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Build relationships with CRM

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.

Your system needs to help you effectively and efficiently execute this vital work, even when you get busy. Supporting your business development system with customer relationship management software makes it easier.

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.

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Tools to support business development

Goal	Tool: Contact management tool, e.g., Outlook, ACT!,	CRM tool	Contact management or CRM tool that allows "custom" or "user-created" fields	CRM tool with easy workflow engine and custom fields
Track your contacts	✓	✓	✓	✓
Segment your contacts			✓	✓
Schedule activities with contacts	✓	✓	✓	✓
Automatically schedule activities for you				✓
Track performance		✓	✓	✓

Most CRM tools (like salesforce.com, sageCRM, Microsoft Dynamics or many competitors) provide you the ability to track your contacts, schedule activities and track performance. These tools also allow you to collaborate easily on business development with colleagues and share information easily with them. If you are a solo practitioner you might be able to get by with a contact management tool like Outlook or ACT!.

If you want to be able to segment your lists, you'll need a tool that allows that (some CRM systems have a field for that, and most allow you to create your own fields in your records). The hardest feature to come by is allowing you to automatically schedule activities. For that you need either a CRM tool with a workflow feature or marketing automation software. Marketing automation is a different kind of software that you can link to your CRM tool to give it additional capabilities.

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.

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- *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.

Feeding the system

You'll get better results when you put more information in your system and leave less only in your head. You won't remember everything you learn and do, especially as your contact list grows. And, if you don't keep track of what you've done, you won't be able to capitalize on how your system can help you schedule. Entering the data feels at first to many people like a non-value-adding task, so you might need some strategies to get started. These could include:

- Setting aside a time at the end of each day (or the beginning of the next) to enter the data.

- Planning some time between meetings and calls to enter what's happened.

- Finding a colleague who will be your business development "buddy" and communicating with each other by sharing access to your contact files; then the way you get help will be by putting the information in your system!

This kind of careful network information management will give you great knowledge. When he was the head of the Chase Manhattan Bank, David Rockefeller was famous for his system of writing down on index cards the details of everyone he met -- including the circumstances and what they discussed -- so he could prepare himself when he knew he might again encounter that person. You can do it too.

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Running the system

If your system is supported by a good customer relationship management (CRM)/ marketing automation tool you'll be able to develop a process for each segment of contacts. You can have one program for new contacts, and another for former clients and friends, and another for potential allies, and so on.

For each segment, you decide how frequently and by which means you want to contact them. How frequently by phone, by email, by newsletter, or by seeing a blog post from you? How often do you want to see them in person -- at a meal, a meeting or an event?

Then you can let your system schedule specific actions for or with people in each segment based on the process you've defined for that segment. As your system works, it generates the lists of people for you to contact each week, and keeps track of what has been going on between you and them. In addition, the conversations and interactions generate to-do's for your task list.

Measuring results

A CRM-based system will also let you measure results. You can:

1. Track your activities against your plan. Are you spending the amount of time you planned on starting relationships, maintaining them, and converting them? Or more? Or less? What should you do about that?
2. Track the pipeline of incoming work. What problems do your contacts have that you might help with at some point?
3. Track the state of your portfolio of relationships. How many relationships are getting better or worse?
4. Measure your ROI. What is the yield on your business development efforts?

Looking at your results by segment, you'll be able to see what's working well and what's not working so well.

Having and working a system is the best way to be sure you do the business development you want to do, and that the time you put into it is maximally effective and efficient.

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