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It's All About the Relationship: Andrew Sobel on Becoming a Visible ExpertSM

At Hinge we have been studying [Visible ExpertsSM](#), people who have attained high visibility and expertise in their industry, creating a personal brand that is recognizable industry-wide. We study them because we want to understand how they attained that status and what we can learn from them. This profile focuses on Andrew Sobel, a Visible Expert for business consulting.

Visible Expert [Andrew Sobel](#) is a world-renowned business consultant, speaker, and author who has carved out a niche for himself in the business world by helping executives learn to become trusted advisors and build long-lasting relationships with their clients. For Andrew, the focus of his business mirrors his own philosophy, and he lives and breathes what he teaches. Very simply: “It’s all about building a trusted relationship with your client that enables you to add more value than anyone else.”

On His Own

Andrew developed his special niche after leaving a prestigious, 15-year career in international consulting at Gemini Consulting to start his own practice. “I had noticed this pattern where many consultants work for themselves for a few years and then they go back to working for a big firm,” Andrew says. “When you are at a firm, you can ride on the firm’s brand. When you’re working for yourself, you quickly need to establish a brand of your own.”

“My first two clients when I left Gemini were CEOs. As I worked with each of them on project after project, I realized that they didn’t have to request the budget for my work, they didn’t need to convince other executives that I was a good resource and, because they trusted me, they were very open about their real concerns and challenges. And over time, the breadth of my work with them naturally broadened into new areas. I began to develop the idea that an expert per se is a commodity, whereas an expert in a trusted relationship—a client advisor—is indispensable. If you focus



on the relationship, you can create a client for life.”

When he dug a little deeper, Andrew saw two distinct consultant roles—the ‘Expert for Hire’ vs. the ‘Trusted Client Advisor.’ “I wanted to know: what did those advisors do differently and how could more people learn to make themselves indispensable?”

The Book that Changed Everything

This question formed the basis of Andrew’s first book, *Clients for Life*. Co-authored with marketing professor Jagdish Sheth and published in 2000, the book taught professionals how to make the shift from being an expendable commodity to creating a trusted, value-added partnership with clients. From research based on a series of interviews with CEOs, Andrew discerned seven core attributes that executives needed to make that shift.

The book was the first of its kind, and it launched Andrew into the limelight. “Since then, there have been many books written on high-level B2B relationships,” Andrew says, “but *Clients for Life* was the ‘First Mover.’” The book became a bestseller and was translated into multiple languages.

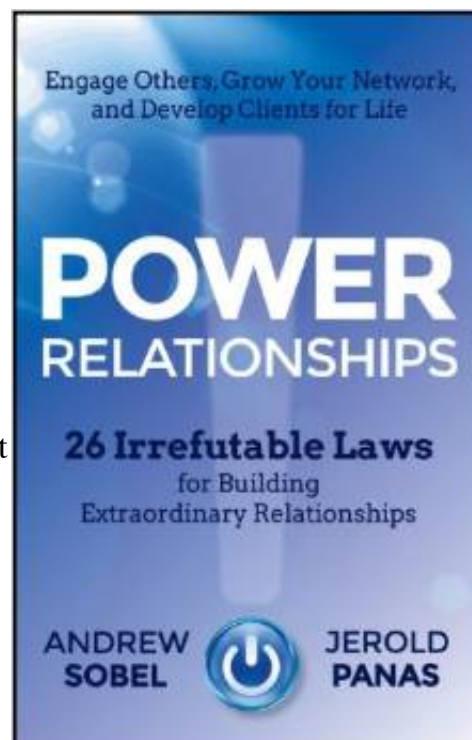
Writing the book also helped Andrew focus his brand. “The book made it very clear. My value proposition after that became: *I help companies and individuals build clients for life.*”

360-Degree Content Marketing

Everything Andrew has done since then has added to his “flywheel,” creating more momentum around his underlying idea of how to build long-lasting client relationships. To keep that flywheel moving, Andrew has created “a body of work with 360 degrees around me, and going out on different channels.” He has written seven more books, including his latest, *Power Relationships*, on different aspects of building great client relationships. Andrew also blogs, uses social media, creates YouTube videos, and is well known on the public speaking circuit. “Even if people love you, if you’re not on their radar screen, they forget about you,” he notes, “so you need to keep getting your name in front of people.”

In 2001, a year after *Clients for Life* was published, Andrew took advice from mentor and fellow consultant and author, [Alan Weiss](#), and started a newsletter. “At first I told Alan, *who will want to read this?* But I gave it a shot, wrote down my best ideas, and sent it to 100 people.” Today, the newsletter comes out 12 times a year and has become a critical part of Andrew’s content marketing strategy, reaching a five-figure proprietary subscriber list and hundreds of thousands more when it gets reprinted by the [RAIN Group](#) and other publications.

Andrew is constantly thinking of new ways to reach more people, on more channels. For his last two books, for instance, he and his publicist tried a new strategy. Instead of focusing exclusively on the big news outlets for interviews—an effort that often produces low ROI—they started a campaign of multiple, high-quality press releases about the book. “Each press release is an incisive thought piece, where I am interviewed on a specific topic,” Andrew says, “and we pushed them out twice a month to my publicist’s list of over 5,000 journalists and media platforms.”



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The effort did generate several interviews from big-name channels, including the *Wall Street Journal*. Even more importantly, though, the press releases began to get reprinted by smaller journals and organizations, saturating the web with information about his new book. “We got hundreds of websites publishing about us because of these value-added press releases,” Andrew explains. “Both large, like Forbes, and small. So it’s all free online press, linking back to my website and book.”

Always Add Value

Andrew’s specialization has allowed him to differentiate himself, but he is careful always to be adding new value to his core theme of client relationships. “I think clients feel my content is original and fresh, and that’s by design: I’m always asking, *is this idea different or better? Or is it the same thing everyone else is saying?*”

To help him keep this balance, Andrew follows what he calls *The Beatles Philosophy of Business*. “The Beatles sold more records than anyone else by constantly evolving their musical style—they never stayed stagnant. They continually expanded their reach until they eventually had a global audience. But they never got too far away from their roots—even with experimentation and a huge diversity of songs, they always kept the same great harmonies, driving beat, and interesting lyrics that made them a brand. And so they never lost their original fan base.” It is this delicate dance between staying true to your value proposition, while always finding unique and new ideas to add to that value proposition, that has allowed Andrew to become a global superstar in his own right.

Check out [The Visible Expert](#) book to learn about our latest research on the benefits that industry stars bring to their firms and how to become or develop one.

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