by Charles Rubin

Information is the coin of the realm in cyberspace. Publishing a document online gives you credibility as an information source while extending your visibility across many weeks or months. Radio personalities like Rush Limbaugh and Howard Stern know that radio, like a newsgroup discussion, is an ephemeral medium. What they say today is forgotten in a few days. Their hour in the radio sunshine is short, and when they go off the air, many people forget them. Stern, Limbaugh, and others have created more visibility for themselves by publishing books, so their pictures, names, and ideas are visible in bookstores and on newsstands 24 hours a day. You can do the same thing on the Net, and you don't have to write a whole book to do it. Here are some ideas:

-   Prepare a short Q? document that deals with questions your customers   commonly ask.

-   Compile a directory of useful information sites, search engines,   or other resources on the Net, or even of phone numbers and addresses   for key contacts your customers might need.
-   Publish a series of tips such as buying tips or money-saving tips.
-   Write a short article that showcases some aspect of your expertise,   or excerpt from and update part of an article you wrote months   or years ago.

With your first document ready, publish it in your own website or FTP directory, in your storefront, or in the appropriate libraries on forums in which you participate. After you publish the document, post an announcement about it along with an excerpt from it so people get a sense of what it has to offer. If you publish in a forum, post an announcement in the discussion group related to that forum library. If you publish in your storefront or FTP directory, announce the location of this free information in any newsgroup or forum related to the subject. If you're on AOL, you can even take out a free classified ad that contains a portion of the document and tells people where to get the rest. In addition, make the document available via e-mail (manually or with a mailbot) for those who want to receive it that way.

After you've written one document, it's easy to create more by expanding on the first one. For example, each of the common questions you answered in your Q? document can be turned into a short article. Each of your tips can be expanded into a longer article. A group of articles can become a handbook. You can also recycle what you've written by targeting a slightly different audience. If you did an article about your exercise program, for example, tailor the text so it suits participants in different sports (many of which have their own newsgroups and

forums). This will allow you to   publish it in several forum libraries and announce the publication in several forums or newsgroups, further magnifying your visibility.

As you publish each document in each location, maintain a log   that spells out the document title, where you put it (with a specific   pathname if it's in a library that's deeply nested inside a forum),   and when you published it. This way, you'll know exactly where   to find the document again if it needs to be updated. Forum libraries   and FTP sites are filled with documents that are months or years   old; do your readers a favor by keeping your publications current.