

Creating demand for your professional services

Frequently prospects are interested in what you do, but aren't sure they have a pressing need. Or they see the need, but it's just not a high enough priority for them - because they and their organization are already swamped. But you suspect strongly that working with you would be very valuable for them, if only you could get them both to see the need and to commit to doing something about it.

Like many professionals, you might prefer responding to prospects who already acknowledge a problem rather than trying to help a prospect uncover a problem. But knowing how to help someone identify a significant problem you could help them with, and then guiding them to agreeing to that help, lets you generate demand that otherwise would have slipped away. Here are some ideas on how to do it.

Get ready to help clients find their problems and opportunities

First, understand deeply your own services and their deep impact. What value do you provide? In what situations would someone be foolish to not have someone like you work with them (if they understood their situation and your capabilities)? For each of these situations, how do you and your firm support the goals of a business, e.g., save money, add profitable revenue, reduce risk, minimize investment? When you tackle a problem of type X for a client, what is the deeper benefit to them of addressing that kind of problem? And what else do they get because of how you address those problems?

For each prospect you talk with - diagnose the situation

1. Understand them and their aspirations. Ask questions to understand their situation as they see it. Ask about what's happening and also about where they are trying to get. What objectives are they pursuing for the business, for their part of the business and for themselves personally? And by when? In particular, learn about initiatives that are already high priorities (because these may have budgets created you might tap).
2. Explore the implications of their situation-- the "so what's". One person's problem usually affects other people. Who else is adversely affected, and what are the downstream effects? Let the prospects fully flesh out the problem and its impact. With their permission, talk with

other people in the organization about it too. Your goal is to have them understand how big the problem really is, so they can evaluate the cost of the problem vs. the cost of doing something about it. You also want to learn whether anyone in the organization might be opposed to addressing the issue.

3. Add depth and breadth based on your knowledge. You have seen additional adverse effects in other organizations. See if they apply here as well. Help your prospect think through all the ramifications of the situation.
4. Make them quantify the costs. What does the problem cost or how much opportunity does it prevent?

For each prospect -- moving to decision

Ask your prospect for permission to come back and talk about what you've heard. At that meeting:

1. Feed back what you heard. Show them you have heard them, and get their agreement on the size of the issue. If possible, link the problems they've described to initiatives already underway at their company -- so any solution to those problems could be considered part of those existing initiatives (and use money already allocated to those initiatives). Also check to make sure you haven't missed anything important.
2. Give them some options on how to proceed. Options let them decide how to move forward. You can describe what you are telling them as "what I'd be thinking about if I was in your shoes -- but also knowing what I know I know." One option can be to tackle the problem now. Another can be how to jointly explore in more detail the value of doing something. A third could be a way of testing whether this approach makes sense for the organization, perhaps by talking to a reference who already did it or by doing a trial.
3. Suggest that they pay for the next step. Don't just agree to do the further exploration or the trial for free; ask to be paid for it. Asking to be paid tests whether you have made enough progress on uncovering the problem to have generated the possibility of spending to address it, and increases the cost of backing out later. A common tactic (good to keep as a fallback possibility) is to request payment for the next step but also agree that if they proceed with the larger effort later you would apply the fees from the next step to the main project.

Credit note: Some of these ideas are based on a detailed approach (not specifically for professional services) in [Selling is Dead](#), by Marc T. Miller and Jason M. Sinkovitz.

What to do this week

Get started about thinking about your value. Who would be crazy not to have you work for them?

Think about where you can experiment with this approach in discussions you already have planned.

What are these tips?

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