

Starting relationships is the first step in business development

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. The first is attracting 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 get their contact information, so you can proactively maintain the relationship.

Writing

Writing a book or some 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). Over 60,000 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. To get more names, offer during your speech to send something to people who drop off their cards (e.g. a free tool to analyze something related to your topic) . 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. One executive compensation consultant was quoted heavily for years in several publications. An executive recruiter I know cultivated a tie with a Wall Street Journal columnist and appears 1-2 times per year in her column. She also is sought out by other journalists. This strategy requires talking to the press many more times than you will appear (sometimes they'll cut you out or just use you for background info) and requires providing pithy quotes.

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 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. One schoolteacher wrote a presentation about educational challenges in the 21st century, and a version of it posted on YouTube has been viewed almost 4 million times. <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ljbl-363A2Q>. For slide presentations, you can use 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.

These methods start relationships by attracting people to you. You can also 1) reach out to people or 2) build a network of allies you support that will send people your way. We'll discuss those in later editions.

Something to try this week

Figure out how to start a few relationships. Should you get going on one of the strategies that are outlined above? Think about which of these, if any, have proven successful for you? Which seem exciting to you -- things you'd enjoy doing? Each of these is a long-term strategy, but each can be very powerful if executed well. At a minimum, explore the approaches you may not know as well. Log on to LinkedIn, and create a profile if you don't have one. Check out some blogs that cover your niche, and see how you like what people are saying.

What are these tips?

These monthly tips are intended to 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.

Can you answer my questions about business development?

We'd be delighted. Please send any questions you have to questions@bridgewellpartners.com and we'll do our best to help you out. Or call us at 312-863-3489. Or visit www.bridgewellpartners.com to learn more about how we coach and train professionals to be better at business development and to enjoy it more.