After the euphoria of passing the CFE exam has passed, new CFEs often face the sobering reality of how to generate new business or even start their own business using their newly-acquired knowledge and skills. Or, if you’ve changed careers or are just starting out, you may have run into the “must have experience” requirement— even with entry-level jobs. How do you navigate through these obstacles?

Clifton B. Bell, CFE, a Financial Research Specialist at Georgia State University and frequent contributor to the ACFE Employment Discussion Forum, and Ralph Q. Summerford, CFE, CPA, ABV, CIRA and founder of Forensic/Strategic Solutions, offer the following practical suggestions for establishing yourself as an anti-fraud expert, increasing your client base and overcoming the experience requirement:

**Determine the demand in your area**
Demand exists for anti-fraud professionals in everything from small city governments, medical practices (including doctors, dentists and veterinarians), retail stores, and daycares to non-profit organizations, to name just a few. How do you pinpoint the organizations? Bell recommends setting up a Google alert using keywords such as embezzlement, anti-money laundering, and fraud scams in local businesses. “There are many examples of fraud occurring in businesses that will help you identify a potential need that can be met by a CFE. Compile a list and then promote your knowledge and skills to those organizations,” suggests Bell.

**Location, location, location**
Summerford started his firm in 1992 with just one employee—himself. “I worked from my home for the first six months and then bit the bullet and leased an office in the downtown [Birmingham] area right in the middle of the attorney firms I wanted to work with,” he said. “I set up a daily routine of calling and visiting with potential clients.”

**Communicate and sell the need for a CFE**
The *Report to the Nations on Occupational Fraud and Abuse* finds that the typical organization loses 5% of its annual revenue to fraud. And that’s just an average. Companies such as Enron and WorldCom exemplify the disastrous effects fraud can have on companies and illustrate the importance of fraud prevention and deterrence programs. Promote and communicate your skills and knowledge by offering fraud risk assessments that target a variety of business entities. Use the ACFE’s Fraud Risk Assessment Tool (available only to members) as your template or use it as a starting point to design your own tool.

And don’t forget to distribute the CFE Promotional Brochure to your clients, prospects, co-workers and management. Available on the ACFE website, this professionally designed pamphlet highlights the unique skills and abilities of a CFE as well as the qualifications needed to earn and maintain the credential.
Targeted visibility builds credibility
In addition to calling on potential clients, Summerford also began speaking at local professional meetings and wrote for area publications, eventually building a solid client base and expanding the business. “The combination of these activities in my marketing plan worked. Later I tried advertising but found it was very expensive, hard to do effectively, and it didn’t work.” Like Summerford, you will find that some techniques work and some don’t. Be willing to take chances and formulate a strategy that works best for you and highlights how hiring you will benefit the organization and, ultimately, impact the bottom line.

Get around the experience requirement: volunteer your time and skills
Many organizations require a minimum number of years of fraud-related experience, even for entry level positions. As a new CFE, this limitation can be the most formidable roadblock on your career path. How do you get experience when it seems that every position requires you to already have experience?

“If you work for a firm that has an Internal Audit department, offer to volunteer some time with them, since they deal with fraud and forensic accounting every day,” suggests Bell. “If your firm doesn’t have an Internal Audit department, find out who your company uses for internal audits and ask that company if they would like some free help. In today’s economy, most companies would jump at the chance for a qualified volunteer. Then making the sale to your company will be a bit easier. ”

Bell also recommends talking to private investigators (PIs) and businesses that outsource investigations in your area, since they have the inside track into private security firms that provide all types of investigation services to private companies. “They (PIs) may also be willing to let you assist them in some investigations and as a CFE, you may be able to offer yourself as an expert that a PI may need to gain more business!” Bell suggests using ‘private sector security industry’ as the keyword when conducting your search for private investigations firms.

Bell also suggests researching other organizations to see if they have a Security Unit or Asset Protection team. “Let them know you are interested in what they do and are willing to provide your knowledge and skills at no cost.”

“The very nature of fraud investigation deals with catching crooks and criminals, although in most private companies the end goal is not putting someone in jail; it’s recovery, prevention, and protecting assets. So you will need to know how to interrogate and interview suspects and also know how to conduct investigations from start to finish,” advises Bell. “The bottom line is that it may take some free work on your part to gain some experience in fraud investigations.”

Get creative with your strategy
While the credential is an integral part of your professional success, as a newly-minted CFE, you’ll most likely need to do some legwork to promote yourself. Networking, both face-to-face at meetings or seminars and via social media, will provide opportunities to forge ties with prospective clients and establish your credibility. Seek creative ways to market yourself, such as speaking at professional meetings of like-minded individuals, writing articles, offering fraud risk assessments and offering your fraud-related services for free to firms who you’ve determined (by your Google searches) would welcome your expertise. If possible, find a mentor who will offer guidance and suggestions on how to become established in the anti-fraud profession.

The ACFE is committed to supporting you in your professional growth and career advancement with resources, tools, information and people to help you along the way. Visit ACFE.com for more information.