

# A/E Rainmaker

## The Guide to Attracting and Keeping Great Clients

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## MISS MANNERS HAS IT GOING ON....

### DOS AND DONT'S OF CLIENT INTERACTION FOR OUR TECHNICAL PROFESSIONALS

By Anne Scarlett

So many business development professionals work at firms that have an array of folks 'touching' clients. Construction firms have superintendents and their teams at the job site. Project and program management firms have a manager sharing space within the clients' offices. Water/wastewater firms send engineers on-location. All of these people have different backgrounds, different education levels, and different filters through which they use to communicate. It never hurts for these representatives of your brand to review the basics in terms of how to best interact in a way that leaves a positive impression with the client contact. Mastering these basics will ultimately enable your staff to grow business with your existing clients. When discussing this topic with your entire staff, first acknowledge the bigger picture, and then move on to the basics.

### First, begin with the end in mind.

This mantra, coined by Stephan Covey, holds true during client interaction; be clear on your goals and expected outcomes before you engage with the client.

- ◆ **Set realistic expectations starting with your initial written proposal; reinforce those expectations at the project kick-off.** Where are the boundaries in terms of accessibility, information exchange, and work ethic? How does the client see the relationship evolving over time?
- ◆ **Give clients a pleasant, memorable experience in each meeting.** Always consider their perspectives first, remembering that everyone is tuned into channel WIFM, a.k.a. What's in it for Me?
- ◆ **Be an active listener.** A tip-top priority in all prospect and client interaction, active listening involves head nodding and other facial/body responsiveness, rephrasing content to ensure understanding, confirming agreement or addressing disparities, and never interrupting.
- ◆ **Build and sustain trust.** Remember, your clients buy (and approve decisions) with emotion, yet they justify with reasoning and rationale. Make sure to give them solid, proven reasons to be responsive/approving of your work. Further, let them experience — first hand — your expertise through your actions, your solutions, and your ability to listen and thoughtfully respond.
- ◆ **Be objective and diplomatic.** In the bigger picture, you have to take the high road; finger-pointing and blaming will ultimately leave the client questioning your loyalty to them.
- ◆ **Finally, ask: what's my desired outcome of this meeting?** Even if it's just an informal client interaction, make sure to pre-plan your objectives; agenda/talking points; even possible action steps.

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## MISS MANNERS HAS IT GOING ON....

### DOS AND DON'TS OF CLIENT INTERACTION FOR OUR TECHNICAL PROFESSIONALS

(CONT. FROM PAGE 1)

#### It all starts before you even arrive. What to do in advance:

- ◆ **On the day prior, confirm the meeting if necessary.** As a side note, always communicate with each individual the way s/he prefers (e-mail, through assistant, by phone, or by mail).
- ◆ **Prepare content and format for a meeting that will bring you to your desired outcomes.** Even if it's the most casual of interactions, take just 5-10 minutes to organize. Bring all documents that you might need to reference or distribute.
- ◆ **Pre-select a couple ice-breakers,** especially topical news about the industry, U.S., or the world.
- ◆ **Be well-groomed; make yourself easy on the eyes!** Match your attire to their level of dressiness or higher. Take care to have properly-fitting, pressed and clean clothes; shined (or at least clean) shoes. Make sure to have clean hands/nails, and boast a clean-shaven face with fresh breath too!
- ◆ **Leave enough time so that you will always arrive ten minutes early.** Allow 'cushion' for traffic, walking time (building to building), etc. Arriving early, incidentally, allows you the chance to build casual, offline rapport with attendees before the meeting begins.
- ◆ **Project a confident demeanor.** To relax, take time to monitor and slow your breathing. To raise your enthusiasm for the interaction, do some self-cheerleading by envisioning a successful outcome.

#### Once you arrive...

- ◆ **It's all about respect, all the time.** Be friendly, conversational, and professional with the receptionist and administrative staff. They'll be watching to see how you treat others, so you must be tolerant of all types. When greeting folks with a handshake, keep it firm, solid, with about two-three pumps for either gender. Say their name as you take their hand. For added warmth and connection with those that you know well, gently touch their forearm.
- ◆ **Take care to handle any conflict in private, directly with the source.** Further, don't gossip anywhere. Imagine having a personal microphone on you at all times, even in casual places like the lunchroom, elevator, restroom, or lobby.
- ◆ **Be sociable and 'easy' with everyone.** Continue to self-monitor, even if you are onsite at the client's facility every day.
- ◆ **Keep names straight.** When new people come to the meeting, try to get their cards, then arrange them (spatially) so that they match their seating position (or draw a quick little chart on your notepad showing where folks are sitting around the table)

When it comes to ongoing client interaction, sometimes we just need to get back to the basics...because in the end, it's all quite straightforward isn't it? A happy client is a paying client. And those are the clients we want for a lifetime.

#### A LAUNDRY LIST OF WHAT NOT TO DO (IMMEDIATE TURN-OFFS):

- Slouch
- Cross arms or in any way look defensive/defiant, superior, or conceited
- Look down or avoid eye contact (when thinking, always look upward)
- Look bored or distracted squirm in your seat
- Rock back and forth
- Nervous movement
- Swinging or jiggling legs
- Rotating foot
- Scratch your head
- Bite your nails
- Bite your lips
- Keep hands in pockets
- Stand rigidly
- Self-touch (picking off invisible lint, etc)
- Chew gum
- Click your pen
- Twist your hair
- Swear (or at least, not any more often than your client)
- Revert to poor English (when you clearly know how to speak properly)
- Scowl
- Furrow brow

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## GOT TRAINING?, PART 6

# “REGISTRAR MENTALITY”... IS THIS REQUIREMENT AN INHIBITOR?

By Joanne G. Linowes

When running an in-house training center, university, or continuing education program, it is easy for a firm to feel it is doing a commendable job in professional development by defining success in a traditional way.

Offering a wide range of courses to meet departmental needs and scheduling trainings to maximize billable hours will suit the firm's goals. Managing time slots, documenting employee course-completion data, monitoring performance and skill acquisition are the “registrar” functions of an in-house training director. These functions are the vital tracking and record-keeping aspects of a successful training program. They support the key operation – that of conducting needs assessments to identify courses to offer, securing instructors, putting together a “course catalogue,” filling the seats, and evaluating.

This required operational protocol is what makes a training center or in-house university *go!* Standards for excellence are established and each firm determines its own level of success. This is today's model and it is based on traditional adult continuing education programs and the need to coordinate like a registrar.

Is that all there is? Not exactly. Going forward, in-house training centers and universities can

serve a broader function. Removing the “registrar mentality” allows expanded thinking about how to best provide professionals and staff with learning experiences that contribute to growth on many levels.

The configuration for forward-looking continuing education initiatives would be to serve as an umbrella – overarching and coordinating all the possible activities that would fall into the category of *building quality people to deliver the best work and client service* within your firm's corporate culture. Such learning activities can include obvious opportunities like attending outside courses at local colleges and professional organizations, and can also embrace the creative — such as moving the classroom into the field, bringing in renown specialty speakers, shadowing seasoned colleagues, providing presentation opportunities, designing experiential learning, and creating case studies.

Introduce innovation in your firm's approach to training. The registrar function is vital for smooth, organized operations, but as the exclusive management style it can inhibit potential development opportunities. Consider ways to redefine the parameters for success – to encourage open-thinking in the design and management of your firm's

training center. The goal for a new direction is to move planning and management of continuing education from the registrar mentality to an invigorated learning system.

*For further discussion on establishing and managing a 21st century in-house professional development program, contact the writer.*

Joanne G. Linowes, Linowes Executive Development International (LXDi), is nationally recognized for coaching winning presentations and providing in-house training in communications, train-the-trainer, and marketing skills for design and construction firms since 1986. Contact Joanne to learn how training programs can be of value to your firm. [www.lxdi.com](http://www.lxdi.com). [jlinowes@lxdi.com](mailto:jlinowes@lxdi.com), or call 508-359-1011.

Check out other valuable BD tools and resources on your Editor's web site, [www.AECadvisors.com](http://www.AECadvisors.com). Go to “Publications” for information on *Marketing to Win*, a 300 page manual, *PSMJ's Databank of the Best Promotional Materials on the Planet*, *The Ultimate Marketing Plan*, and many other PSMJ publications.

## TELECOMMUTING: JUST ANOTHER WAY OF DOING BUSINESS - PART 2

By Barbara Shuck, CPSM

*Telecommute, e-commuting, e-work telework, working at home (WAH), working from home (WFH) are all terms described in the April 2008 issue of A/E Rainmaker. Part 2 looks at some of the benefits as well as the drawbacks. Part 3 will appear next month and will describe recommendations for those willing to try these new methods of working.*

### Social & Economic Benefits

- Telecommuting reduces traffic congestion, and studies show that telecommuters travel more at off-peak times. Moreover, teleworkers tend to reduce total travel, which reduces pollution even more. As states create anti-pollution programs, teleworking may become a more valid environmental factor.

- Teleworking provides access to work for people with special needs, including the disabled, single parents, or those with elderly or sick relatives.

- E-work provides wider employment and work opportunities. In areas of high unemployment, workers find opportunities anywhere, even world-wide. Individuals must have skills in high demand and skills in electronic networking that bring competence to appropriate employers, or the local community may establish itself with business networks so distance working opportunities are generated for its citizens.

### Drawbacks

- E-working may be inappropriate for people with poor personal motivation or self starters who need the external

discipline of set hours and a managed environment. Young people entering the workforce generally benefit from conventional work teams. Work is a place where people go to make friends and develop social and professional skills.

- Homes must be equipped for telework. It can be difficult to focus in a small, confined area, where children are underfoot, or where household noise is an interruption.

- Not all management systems and cultures are suited for e-working employees. Managers need confidence of managing at a distance and faith in their staff's commitment.

- Some co-workers may resent another's e-commute work status.

- Not all tasks can be performed in a distributed, self-managing environment. Many tasks gain from close interactions and teamwork, especially in design and creative work. In some environments, team spirit and internal motivation are a result of strong hands-on leadership. Some work needs to be closely-managed.

- Telework has the opportunity to complement rather than substitute work. As workload increases, more people work from home to finish tasks, which may increase stress and lead to burn-out on a long-term basis. Likewise, juggling distractions at home, such as taking care of children or a sick relative, may cause undue stress and burn-out for a teleworker.

- There is increased risk of confidential data loss or data integrity in the case of home theft.

- Productivity during the first few months may drop, mostly due to inadequate office organization. Managers should be patient and let the e-worker adapt. Eventually the productivity will climb.

- Management needs to recognize communication barriers that telecommuters will experience. They may feel alienated from the usual office happenings, and will certainly miss out on the team atmosphere and camaraderie.

- Although overhead costs decrease with teleworkers, the cost of technology is greater for user requirements, remote access servers, personal digital assistants, home computers and non-standard communications software.

- Consider personal liability and workers compensation costs. Check out the legal issues, union issues and zoning laws that may apply.

- Some companies incorporate training and development, evaluation, simulation programs, team meetings, written materials and forums to assist teleworkers. Sharing information is a key to reducing conflict and frustration.

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Information taken from Wikipedia/telecommuting (February 15, 2008); [www.eto.org.uk/faq/](http://www.eto.org.uk/faq/); [www.telcoa.org/](http://www.telcoa.org/); Also see <http://office.microsoft.com/en-us/help/CH101495151033.aspx> "Crabby Revisits Her Telecommuting Tips."

## USE EXPECTED VALUE (EV) TO MAXIMIZE YOUR MARKETING INVESTMENT - PART 2

By Scott E. Mickle

How do we determine the value of marketing programs? The key to the process is to develop an Expected Value (EV). To do so, you need only three pieces of information — the win rate; the average value of a project; and the average fee for this project type. For example:

- ◆ A Win Rate of 30%
- ◆ Average Project Cost: \$5 million
- ◆ Average Fee (8%): \$400,000.

As a hypothetical example, let's evaluate the EV of attending a trade show: Let's assume that from 100 contacts (business cards) you generated 10 qualified leads at this show that resulted in 3 projects (30% win rate).

- ◆ Those 3 projects at \$400,000 fee for each = \$1.2 million, which is the overall EV of the Trade Show.

We can use EV to further refine our leads:

- ◆ \$1.2 million fees ÷ 10 qualified leads = \$120,000, which is the EV of each lead.
- ◆ \$120,000 ÷ 100 business cards = \$1,200, which is the EV of each business card collected.

Expected Value is a very powerful measurement tool for placing a monetary value on the results of your marketing activities. At the top of the prospecting funnel, prospects have a low monetary value, but as they move through the sales process and are closer to becoming clients, their EV increases based on your firm's actual likelihood of winning the work. Now, when someone

asks the question: "was that trade show worth going to?" or, "did the last direct campaign work?"; you can answer yes or no and provide specific dollar figures to support your response. If the EV is greater than the cost of the marketing activity, the activity was successful and should be repeated. If the EV is less than the cost, it was not successful, and, therefore, that marketing activity should be reviewed for improvement or discontinued altogether.

### Where to Begin?

To many who are contemplating a new marketing initiative, the measurement process may feel a bit like jumping off a cliff. But, employing the methods and tools outlined here provides a safety net and a solid foundation upon which to build your marketing initiatives.

Successful marketing programs work best when firms:

- ◆ Set reasonable goals.
- ◆ Clearly define responsibilities.
- ◆ Create a tracking method.
- ◆ Make a timeline to measure results.

They communicate with everyone in the organization so that all understand their roles in the success of the marketing process. For example, the receptionist may be responsible for tracking the increase in phone calls while someone else tracks hits to your website. Remember, too, that marketing programs are not static, and over time, may grow or evolve in other ways.

The following are some specific channels that we use to track key marketing programs and the possible metrics to use:

- ◆ **Direct Mail Campaign:** Appointments, Web Traffic, Brand Recall.
- ◆ **Web Site:** Total Visitors, Page Views, Sign Ups/Email.
- ◆ **Statement of Qualifications (SOQs):** Short List Rate, Wins, Client Debriefs.
- ◆ **Trade Show:** Contact Info, Appointments, Request for Qualifications.
- ◆ **Print Advertising:** Call-Ins, Client Questioning, Brand Recall.
- ◆ **Sponsorships:** Impressions, Contact Info, Appointments, Brand Recall.

### Overcome the Fear

For those within an organization who struggle with how to measure their marketing programs and suffer system overload, keep it short and simple. Start with a small or simple marketing project, and test and measure it just for yourself. When complete, look at the EV you estimated; compare it to the amount of real income your campaign brought into the company. Now you have a success story, backed by real measurement data that proves how the marketing function and investment contributed to your firm's overall profit growth.

Scott E. Mickle is President of AEC Marketing Solutions. The firm specializes in working with A/E/C firms to maximize the effectiveness of their marketing and business development activities. Mr. Mickle was named by *Building Design & Construction Magazine* as one of the '40 under 40' rising stars in the design and construction industry in their inaugural list in 2006.

You can learn more about AEC Marketing Solutions on the web at [www.aecmarketingsolutions.com](http://www.aecmarketingsolutions.com) or reach Scott at: 704.560.7079 or [smickle@aecmkt.com](mailto:smickle@aecmkt.com).

## WHAT WOULD MOM THINK? BAD MANNERS IN BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT

BY ANNE CROWE KROGER, WALKER PARKING CONSULTANTS

If your A/E business development staff lacks fundamental networking and communications skills – things like returning e-mails and phone calls promptly and showing proper courtesy to peers in your office and to your subs and specialists – eventually those bad habits are going to find their way into client relationships. If they haven't already! Here are a couple of examples of bad manners and their affect on the BD process.

A few months ago at a networking event out-of-state, I ran into an architect with whom I had a very slight acquaintance. This person asked if my firm would team with theirs on a new RFP that had just hit the street. I said I would review the RFP upon my return to the office in two days and get back to them by the end of the week. (The RFP wasn't due for over a month.) Over the next 48 hours I had 2 calls on my voice mail at the office, an e-mail, and 2 calls to my cell phone. My boss also had two calls to his office voice mail! We all know it takes at least six touches to get on someone's radar – but all six touches should not occur immediately. (There's another whole article, how should those touches happen and when.) As I promised (because good networkers make promises and keep them.), I read the article when I returned to the office and called the architect to discuss the teaming arrangement. A week went by

with no return call. I called again. No return call. My firm eventually made other teaming arrangements. Several months later, I ran into the architect at another networking event and he sheepishly told me he was just too busy to get back to me. Huh? You asked me to be on your team. This is obviously not good BD skills. A/E Consultant Rich Friedman says "Your business development process is a proxy for what it will be like to work with you on a project." How eager do you think I was to work with this architect?

Here's another example of bad BD skills. I called to introduce myself to the BD representative of an architecture firm with whom my firm had worked years ago, but I did not know. I mentioned commonalities and synergies – SMPS connections, mutual colleagues, past work between our firms, etc. – and suggested we have coffee to determine where we could help our respective firms. He completely dismissed my suggestions. End of call. A few months later this same BD person called me for a proposal. And subsequently for a second one on a separate job. We sent the two proposals within a week each and waited. And waited. No response. I called to follow up, did he even get our proposal? No response. No replies to e-mails. Many months later I finally learned from a firm principal that they just weren't ready for our services. Fine.

Why didn't the BD person tell me this? Several months later, the BD rep is with a new firm, e-mails me to suggest that "we reconnect." Sorry, but there was no "we" there. I do not know this person. I have no relationship to reconnect. Now that my firm is valuable to yours, you're interested in me. Sorry. Bad manners cannot just be ignored, forgotten, pushed under the table. It's a small industry and a small community. Be careful whom you treat poorly. It will come back to bite you. Needless to say, there was no "reconnection."

So, how could each of these relationships have been saved? By using a few good manners and following some basic networking fundamentals. These are:

- ◆ Return phone calls and e-mails within 24 hours, but no later than 48.
- ◆ When someone makes an arrangement to speak with you in a few days time, give him or her the courtesy to do this – if it's their turn to initiate contact let them do it.
- ◆ Don't use the shotgun approach in your networking.
- ◆ Don't go over the BD person's head to their firm principal. Neither will thank you for this.
- ◆ If you don't have an answer for someone, let him or her know this. They'll respect your honesty.

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## WHAT WOULD MOM THINK? BAD MANNERS IN BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT (Cont. from page 6)

- ◆ If your firm is not ready for their services, suggest they try you again in a month, two or three. Maybe your firm will be ready then.
- ◆ Don't ignore people.
- ◆ If you've made a mistake or used bad behavior, admit it. Then, you both can move on and have a relationship.

This industry is all about relationships, building them and maintaining them. It's a miracle that so many bad BDers get by on their current skills. Know someone like this? Help them. Send them to an SMPS class. Have them read a Ford Harding book. Cause an intervention. They give our profession a bad name.

And remember, your peer relationships are just as important as your client relationships. Just like with clients, when you connect with peers you are the image of your firm – and you need to build these connections the same way. Make sure that your team follows fundamental BD communication rules in all environments – and when you see bad manners creeping in – take positive steps to correct them immediately.

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## THE UPSIDE OF A DOWNTURN

It's hard to escape the news of a slowdown in our economy. Among other current headlines, *Architectural Record* reported that the key measure of architectural services, the Architectural Billings Index (ABI), a survey of firms compiled by the American Institute of Architects (AIA), fell for the second month - and was the largest consecutive decrease in the ABI's 13-year history. With few exceptions design and construction activities are being scaled back across the board. What does all this mean for Rainmakers?

Business development, by its very definition, is a planned hedge against volatile times and economic slowdowns. If your firm is doing all the right things and managing your clients well, there is little to be concerned about. True rainmakers know this, especially if they have trusting relationships with their clients.

It was not very long ago that firms were concerned about having too much work. That is the time, as we all know, that marketing and business development has to be top-of-mind, in full gear, and cannot be cut back. Those who relaxed those efforts might be in dire straits now.

Some of the advice given:

Don't cut the marketing budget. If you can afford it, some claim that recessions offer un-

precedented opportunities to market in an environment of relatively less noise as other firms cut back.

Some will use the downturn as a catalyst for innovation. Instead of cutting back, they will see it as an opportunity to whack 90% out of all the things that are not working. Cutting off funding for those items would free up a lot of money for breakthrough ideas. Or, if you want to be less aggressive, you could put more resources behind the existing programs that are already working well.

Recessions are historically temporary. Great firms and great leaders do not abandon their growth strategies in light of temporary setbacks. They attack aggressively, while everyone else is pulling back.

There are signs of resilience among firms who have focused on the institutional sector - which includes schools, hospitals, and government buildings - which actually posted an increase, according to the ABI scores. For a more detailed look at the overall demands for A/E services that are still continuing to grow, check out the March 2008 issue of *A/E Rainmaker*, page 5, *An Important Business Development Forecast*.

For more information on the forecast, contact David Burstein, [dburstein@psmj.com](mailto:dburstein@psmj.com), or 800-537-7765. For more information on PSMJ's other Surveys, contact: [Blynch@psmj.com](mailto:Blynch@psmj.com).

## ADVISORY BOARDS PROVE BENEFICIAL FOR BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT

By Kimberly Kayler, CPSM, CSI

One of the key elements of business success is the ability to change. However, it is often hard to figure out why, what and how to change without any outside ideas. That is why many A/E firms have formed advisory boards.

Whether formal or informal, an advisory board can help you think outside the box and eliminate having to make the same mistakes others have made in their own companies.

Unlike corporate boards, advisory boards have no fiduciary responsibility and their advice is nonbinding. Separate from a shareholder or investor board, an advisory board can provide you with direction that isn't necessarily tied to the bottom-line and their stake in things. Rather, an advisory board can provide outside guidance on key issues that affect your business related to marketing, sales, staffing, succession planning and much more.

David Rosenberg, President of Hycrete Technologies, LLC, manufacturer of the Hycrete™ Admixture — a hydrophobic concrete admixture — created an advisory board simply to bring more experience to the company. Seeking feedback from key industry stakeholders about how to grow, he hand-picked a board comprised from a variety of markets in the concrete industry.

"I am pleased with the objec-

tive, seasoned opinions and willingness to help from the members of our advisory board," said Rosenberg. "People in the concrete industry want to help others so that the industry as a whole can be successful and improve."

Jim Joyce, President of H.R. Gray — a management and consulting firm serving the construction industry exclusively for public projects — also benefits from key advisors.

"I decided to form an advisory board because we did not have any in-house experience in operating a company, but we are very experienced in the work we obtain," said Joyce. "I felt it was important to learn from others rather than repeat mistakes that may already have been made by others. I also wanted to structure our financial reporting to look like what other businesses were doing and what the financial marketplace was used to looking at."

To assemble his board, Joyce contacted his local business publication and relied upon their database of people interested in serving on advisory boards. He reviewed and selected candidates based upon their personal experience and familiarity with the industry. Although it took eight months to assemble the right players, Joyce said they now have a chair with strong CEO skills, a CPA with a strong construction background and a political

consultant/lobbyist with a strong understanding of public works/contracting practices. Joyce suggests that you don't select members with the same skill set.

"It helps to have a perspective different from one another," he said, "and I think it provides a more complete review. Subcontractors, suppliers and clients can give valuable insight because they see many firms in the same position as your own and can give you a best of the best/best practice viewpoint."

While some advisory boards are hands-on, meeting monthly or more, many advisory boards come together to meet only a few times a year. Still other companies operate with advisory boards that never meet, rather, the president of the company has a listing of go-to people to test ideas on. The difference between a formal advisory board and constant, continuous networking with a circuit of trusted capable individuals is simply format.

### Assembling Your Board

Key to success in selecting your board is assembling a group of business owners or executives whom you respect as you are more likely to listen to their ideas. Also do your best to pick companies with complimentary services or products. Not only does such

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## ADVISORY BOARDS PROVE BENEFICIAL FOR GROWTH

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a grouping provide a chance for interaction and leads among the members of your board, but a group of competitors will likely be tight-lipped.

Although advisory boards are typically unpaid positions, compensating the members in some fashion is appreciated – whether through in-kind service, gift certificates or even leads. Also be cognizant that while their greatest gift may appear on the surface to be their ideas, the greatest gift from the advisory board members is really their time. As such, it is crucial that you establish an agenda, provide ample background information and run a structured meeting.

Same goes for an informal group of people you call upon. Even if you are simply running an idea by them on the phone, be fair to their time, try to schedule the conversation and give them a chance to think about the topic before you talk.

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## NEWSLETTER BREATHES NEW LIFE INTO A COMPANY

The production of a successful newsletter is more than a group of nice photos and clever copy. It really begins with a survey about the firm's or company's image, and this is precisely what the Lentz Group performed for the 83-year old W.S. Bellows Construction Corporation. The survey encompassed owners, developers, architects, and engineers. The results revealed (as they nearly always do), items of concern that would be addressed by the newsletter. These included the death of Chairman William Bellows, Jr., and the retirement of senior vice presidents would leave the perception of a gap in the company leadership. Few of the respondents were up on the current work of the company. There was a perception the Bellows had an aura of exclusivity, turning down jobs that were too small or bid competitively.

These were all addressed by the Lentz Group, where Carolyn Ferguson designed a sophisticated, six-page, tri-fold newsletter that was graphically appealing and contemporary to dispel another perception - that Bellows was old-fashioned and stodgy.

Each issue had the following elements: two project profiles, obtained through interviews with the project manager, or officer-in-charge; a column by the president, and a column by other officers and managers. The graphic design, writing, and photography are outstanding, especially the cover photos. This was confirmed by the many responses to the over 1,000 recipients on their mailing list. The comments also indicated that the company was on target in meeting the goals they had set forth for the newsletter. Comments such as:

*" Bellows Byline is a most elegant newsletter. The images are wonderful and the text so effective in conveying the high level of craft and commitment needed for challenging projects and successful collaborations. How refreshing to have a company newsletter that is so interesting to read."*

*"Your new Byline newsletter is superb - exactly what I would expect from such a quality outfit. It's well done and to the point - another great way to keep your relationships alive."*

*"Wow! It's fabulous. Very classy - 1st class. Makes a tremendous impression."*

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## THREE STRATEGIES TO REACH TOP DECISION MAKERS

By Andrew Neitlich

One of the more pressing questions my clients ask is: How do I reach busy decision makers?

It's a crucial question. If you know how to interest skeptical, easily-distracted executives in your solutions, you will be more successful than most of your colleagues.

Based on my own research and personal experience, three strategies work, and can be implemented in tandem:

### Strategy One: Become the "go-to" professional in your specialty.

If you are the go-to professional in your specialty, powerful decision makers contact you. They think of you first when they have a need. You don't have to chase them.

Go-to professionals get that way by doing the following:

- ◆ Develop a compelling marketing message that sets their services apart and demonstrates value to decision makers. Focus on their prospects' top concerns and how to solve them - and back up claims with facts, data, and case studies.

- ◆ Invest time getting visible to decision makers with interesting, valuable information. Top-producing professionals speak, write, and produce informational products (e.g. reports) about things that decision makers want to know. They also write press releases in publications that their decision makers read. Get visible where deci-

sion makers congregate. Do this by taking leadership roles in trade associations, industry groups, charity and community organizations, and other places where ideal prospects are likely to show up. Follow-up with prospects over time. By collecting contact information fanatically (and with permission), you can continue to demonstrate credibility and value. Do this through your newsletter, sending out additional educational products, and inviting prospects to attend speeches and seminars.

- ◆ Become expert at asking for referrals from current clients and your sphere of influence. Then follow-up to continue to build your network.

- ◆ Provide exceptional service and value, so that people rave about you.

- ◆ Work hard to understand the specific needs of current clients, so that you can continue to offer them additional solutions.

### Strategy Two: Focus on specific niche market(s).

Too many professionals mistakenly think that "everyone is a client." While that may be true, this mindset leads to superficial, generic, and expensive marketing. It is much more powerful to focus on a specific niche market. That way, you can develop a targeted message that will really get your audience's attention - and get them to spread the word about you. Also, you can set yourself apart from other professionals who are "all things to all people." By choosing a specific

niche, such as a vertical industry, you can reach top decision makers by doing the following:

- ◆ Develop a marketing message with words and issues that will resonate with people in that niche.

- ◆ Get visible and very involved in trade groups where decision makers attend.

- ◆ Build referral relationships with complementary professionals who also target that niche.

Create informational pieces that specifically address the problems that decision makers in this niche face.

- ◆ Conduct and disseminate research that will interest the executives in your niche.

- ◆ Get newsworthy publicity in publications that target your niche.

As you succeed in one niche, start to penetrate another.

### Strategy Three: Pursue your "Target Prospect" list.

Finally, some of my clients have had excellent results with the "Target Prospect" strategy. Here is what they do:

- ◆ Choose about 100 prospects with whom you would love to work. (Adjust this number to be sure you can manage this many prospects).

- ◆ Develop a series of letters to reach these prospects. Each letter should demonstrate your value up front with facts and case studies that get attention - as well as information that your prospects will value. Your letter might also

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include an article or executive brief you have written. In a post-script after your signature, tell your prospect when you will call (that way, you can tell any gatekeepers that your prospect is expecting you).

- ◆ Send your letter to your target prospect list. Follow-up with a phone call, and perhaps even a visit.
- ◆ Keep repeating. Don't be a pest, but do continue to follow-up with educational, valuable information every 21 days or so. Over time, some of these prospects will be willing to meet with you.
- ◆ Replenish your list as prospects become clients, or as prospects tell you they are clearly not interested in what you have to offer. Always have 100 target prospects (or whatever number you choose given your goals).
- ◆ Continue to get visible with your target market using the other two strategies described in this article.

#### Conclusion: No silver bullet.

There is no magic letter or silver bullet to reach decision makers. It takes work and time to get visible. Most importantly, you need to present your firm's value in a way that compels your decision makers to respond.

Andrew Neitlich is the author of the *Professional's Essential Business Development Manual*. For more information and Free Business Development articles, visit [www.marketbasedontrust.com](http://www.marketbasedontrust.com)

### RAINMAKING: BOOK REVIEW

This is our first book review in *A/E Rainmaker*, and a very important one. Ford Harding's first book, *Rainmaking: The Professional's Guide to Attracting New Clients* was published in 1994. If we can remember how much marketing professional services has changed in the decade since, (the first version didn't even mention the internet), then we can appreciate this second edition, which contains 40% new content.

But the story has even more meaning for us, for in 1998, Ford wrote a sequel, *Creating Rainmakers: The Manager's Guide to Training Professionals to Attract New Clients*. It was published by the Society for Marketing Professional Services, and was featured at all their conferences and events. It was at their conference in New York City that Bruce Lynch, PSMJ's Publishing Director, bought the book, and reading it on the train home, decided that Rainmaking would be the focus of a new newsletter. He later called upon us, as one-time editors of *PSMJ's Marketing Tactics* newsletter to take over as editors.

The new edition, *Rainmaking: Attracting New Clients No Matter What Your Field*, is published by Adams Media Corp. 2008, the publisher of the first book, and is a treasure trove of information about how professionals build relationships, develop leads, advance and close sales, and many other tactics on what works and what doesn't. It is filled with easy-to-use strategies, checklists, tables and guides, and for those who love diagrams, many intriguing networking and referral diagrams.

In addition to the numerous charts and tables, the text is punctuated with pithy advisory subheads, such as: "When you have the opportunity to advance a relationship, take it," and "Start early and catch a rising star," all of which make for an easy read and greater comprehension than solid text.

The book also tells you how to write articles, make cold calls, network like a pro, and many other strategies to advance your business development and sales efforts. A must-have book in every rainmaker's reference library- highly recommended.

Ford Harding is the president of Harding & Company, which trains professionals to win new clients. His books are required reading for certification by the Society for Marketing Professional Services. His articles have appeared in the *Harvard Business Review*, the *Wall Street Journal*, and of course, many times in *A/E Rainmaker*. He lives in Maplewood NJ. Contact him at [fharding@HardingCo.com](mailto:fharding@HardingCo.com) or 973-763-9284. **Editors.**

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