

CAREER CHECK UP – time for your annual exam

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Our lives and careers change and evolve, often in ways we neither planned nor imagined. Without a regular re-assessment of our business goals and strategies, what was once a thriving and rewarding profession can become both disheartening and laborious with an insufficient return on our investment of time and resources.

What is your motivation?

Is garden communication your secondary career, the primary income or just a “for fun” pastime? Has that changed recently? Can you afford to accept a few lower paying writing assignments because you like the editor or will that take up time that might be better spent designing a landscape/offering a consultation or doing something else more lucrative? Our motivation will drive the decisions we take as garden communicators – and will need to be re-evaluated on a regular basis.

In my homeland, the UK, all vehicles have to have an annual checkup called an MOT test (Ministry of Transport) to be deemed safe and road worthy. This isn't just an emissions test. It covers brakes, lights, steering, seat belts and structural integrity. In other words an assessment is made as to whether the vehicle is fit to continue on as it is or if changes need to be made.

Take the time to give your career an annual **MOT** by considering **M**oney, your **O**nline presence and **T**raining opportunities.

Monetary Considerations

- Review your speakers fee scale; research what similar speakers charge in your field/geographical area, re-evaluate your costs (travel, printing, supplies).
- Update your speakers one sheet with new talks, photos and color scheme.
- Update your Great Garden Speakers listing.
- Send out presentation proposals to events and shows. Research! Keep a contact spreadsheet.
- Consider negotiating a higher rate with companies for whom you have a good track record e.g. Houzz
- Update your speakers contract boilerplate (book sales, cancellation fees etc)

Online Presence

- Website/blog – does it need updating for function, style or content. This is your hub. (Do your current business cards/postcards/other marketing materials visually tie in to your current theme and style?)
- What do you want your website and/or blog to do *this* year? Drive book sales? Design business? Workshop sign ups? How have you adapted the content or layout to achieve that?
- Are your events, bio, portfolio and publications pages up to date?
- If a prospective publisher or event organizer visited your website *today* would they discover the real ‘you’? Was your most recent blog post well written? Is your events page out of date?

- Analyze the stats on your blog – do you need to adjust post frequency/days/times of day/length of posts/layout? Which were your most popular posts? Why?
- How are people finding your website? Do you need to re-think your cross advertising and/or sign up links? Be sure to Pin (to Pinterest) from your blog or website rather than just upload images from your photo library to drive traffic. Brand your images.
- Create a social media calendar to use your time efficiently – plan what and when to post. Consider keeping a log to see how much time you are on SM per week – and then ask what financial or other return you are expecting from those hours.
- Houzz – request reviews for your recent projects, upload new projects, clean up your profile, update keywords, add new photos.
- FB, Linked In, Pinterest, Instagram, Twitter etc – check that your profiles are all up to date.
- Newsletter – do you need to start/continue one? Analyze statistics, especially click-through rates. Adapt your content as needed but be sure to provide more free, valued information than blatant invitations to buy your products or services.

Training

- What skills would give you more confidence, boost your sales and/or enable you to pitch better stories?
- How and where can you learn?
- What will be your learning goal this year?

Challenge

Set aside a specific day or week each year to do your career **MOT**. Choose a date you will remember such as your work anniversary, April Fool's Day or a reliably 'slow' period on your calendar. Set it up as a recurring appointment on your online calendar, stock up on treats and don't be distracted!

Resources

Great Garden Speakers website - <http://www.greatgardenspeakers.com/>

National Garden Club lists - <http://www.gardenclub.org/clubs/state-garden-clubs.aspx>

Article on the top email apps - <https://zapier.com/learn/email-marketing/best-email-newsletter-software/> (I use Constant Contact but there may be a better option for you)

One sheet tips - <http://www.newincite.com/one-sheets/14-dos-and-donts-of-marketing-one-sheets/>

You are welcome to download my one sheet for review - http://www.lejardinetdesigns.com/wp-content/uploads/2012/03/2016-Karen-Chapman_In-State-One-Sheet.pdf