



select
statistical services

Setting up a Statistical Consultancy

May 20th 2013

Steve Brooks

Background

- 12 years as academic ending up as professor of stats at Cambridge
- Left to join statistical research organisation specialising in sports modelling – challenging but commercially sensitive
- Decided to set up consultancy – cherry picking the best bits of the academic and commercial world
- Aim to match projects to people - to make it easier for statisticians to find challenging and profitable projects and for clients to access the expertise they need

Select Statistics

- Formed in March 2011. Started trading January 2012. Fully operational from September 2012
- Offices in Exeter – state-of-the-art facilities and shared support staff (IT, reception, marketing, finance, HR, cleaning and catering)
- Two full time consultants and a full-time operations manager – likely to expand over the Summer
- Network of freelancers (about 12 active and another 20 passive) – self-employed or casual workers some work via referral scheme
- Interns and work placements – statisticians and IT specialists

Systems and Processes

- Created bespoke project and customer management system to manage projects, clients and timetables
- Developed website functionality to handle newsletters, e-shots, enquiries etc.
- Created bespoke software to automate routine tasks e.g., cutting-and-pasting results from R to Word – reduces client's costs
- KPI's automatically generated from web site and project management system

Preparation

- Lots of academic collaborative experience
- Set up web site and social media sites
- Focus on SEO so that we're easily found online
- Printed business cards and had stationery designed
- Re-connected with academic contacts – referral scheme
- Contacted other stats consultants – referral scheme & network
- Started pulling together freelance network – training workshop
- Started networking locally – clients and partners
- Sought out partners with complementary skills e.g., database experts, graphic designers and php/java coders

Nature of the Work

- Clients – hugely varied. Mainly national rather than local
- Projects very different , ranging from (a very few) t-tests and ANOVA projects to much larger and technical research-level projects
- Strong relationship/trust-building component
- Often provide common-sense and commercial advice as well as statistical expertise
- Negotiating prices and managing expectations
- Database skills often required– Access, SQL
- Clients sometimes keen on visualisations and/or bespoke code that they can plug into their systems

Issues

- Fees and the value of IP
- Chasing payments and asking for deposits
- Project Creep
- Handling data – personal information (ICO) and huge datasets
- Negotiating contracts
- Managing the sales funnel whilst delivering to clients
- Flow of work – peaks and troughs

Future Plans

- Grow the network – supporting the freelancers and making more work available
- Develop the franchise framework to help consultants set themselves up
- Expand the in-house consulting team
- Move away from fixed-fees where possible
- Move towards retained services and longer-term income streams (e.g., licences and joint ventures) rather than one-off projects
- Continue to focus on delivering value to clients