

10 Tips for Business Development

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You want your company to grow. The phone had been ringing off the hook, but you took yourself off the marketing hook and the now the jingles have stopped. It's time to do business development! Here are 10 tips to tackle the job of getting into your marketplace and getting the work you want.

1. *Work with marketing professionals.* If you're serious about being in business, you have to work with professionals who know how to do what you don't. Have them create a look and brand for you, develop your Web site and marketing materials, etc. You have to look the part to be in the game, even if you're a solo practitioner. You don't want business cards with serrated edges that you created on your computer. Budget for it and let someone make you look good.

2. *Make business development a regular part of what you and your staff do.*

Have an all-day meeting to kick off the process.

Invite those who will be involved in your marketing efforts, including admins (you don't always need to include them, but you do at the beginning).

Work through the items that follow in this article.

Always ask: What's working? What's not working? How can we better utilize our strengths?

Leave with a plan and assigned accountabilities (make sure you don't take home the entire to-do list!)

Set the next meeting and the agenda before you adjourn.

3. *Keep your marketing professional involved in your business development.* You'll get ideas, strategies, plans, and slogans. The marketing person can take on some of the tasks, and because you're paying for it, you'll stay more accountable to get the marketing job done.

Bring your marketing/public relations person to your meetings.

Create, with the pro, a marketing plan with strategies, plans, timetables and accountabilities.

4. *Determine your marketing persona.* What's the most effective way for you to get business? Do you develop relationships and become best friends with potential clients, and that produces assignments? Does direct mail or Internet marketing get results for you? Do you make presentations at professional conferences that secures customers? Do you get government contracts by being on preferred vendor lists? Each requires a different approach to marketing. Know yours, assess it, and regularly take your *persona* out there.

How well is that working for us?
What should we do more of?
What should we do less of?
Is it time for something completely different?

5. *How do we keep the clients we have?* Current clients are your “fish in the barrel.” It’s easier to catch them in that tiny space than to set out on the high seas hoping for a big leaping marlin.

Make a list of your clients.
What are we doing for them now?
What do we do well? How could we improve?
What new products or services can we offer that tie them closer to us?
Are there other people in the company who have worked with and like us, who might be approached for business?
What can/should we do to further cement our relationships?
Who’s on the marketing team, and what results do we expect from them?

6. *Research your current marketplace.* Find out what your customers want so you can plug in to their needs.

Why do existing clients continue to use us?
What’s important to them?
Take somebody to lunch:
 We’re developing a marketing plan.
 What do we do well? How can we improve?
 What are your upcoming needs?
 Did you know we also do “X”?
 How might you be using us in the coming year?
 Can you refer me to others?
Follow up with a thank-you letter, enclosing a book you or someone else has written (sayings, business advice, how to hire great people, etc.)

7. *Decide what companies you want to go after.* If you’ve established a direction and goals (and you need to do that first), you know where you shine in particular industries or professions. Who’s in your marketing sights?

Make a list of organizations you want to contact (it becomes your potential client list).
Research the companies and their needs: Who are they hiring? Do we have an expertise or a special process they would value? What are their issues? (turnover, for example, and how we can reduce it). What do we have that makes their job easier?
What’s the best way to contact them? Who should do it?
Who’s the decision-maker to be contacted?

What's the approach?

Phone call.

Letter introducing us, tell you about our services.

Referral (get one when you can).

Packet (brochures, testimonials, articles you've written).

8. *Research your competition.* You have to know how you compare to others in your marketing sphere who offer similar products and services. How do you look in the marketplace by comparison with your competition?

What does the competition do?

How are they different from us?

How do they do it better?

How do we want to be out there, in contrast to them?

Get their marketing materials.

Visit their web sites.

How do we stack up?

Do we look professional?

Do we have the right brochures? leave-behinds? press kits?

What do we do better?

What do we do alike?

How can we pull ahead?

9. *Decide what will give you "marketplace gravitas."* Consultant Alan Weiss talks about developing "consultant gravitas." His point is that marketing goes beyond "smiling and dialing" for new customers, that you have a greater "attractor factor" if you are out there with a larger presence. You decide what will give you the platform and the edge you want, but here are a few from Alan:

Do great work and add value to your client (obvious, but not to be overlooked).

Keep in touch with clients (mail items of interest to them, for example).

Request referrals and testimonials.

Develop relationships.

Have a presence on the Internet.

Have sharp marketing materials, including a press kit.

Write and publish articles.

Give speeches.

Publish books.

Teach at a university.

Take workshops where potential clients or "referrers" will be.

List your company in directories and trade publications.

Exhibit at trade shows.

Do pro bono work.

Be active in your community.

Continue to learn so you continue to add value.

You may think of others. It's better to pick a few with the potential to make a great impact than to attempt them all (which could mean you won't do any).

10. *Do business development today and every day.* It has to be on the daily to-do list of you and your key staffers. You just have to call, write, have on the radar, go the extra mile, ask for business — whatever you do — all the time. Include, when you can, others in the company. It's helpful when all have a marketing mentality.

What will you do today to grow your business?

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