Setting up a system for business development – Part 1

Business development is a continuous process. Most professionals who also deliver work have trouble fitting business development into their day. Having an easy-to-use system makes it more likely that business development will happen even when you get busy.

A system can be very simple. One consultant was famous in the pre-cell phone days for using waiting time in airports to systematically contact clients and prospects; he never wasted those minutes and built a huge practice. Another consultant set aside time to call his warm contacts (former clients and former colleagues) every two months, and was both extremely successful and beloved by his clients and by dozens of people he mentored.

Your system needs to help you effectively and efficiently execute this vital work, even when you get busy. Your system can be manual (or on spreadsheets) but nowadays it makes sense to use a CRM system or at least a contact management system. Your system needs to be set up, fed and then run. This month's tips will look at setting up your system and making the time for business development and next month's will look at feeding and running the system.

Setting it up

For business development, the system you set up should:

- Track your contacts including what you are doing with them and what is happening with them. When you interact with a client or prospect, you note it in your system. This discipline is tough to stick with when you are a solo operator; there's an immense desire to keep the details in your head but doing so will limit either the volume of contacts you can handle or the quality of your relationships, or both. It's also good if you can tie information from Google alerts or other similar information sources to the contact's information.
- Allow you to segment your contacts, by, for example, stage of relationship. This lets you track your activities and your progress by segment and also to plan activities and campaigns by segment.
- Let you schedule and automate some activities easily. Suppose you want to contact by phone a segment of people quarterly. It would be great if the system would put those calls on your to-do list in the right week.
- Let you react to events as they happen. You can always pick up the phone or send an email to someone and then your system should adjust the timing of planned future events.
- Provide you information easily on your progress and on the tasks ahead of you.

Tools you can use are suggested by this table:

Tools to support business development

	Tool			
Goal	Any contact management tool, e.g., Outlook, ACT!,	CRM tool	Contact management or CRM tool that allows "custom" or "user-created" fields	Contact management or CRM tool with easy workflow engine and custom fields (e..g., Ivinex)
Track your contacts	✓	✓	✓	✓
Segment your contacts			✓	✓
Schedule activities with contacts	✓	✓	✓	✓
Automatically schedule activities for you/ let you react to events as they occur and adjust your plans				✓
Track performance		✓	✓	✓

Making the time

The critical first move in using the system is scheduling your time for your business development activities.

- *How much time do you want to invest in starting new relationships?* If it's three hours per month, then figure out how you will spend it next month and schedule it. If you have commitments that use the time already, e.g., you are giving a speech, then you are finished. If you don't, then decide the best way to use the time you have, and block it in. One great approach is to find a colleague who also wants to commit and agree that at a certain time you'll stop answering phones and doing other work and just devote yourselves for a scheduled hour or two to starting new relationships.

  Here's a wonderful example. A professional who moved to a new city wanted to build his contact list. He made three lists of targets: his A list, his B list, and his C list. He asked his assistant to try to make breakfast or lunch appointments with A-listers (senior corporate executives in this case). He told his assistant that if she didn't have something set up for a particular slot with an A-lister two weeks ahead of the date, then she should try for a B-list person. If she didn't have anything from the B-list confirmed three days before a lunch or breakfast slot, then she should try for C-list people. He started out going out with a lot of C-list folks, but they were willing to introduce him to B-listers; plus he learned a lot about what was going on and became a source of information and insight who people wanted to meet with. Pretty soon he had lots of A-list appointments.

- *How much time do you want to invest in maintaining relationships*? You need to schedule when you will be doing it. Maybe set aside two mornings a month. Then have your system generate the list of calls you need to make to keep people on the right cycle. You'll also soon discover that you need some more time-efficient ways to stay in touch with people to mix in with calling them; should you be doing a little newsletter or emailing people?

- *How much time do you want to invest in winning specific pieces of work from people you've met?* Most professionals don't need to worry about this - they amazingly find the time to respond to opportunities, even ones that they probably shouldn't respond to!! One place to look for time to do other business development tasks is time you spend on proposals that are not appropriate or that you are very unlikely to win.

In part 2 next month we'll look at how to feed and operate your system and use it to measure results.

Something to try this week

Start both short-term and long-term activities.

- Decide how much time you want to devote to business development, block that time out, and do business development at the scheduled time. Your commitment is the only tool required.
- Start to use tools you already have, like your contact management tool.
- Begin to investigate some tools you might use to set up a more thorough system for yourself. Can you use the tools you have in new ways (e.g., use Outlook better, take advantage of what your firm offers)? If you need to get something new, it may take a while to find the right solution for you, so start now.

What are these tips?

These monthly tips help professionals create more business and enjoy their work more. We focus on how to start relationships, how to build relationships, and how to convert those relationships into sales.