

Large Professional Services Company: Article Placement in *Harvard Business Review*

When a consultant in a fast-growing practice of a major consulting firm set out to publish an article in *Harvard Business Review*, he found it more difficult than he anticipated. In fact, he discovered that the actual prose writing was really only a small part of the effort. The real challenge, he eventually realized, was in developing the content that would form the basis of the article and structuring it in a way that told a compelling story that was supported by data and real-life examples. Working with Alterra Group, the consultant was able to produce an in-depth case study that was accepted by the journal and ultimately generated millions of dollars in consulting business after its publication.

A partner in a large professional services company—and head of one of the company's fastest-growing practice areas—was keen to publish an article in the *Harvard Business Review*, which is known as much for its leading-edge coverage of business and management issues as for its rigorous editorial standards and high article rejection rate. The consultant knew that getting a piece in the esteemed *HBR* would generate significant awareness of his expertise and insights among a large group of highly influential executives—and, consequently, would help boost interest in his consulting practice.

Recognizing he needed editorial assistance to pull the article together, the consultant hired a number of different ghostwriters to help him “put pen to paper.” However, over the course of many months, none of the drafts these capable writers produced met the consultant's expectations.

The consultant expressed his frustration to a marketing professional within his company. She believed that Alterra Group would be able to help the consultant realize his goal of publishing in *HBR*, and she introduced us to him.

After reviewing the drafts produced by the previous writers, we identified the reasons the writers struggled. The problem wasn't that the consultant lacked good ideas or that

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the topic wasn't of interest to the publication. The real issue was two-fold:

> The consultant had precious little “spare time” away from client projects in which he could work on the article, so weeks often passed with no progress made. And, because the writers he had hired lacked experience with and knowledge of the prospective article's topic and were completely reliant on the consultant for material, they couldn't keep the project moving during the times the consultant was too busy to attend to the article.

> Even though he didn't realize it, the consultant was using the ghostwriters to develop the content. While the ghostwriters were indeed talented at translating ideas into readable prose, they did not have the research, logic and argument-building skills that are vital to developing compelling content, which must happen before any prose creation can begin.

Working with the consultant for several months, we helped him completely restructure the article so it flowed more logically and presented his insights in a more compelling manner. Key to this restructuring was a detailed

outline that enabled the consultant to vividly see where his concept was fully fleshed out and where the content needed to be developed further. With the outline in hand, we then conducted in-depth case study research and comprehensive secondary research to bolster his argument and fill in the content gaps. Only after the outline was completed and approved by the consultant did we write the prose draft of the piece that we sent to *HBR*. Working with the *HBR* editorial team, we refined the draft into a polished finished article that appeared in a subsequent issue of the journal.

The consultant reports that the article has been a major generator of business for his consulting firm—in fact, it opened doors that led to \$5 million in new consulting business in just 18 months, and it continues to generate interest from prospective clients several years after publication. ▲



Alterra Group helps professional services organizations raise awareness of and create demand for their services among key target audiences. We do this via three principal services: developing unique points of view, articulating those points of view in a variety of publications, and building powerful marketing campaigns around the content in those publications to get points of view in the hands of current and prospective clients. We have applied our approach to thought leadership marketing in a diverse group of professional services firms, including leading global outsourcing and systems integration companies, influential trade associations, midsize consulting and strategic advisory firms, boutique consultancies, and independent consultants and authors.

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