus on your business and your clients. The Virtual Assistant Networking Association (VANA) is just one of many websites and directories where you can find these professionals.

Subscriptions to Information Resources

Subscriptions to online information services are a significant consideration for research-focused businesses.

The AIIP Industry Relations Committee negotiates group discounts and other benefits for members. Benefits may include waiver of upfront or annual/monthly charges, free or low-cost training and documentation, and access to vendor products and services by AIIP members at advantageous terms.

Learn about AIIP Partners & Affiliates
Branding, Advertising & Marketing

“Initially, I should have spent the majority of my time learning how to market myself and my services, creating a plan, implementing it and adjusting it as needed.”
Branding & Advertising

Your public exposure to clients and prospects is not the place to be frugal. Hiring a graphic designer, website developer and marketing professional is an investment likely to pay off immediately and over the long haul.

Must-have elements include:

**Visual Identity Materials**

Logos, cards, stationery, and other visual identity materials make you look professional and help to distinguish your business from others in the market.

**Website URL and Email Address**

An email address such as researcher@yahoo.com looks amateurish. Instead, purchase a domain name, also called a URL, based on your business name and use that domain name for your website and email address. You can work with a professional website developer and designer to create your website or build it yourself using a website template on a platform like Wix, Squarespace or WordPress.com.

Your website's content should reflect your expertise as well as explain why prospective clients should consider hiring you. It is common for IIP websites to have blogs, articles, white papers and similar materials to demonstrate their knowledge.

Case studies showing how your services helped clients solve problems or achieve advantages are an excellent way to shed light on your expertise. Testimonials from happy clients similarly send a message that will reassure prospects how they, too, may benefit.

**Marketing is Time Intensive**

Many IIPs do their own marketing either because they don't have the funds to hire an expert or want to do it themselves. Others realize that while marketing is essential to their success, it isn't their core skill. For these IIPs, hiring an expert or virtual assistant with marketing skills to take on this vital part of the business is a wise move. Either way, you are going to have to spend time on your marketing.
Marketing & Selling

Marketing Methods

There is no such thing as one-size-fits-all when it comes to marketing. The tactics you choose depend on your business goals, resources, skills and more. The list below represents the tactics AIIPers have found most effective to promote the products and services they offer with the people most likely to buy.

Volunteering in Relevant Organizations

Once you've found a niche, joining a professional organization devoted to your prospect's field is invaluable. If you can find a volunteer opportunity within the organization, that's even better because it allows prospects to get to know who you are, what you do and how you can be of service.

Teaching

As with volunteering in relevant organizations, the idea with teaching is to show prospective clients that you know what you're doing. Presenting workshops and webinars is a good way to demonstrate your expertise and, at the same time, convince attendees that it may be better to hire you than to attempt specific tasks themselves. Many IIPs say they find the atmosphere of a workshop or presentation more comfortable than an overt sales call and that they reach more people than through a sales call.

Cold Outreach

Generally, people find cold outreach, whether via calls, email, or social media, challenging and most information professionals choose to reach out to their targets in other ways.

Warm Outreach

Warm calling is much easier than cold calling. It involves reaching out to people you know because they've been referred to you or you've met them at a network event, online or in some other manner. It is an excellent way to keep in touch with former clients to remind them of what you do and how you helped them in the past. Generally, it is best to call, email or reach out via a social platform with some helpful information or a current news story that may be of interest and let the conversation proceed from there.
**Newsletters and Blogs**

Newsletters and blogs can be wonderful ways to put yourself in a prospective client's field of vision. The one difficulty with newsletters and blogs is that they are not directed at individuals, so they cannot be tailored to an individual prospect's needs. If you work in a particular field where people have similar questions and challenges, you can create content that interests the group.

**Conferences**

Attending the annual AIIP Conference is a great way to meet potential subcontractors and/or become known to those who might hire you as a subcontractor. Conferences provide the opportunity to meet others who work in your field and there is great benefit in sharing experience and knowledge with people whose concerns are similar to yours. Introverts comment that they find conferences a spectacularly helpful means of showcasing their expertise without finding it overwhelming.

In addition, attending conferences that are for your target market of potential clients is a productive way to meet prospects face-to-face and learn about their challenges. Speaking at such events is even better because it lets you demonstrate your value to a relevant audience.

**In-person Networking**

Networking is a tried-and-true means of growing an information business because of the crucial role of word-of-mouth recommendations. Networking can mean attending local professional association meetings for your niche group or attending local information or independent professional meetings. It can also mean telling everyone in your social circles what you do. You never know whose spouse's cousin's neighbor's daughter may need your services in the future.

**Social Media Networking**

Social media is a powerful tool; most IIPs benefit from a robust social media presence. Identify your prospects' social networks and build your presence where they are most likely to see you. Most AIIP members use LinkedIn but you may also want to use other networks such as Facebook and Instagram.

**Leveraging Your Website for Credibility**

While AIIP members should have a website, relatively few clients surf the web, hit an information professional's site and hire them. Your website is a platform to reinforce visibility, back up your claims of expertise and show prospects you are a professional.
AIIP Top Tip
You Need to Know Marketing

“Don't underestimate how much time it takes to market your business.”

IIPs wish they knew more about and spent more time on marketing their business, especially at the start, and it is where they spend the most time today in their businesses. That's right, more than the research or project work. They deal with marketing plans, consistency, credibility, visibility, networking, client development, niche or specialty development, target markets, follow-up, writing, speaking, email and presentations.

You may think doing good work for clients will be enough, but it's not. When starting your information-based business, prepare to spend 25 to 50 percent or more time on marketing-related activities.

Marketing is the engine that drives a business and brings in clients, keeps happy clients coming back and has them talking about you and your company to their network of colleagues who also need your expertise. You must create a plan, execute it and then be consistent about your marketing efforts.
If you’ve gotten this far and are hungry for more information and resources, we encourage you to check out the information on the AIIP Blog. If you decide to become a member, you’ll have access to even more materials, from webinars and virtual events to our Peer-to-Peer mentoring program.

In addition, AIIP members have found the books below especially helpful; we recommend them to anyone starting or running a business.

- *Together: The Healing Power of Human Connection in a Sometimes Lonely World*  
  Vivek H Murthy

- *Good to Great: Why Some Companies Make the Leap...and Others Don’t*  
  Jim Collins

- *Everything Is Figureoutable*  
  Marie Forleo

- *Building a StoryBrand: Clarify Your Message So Customers Will Listen*  
  Donald Miller

- *Talking to Strangers: What We Should Know About the People We Don’t Know*  
  Malcolm Gladwell

  Steve Blank and Bob Dorf

- *Management Basics for Information Professionals*  
  G. Edward Evans, Stacey Greenwell

- *Practical Data Science for Information Professionals*  
  David C. Stuart
Information Broker's Handbook
Sue Rugge, Alfred Glossbrenner

Building & Running a Successful Research Business
Mary Ellen Bates

The Reluctant Entrepreneur: Making a Living Doing What You Love
Mary Ellen Bates

Start with Why: How Great Leaders Inspire Everyone to Take Action
Simon Sinek

The 1-Page Marketing Plan
Allan Dib
Conclusion

We hope you've found a lot of useful information and advice in this short guide, and that you are on your way to setting up a successful information-centric business.

Starting your own business is absorbing but it can be a little intimidating. From selecting and pricing your services to marketing to managing your accounts, there are a lot of decisions to make, new skills to learn and a great deal to think about.

AIIP exists to help you navigate these and other challenges and opportunities as you learn about business ownership. Explore our website to learn more about AIIP membership's benefits.

We offer a variety of membership options, so even if you are not quite ready to launch your business there is an option for you.

Join AIIP Now

We look forward to welcoming you to our association soon.