



# Finding Your Niche:

## The Key to Starting a Successful Forestry Consulting Business

**S** **STARTING AND RUNNING YOUR OWN CONSULTING** business may be a profitable venture under the right circumstances especially if you have the expertise and skills in a particular industry or area of business. However, if you want to start your own consulting company, be sure to research the necessary considerations and requirements before launching your business.

### Identifying & Honing Your Expertise

Forestry is just one of the many industries where companies are outsourcing for services and expertise that may no longer be available from their own staff. They are bringing in consultants to help fill in the gaps.

So the first step to becoming a consultant is to assess your strengths and areas of expertise, to define your unique selling proposition and market niche. You may have extensive experience in a particular field or received special training and education. Try to emphasize your expertise in terms of your accreditations, qualifications, past projects and client testimonials. This can help you differentiate your services from the competition.

Meet Craig Kennedy, RFT, a forestry consultant with the Tl'etinqox-T'in Government Office (TGO), Anahim Band. He started his consulting business in 2008, with the support from Community Futures of Cariboo Chilcotin, immediately after being laid off from a forest industry job. He wanted to get into a business area that was untapped.

"In my previous job it became evident to me that the SAFE Companies Program administered through the Forest Safety Council was proving to be difficult for some companies to achieve. These companies were supportive of the initiative but were so busy running their business, they needed a little extra help as the industry was tightening up on safety requirements and making it mandatory for companies to be SAFE certified. Using my past experience and knowledge of the safety program process, I focused my consultancy business on forestry and safety. Safety being an area no one else was involved in at the time," says Kennedy.

Kennedy's ingenuity of finding a new market niche and honing his consulting services based on forestry and safety secured

him a contract at the TGO managing their forestry and resources and he continues to remain busy with over sixty regular clients.

### Marketing Your Services

Once you have defined your unique selling proposition, it is time to spread the word about your consulting services. As an independent consultant, you will mostly rely on word of mouth and referrals to market your services and generate new business. These are also the most effective and least expensive marketing tools available. This constant process of self-marketing is largely based on your up-to-date credentials and expertise as well as relationship management. So ensure you do your best work to keep your clients happy because they will be your best marketers.

"Ninety percent of my business growth is the result of word of mouth advertising," says Kennedy. He also took advantage of working at the TGO to develop solid relationships with government agencies, licensees and the public to procure future contract opportunities for that community.



Photo: Courtesy of Craig Kennedy

Craig Kennedy, forestry consultant (blue hardhat) and King Campbell of Ducks Unlimited. Craig found his consulting niche in helping companies become SAFE certified.

### Prospecting and Bidding for Contracts

A large part of being an independent consultant is prospecting for work and going through the procurement process. This usually involves a bidding process in which the bidders quote their prices and the buyer accepts the most suitable bid based on the project's requirements.

Knowing how the bidding process works is essential to winning contracts. The BC Bid website, [www.bcbid.gov.bc.ca](http://www.bcbid.gov.bc.ca), offers a proponent guide on how to respond to BC government request for proposals and lists current BC government tenders. As for the MERX website, [www.merx.com](http://www.merx.com), it has a comprehensive electronic tendering service where you can find Canadian public, private and US tenders.

### Developing a Pricing Strategy

Develop a pricing and estimating process for the work you intend to perform. Most clients want a fixed lump sum price for the work they

want done. So make sure you fully understand all your direct labor, materials and equipment costs, your overhead costs and your profit expectations for the work you quote.

Kennedy says he keeps his pricing consistent with the going rate of the Registered Forest Technologists in his business area.

### Getting Support

Bridget Field of Small Business BC recommends, "As your consulting business grows, be prepared to budget for a good accountant who can determine the best tax structure for you and help maximize your business tax deductions. Also, consider hiring administrative support to help you with routine office work so you can focus your time on developing your business."

What advice would Kennedy give aspiring consultants? "Network with people in similar consulting fields as this can lead to new business opportunities. I find that successful business owners are willing to share tips of

the trade. Also, start your business by doing a business plan. A solid business plan will give you confidence to move forward with your ideas and there are resources out there to help you," he says. Small Business BC offers advisory services and a listing of seminars to help you write and prepare your business plan for implementation at [www.smallbusinessbc.ca](http://www.smallbusinessbc.ca)

Operating your own consulting business allows you to get paid for your knowledge and expertise while offering you the freedom and flexibility to choose your working hours that suit your lifestyle. With the proper business planning, the willingness to stay current in your field, network and the desire to succeed, your consulting business will reap benefits. 🌱

*Candice Macalino is the communications manager at Small Business BC. Small Business BC provides advisory services, education and community to help BC entrepreneurs succeed in all stages of business. For more information, visit [www.smallbusinessbc.ca](http://www.smallbusinessbc.ca)*