



# Strategies for Starting Relationships

Successful business development begins with starting relationships. Future clients need to know you before they work with you. How can you make this happen?

There are three fundamental strategies for starting relationships:

1. **Attract people to you.** You become a magnet that lures the right people to you. You do this by becoming known as an expert or a major player in your niche. As you attract people, you obtain their contact information, so you can proactively maintain the relationship.
2. **Reach out to people.** You find people who might be interested in knowing you and what you do by calling them, by contacting them via direct mail or email offers, or by going to meetings and events where you can encounter them.
3. **Work with others to help potential clients find you or help you find them.** You develop a network of formal or informal allies who look out for opportunities for you while you look out for opportunities for them. You get many more “eyes and ears” to uncover opportunities or connections that might be good for you. Asking clients for referrals is also part of this approach.

Strategies for Starting Relationships		
Attract people	Reach out to people	Work with others to find people or have them find you
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Speaking</li> <li>• Writing</li> <li>• Public relations</li> <li>• Website</li> <li>• Blogging</li> <li>• Social networking</li> <li>• Sharing media that show your expertise</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Cold call</li> <li>• Direct mail</li> <li>• Meetings and conferences</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Network of allies</li> <li>• Formal strategic alliances</li> </ul>

No person (or even organization) can effectively pursue all of these strategies. Some are more appropriate than others for your situation. Each takes time and sustained effort to yield fruit – and “starting relationships” is not the only task you have in a business development approach. Your goal should be to figure out which few strategies you will consistently pursue.

## Attract people to you

You can attract people who might be looking for someone like you by making yourself visible and attractive to them. Increasingly prospective clients do their own research – usually online – to find potential service providers. Getting people in your target market to be interested in you requires high quality content that both attracts and impresses them.

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Strategies for attracting people include:

## Writing

Writing a book or a few articles makes your work visible. A noteworthy book can attract people. Most books don't last long as magnets (although they do build credibility with people you meet in other ways). Tens of thousands of business books are published annually, so it's hard to stand out for long. Articles disappear very quickly, although a column in a trade magazine can keep you in the public eye. When you write, the next move is up to the reader --- you probably don't know who they are or who was amazed by your work unless they contact you.

## Speaking

Making speeches allows a more personal touch. People will approach you after your speech to ask questions or talk. They'll offer their cards. At some events the organizers can provide you with a full list of attendees.

## Public relations

PR also gets your name out into the world. When you've become a reliable expert source for a journalist on an issue they cover, they'll use you. If you are successful with this strategy, you can be quoted many times in articles that your target audience might read.

## Your website

Internet-based approaches have long lives and are findable via searches. Websites serve many functions, but they only help start relationships if the site actually attracts people. You can grow your site's magnetic power through search engine optimization, keyword ad campaigns, and by having outstanding content. You only find out visitors' names, though, if you ask. This is typically done by offering some benefit in exchange for their name, such as signing up for an e-publication.

## Blogging

You might also attract people by starting a blog on a subject you are passionate about. Blog readers interested in the topic will eventually find you. Or, more easily and requiring less discipline, you might begin to attract people by commenting on other people's blogs; just be sure to leave a trail (back to your blog, website, or email) so people who are impressed can easily find

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you.

## Social networking

Online social networks can attract people. With a decent-sized LinkedIn network and a carefully crafted LinkedIn profile page, people looking for people like you will find you. You can also answer other people's questions on LinkedIn, which raises your visibility and can attract people to your profile page.

## Sharing media that demonstrates your expertise

You can share media that demonstrate your expertise or your passion. Videos on subjects you are expert on can introduce you to others on YouTube or other video sharing sites. For slide presentations, you can use [www.slideshare.net](http://www.slideshare.net). It includes many searchable business presentations and is well-visited and growing rapidly. Bloggers you know can help spread the word by embedding your material in their blogs. You can also make a series of podcasts and post them on iTunes where they can be found by people looking for information.

## Reach out to people

When you have identified your target market, you may be able to directly contact people in it. You can contact them via mail, email or phone.

### Email marketing

Initially contacting people via email marketing is challenging because of the huge volume of emails that most people receive and the fact that unsolicited email is viewed by some recipients as "spam," regardless of the quality. However, a high quality email or high quality email campaign (of several emails to the same person building on the previous ones and referring to the next ones) can be an effective way of reaching people. The emails need to be personalized, well-researched and targeted, and be a prelude to an attempt to schedule a phone call where you can more fully explore the person's situation and begin to get to know them.

### Send a letter

A thoughtful, well-researched, well-targeted and well-written letter can also be effective in reaching out to someone. Most people you might like to meet with rarely receive thoughtful letters nowadays and consequently your communication may well

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stand out (especially as compared to the myriad of emails they get). As with email marketing, this letter will normally be a prelude to an attempt to schedule an introductory meeting.

## **Direct mail marketing**

Direct mail has fallen in popularity because it is more expensive than email. However, well-crafted direct mail efforts continue to be effective at motivating potential clients to respond.

## **Cold calling**

Cold calling to sell is hard. Cold calling to start relationships can be much easier. You will start a relationship with each person you call, even the ones you never talk with. The best frame of mind for cold calling is to think, “There are so many great people out there whom I could help, and this is an opportunity for me to start to get to know some of them.”

Plan a campaign of three phone calls; make all three over a period of a few weeks, and be ready to leave voicemails. For each call (and for each voicemail) use a script that highlights your interest in them, provides some value to the recipient (or an offer of some value), and encourages them to call you back. Communicate that you want a relationship even if there’s nothing they need from you right now.

In the first two voicemails, state what you do for clients like them and ask to talk briefly to understand their situation (with respect to the underlying issues that you typically address) and to see if you might be able to be helpful to them. In the third voicemail tell them you are going to stop calling, with a phrase like “If I don’t hear from you, I’ll assume that you are happy with how you are addressing the kind of issues I deal with and with the people who are handling them for you, and I won’t call back for some time (e.g., six months).” You’ll be surprised at how many people actually will call you back at this point – because they are interested but figured you’d just keep calling.

Be prepared for when you actually get the person. It sometimes happens – they pick up their phone and they want to talk. So you need to be ready to throw away your voicemail script and begin your conversation.

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## Work with others to find people or have them find you

In a network of allies, each member looks out for opportunities for the other members, as well as for him/herself. So when a network member talks to a contact or a prospective client or meets someone new, that network member listens for needs that any of his/her allies might meet. If, for example, you are an attorney, and you speak with a contact who has a public relations need (rather than a legal need), you can refer them to a public relations ally. "I know someone who I believe works in that arena and might be able to help you," you say, "could I have him call you to see if he can help?" If you have 30-50 people in your network of professional allies, you will rarely encounter someone for whom you cannot deliver value through a referral of some kind.

When you refer a contact to an ally, you directly benefit by demonstrating your ability and willingness to add value, at no cost to the contact. This builds your credibility. When an ally refers a contact to you, you benefit hugely by being favorably introduced to someone who appears to need, right now, what you know and do.

### Success depends on having the right people in your network

The right allies for your network will:

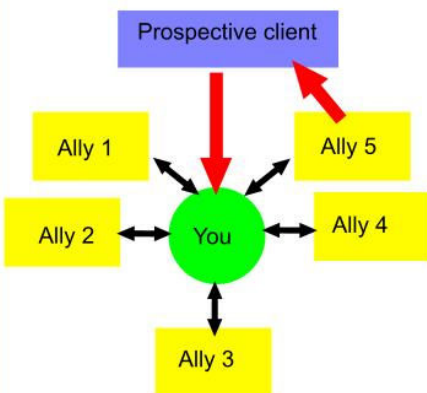
- Be in the right places for you – they'll be people who, because of their own work, will naturally be in contact with people who might need your services
- Have the right approach – they'll be people who will refer you because they want to *give* (to their contacts) and *share* (with their allies)
- Want help from you or people you know (since the relationship needs to be mutual over time)

People in the right places include:

- People who sell to the same people you would like to sell to (e.g., other professionals who sell to the same industry)
- Customers of your potential clients (since a referral from a customer is almost always heeded)

People with the right approach include (but are not limited to):

### Working with a network of allies



You communicate with and regularly help allies

An Ally (#5) encounters person with need you might be able to meet

Ally refers prospective client to you (or you to prospective client)

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- People you know who can help you/or want to help you
- People with lots of allies already!!

## Challenges of maintaining and benefiting from your network

Keeping a network vibrant requires concentrated effort. To cultivate your allies, you'll talk with them in regular phone contacts and/or meetings offering:

- News of developments in the industries you share, at your clients, and at their clients
- Leads
- Suggestions about potential employees
- Advice
- A connection to someone else in your network
- Anything else that might be helpful to them

For your network to pay off:

- You need to tell your allies what you do – so they can recognize an opportunity for you when one is there
- You need to tell people what you want – you have to ask people for recommendations and contacts
- You have to help people – so think about what of value you can provide members of a network; you may be able to provide leads, but also may have other information or insight that might be valuable to them
- Your allies need to tell you what they do – so you can look out for them
- You must identify if potential allies seem interested in helping you – you may have to make the first move, but you ought to get some reciprocation over time or else reconsider them as allies.
- You must stay in touch with your allies – they are a key link for you to your marketplace, and you must keep them engaged with

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you.

Having a strong network of professional allies can be very rewarding financially. It also fits well for professionals who don't like feeling they are "selling themselves" all the time; instead, they can focus on listening to their prospects and helping them find a good solution (which often will involve an ally and will sometimes involves themselves).

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