

# INSIGHTS ON MARKETING AND BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT

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Marketing is fun...engineers, architects and contractors generally hate doing it, but it's really not that difficult, if you have the right attitude. Remember: clients really want to talk to the engineer, architect or builder who will do the work. The Business Development (BD) person prepares the way.

Every firm needs to market! Unless there is a long-term, well-established relationship, clients do not just call and ask if you would like to take on a particular project. Marketing and business development means going out and finding the work.

Before any marketing takes place, there needs to be a Marketing Plan.

## THE MARKETING PLAN

- Can be very formal with lots of research:
  - Economic trends, questionnaires, focus groups etc.
  - Research by someone who likes it and knows what to do.
- Can be less formal and down-to-earth, but should be written down.
- Both forms must have clear company direction...**from the top**.
- Company must know who they are and what they want to do:
  - Wright-Pierce...water and wastewater
  - Hoyle-Tanner...roads and bridges
  - Payton Construction...schools, credit unions, high-end fit-out
- Needs an honest analysis of company strengths and weakness.
- Needs a realistic assessment of competition.
- Can be either market driven vs. client driven:
  - Market driven...schools and colleges
  - Client driven...Bowdoin, Bates and Colby

I favor simple research and a basic marketing plan...not too complicated. Beware of spending too much work on developing the plan and not enough time going out and meeting potential clients.

The key to success for a marketer is working for a firm that is clear about who they are and what they want to do. It makes no sense to pursue and find a great bridge project if your firm really wants to do water and wastewater work!

**MARKETING AND BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT...depend on each other, but there is a difference.**

**Marketing**...tends to be more “in-house.”

- Establishing company brand and identity
- Advertising
- Website content
- Newsletters
- Brochures
- News releases
- Statements of Qualifications (SOG)
- Proposals and Bids

**Business Development**...definitely means being “out on the street.”

- Meeting potential clients
- Calling or emailing potential clients
- Attending meetings (AIA, MEREDA, MHA, ERAPPA, etc.)
- Follow-up letters
- Periodic contact on a very regular basis
- Keeping in touch with exiting clients
- Meeting clients at conference booth
- Golf tournaments
- Cocktail hours

A brief discussion on the “funnel of 100 contacts...”

A note on the problem of trying to do in-house marketing and outside business development at the same time...

## **FINDING THE WORK...an example of marketing and business development working together.**

- Marketing plan identifies Bowdoin and Colby College as potential clients.
- Marketing Department has developed a basic brochure, project profiles and other hand-outs about company qualifications.
- Business Development (BD) person gets appointment with key staff:
  - Referral from colleague
  - Met potential client at meeting, conference or whatever
  - No need for a cold call for an appointment
- Present qualifications at meeting.
- Ask about upcoming projects and **listen, listen, listen!**
- Send follow-up letter.
- Call in a few weeks.
- Call every month or two.
- Attend all meetings or conferences where you will see this client.

Woody Allen said: “Eighty percent of business is showing up!”

Charlie Martin says: “Being out in the field and meeting clients is very important. Following up is even more important!”

Research shows:

- 43% of sales people make one call and quit.
- 25% make two calls and quit.
- 12% make three calls and quit.
- 80% of all sales are made on the fifth call!

## **NETWORKING...an important business development tool.**

- Business networking groups...a great source of new leads.
- SMRT Group, BNI, MCC
- Chambers of Commerce, professional organizations
- Soccer games, grocery stores, golf tournaments, etc. etc.
- Referrals from colleagues and existing clients
- Keep giving to others and they will think of you when they have a great new lead.

## **PROFESSIONAL ORGANIZATIONS...another business development tool.**

- AIA
- AGC
- SMPS
- MWUA
- MWWCA
- MEREDA
- EDCM
- CEM
- CSI
- MHA
- NNECERAPPA!
- Chambers of Commerce
- Attend meetings.
- Get on a committee.

## **WINNING THE WORK**

**The Go / No Go decision should be pretty simple if you've been following the marketing plan.**

RFQ or RFP is received in the firm:

- Should be no surprise.
- Business Development (BD) person has been working on this lead.
- BD person provides details about the project:
  - history of this lead
  - background about the decision-makers
  - what the competition looks like
  - selection and interview process
- GO decision is made.
- Can be pretty informal: "Looks like we have a pretty good shot at making the short list. Let's go for it!"
- Can be very formal with a detailed Go / No Go process, matrix, etc.
- If the decision is No / Go, a letter should be sent to the client explaining the decision.

**Model sentence for No / Go letter:** “Although we are qualified to pursue this project, we have decided not to submit a proposal because we are currently working on a number of projects for other clients. At XYZ Company we have a policy of not taking on new work unless we have the staff available to provide the kind of service you have come to expect from us. We would certainly love to work with Bowdoin College, and we hope you will keep us in mind for future projects.”

## **PREPARING THE QUALIFICATIONS OR THE PROPOSAL**

Develop an alphabetical data base of frequently used information:

- Approach
- Budget Preparation
- Cost Control
- Firm overview and history
- Graphics
- Philosophy
- Photography
- Project Management
- References and client quotes
- Resumes
- Safety
- Scheduling
- Whatever...

When the qualification statement or proposal is completed, cut and paste any great new wording that you may have developed. The Marketing Department would have the responsibility for managing this data base of qualifications information.

## **PUTTING THE QUALS OR PROPOSAL TOGETHER**

- Marketing Coordinator vs. BD person.
- Some one person needs to pull it all together.
- Team approach involving:
  - principal
  - lead architect or designer
  - project manager
  - estimator
  - writer

Marketing Coordinator needs to have staff available for typing, copying, graphic design, binding and getting the proposal out on time. Leave plenty of time. It always takes much longer than expected!

Note the value of hand-delivery whenever it is possible.

## **CREATING GREAT PROPOSALS**

When putting the proposal together think about the small-town selectman with the task of reading 10 proposals and cutting them down to 3 or 4 for interviews. He or she is looking for an easy way to eliminate some of them. Poor design, poor graphics, small print and typos will not make a good impression.

### **Characteristics of a great proposal:**

- Try to have the logo of the owner on the cover. This can usually be found on their website.
- Prepare a short cover letter focused on the needs of the owner, not a rehash of the qualifications of the firm.
- Never start the cover letter with: “We are pleased to transmit blah, blah, blah...”
- The proposal Outline or Index should follow the RFQ topics and numbering **exactly**. Failure to follow this rule is an easy way to get eliminated quickly.
- Use an easy-to-read type (Times New Roman 14) with plenty of good spacing.
- Try to use bullets instead of long narrative paragraphs.
- Keep paragraphs short.
- Leave lots of white space on the margins for shaded boxes of client quotes or other relevant information or pictures.
- Use great photography and graphic design.
- Resumes should be relevant to the project...1 or 2 pages, maximum.
- Project profiles should be relevant to the project.
- Answer questions in the RFQ simply and honestly. For example: Will your Project Manager attend weekly meetings? Yes.
- Proposal should be written by one person so that style is consistent.
- If an executive summary is required, it should be prepared by a writer specializing in clear, concise English!

## **Characteristics of a winning proposal:**

- Quality, not size.
- Focus is on the owner's needs.
- Honest, straightforward answers to owner's questions.
- Approach highlights benefits to the owner.
- Experienced team.
- Experience in similar projects.

## **A word about price proposals and Qualifications Based Selection (QBS):**

- Firms must decide whether or not they are going to pursue bid work.
- If yes, beware of the risks:
  - Low bid subcontractors may not be qualified.
  - Low bid GC may be forced to “nickel and dime” the owner on change orders in order to make a profit.
  - Not really a good way to start off a relationship with a client.
- QBS is a better method of selecting professional services:
  - Owner issues Request for Qualifications (RFQ).
  - Selection Committee chooses 3-5 firms for interviews.
  - Winning firm then prepares a Scope of Work and price proposal.
  - Owner negotiates deal with #1 rated firm.
  - If agreement can not be reached, owner begins negotiation with #2 rated firm.
- Visit [www.meqbs.org](http://www.meqbs.org) for more information.

## **PREPARING FOR THE INTERVIEW**

- Decide on the theme. It should highlight benefits to the owner and solve owner's problems.
- Remember: projects are won and lost at the interview.
- Pick an interview team that is good at interviews!
- If your staff needs help in presentation skills, spend the money on a good training session.
- **Practice, practice, practice...no rehearsals in the car, please!**

## WINNING THE INTERVIEW

- Don't rehash your qualifications. The selection committee already knows you are qualified. That's why you've made it to the interview.
- Give them a reason to select you. Describe your approach and show how it will benefit them.
- Beware of the standard interview process used by all other firms:
  - Principal... "We're happy to be here, blah, blah, blah..."
  - Principal describes history of the firm and shows pictures of too many projects. Some of them are not relevant!
  - Approach...each team member describes what they are going to do.
  - Principal..."We'd love to work with you...any questions?"
- Beware of "Presentation speak."
  - "I'm delighted to be here..."
  - "Thank you, my name is Joe Blow and I'm here to..."
  - "It's a pleasure to present our qualifications for..."
- Keep the presentation conversational.

Here is an example of a dynamic and creative approach to a formal presentation. The project is the design of a new football stadium. The selection committee consists of the football coach, the athletic director and the head of the alumni association. None of them knows anything about the design of football stadiums!

The winning firm opens its presentation as follows: "Football ... (pause) ... football is a game of individual effort and coordinated teamwork." They have already captured the full attention of the selection committee!

### **The question of interview hand-outs...**

I favor a nicely bound 3 or 4 page summary or outline of the presentation. The big question is whether to hand it out before or after the interview.

- **Before:** The hand-out may provide a good place for the committee to take notes. On the other hand, they may read it and not pay attention!
- **After:** I favor this approach because it gives the committee a summary of your presentation to use when they are in deliberations.



## DEBRIEFINGS

- **Before the interview:**
  - It's a good way to gain insights on the selection process.
  - What are they looking for?
  - Who is on the selection team?
  - What are their backgrounds?
  - Is it O.K. to talk with them before the interview?
- **During the selection process:**
  - Call to see about the schedule for making a decision.
  - Ask if they need any other information.
- **After winning an interview:**
  - What worked for us?
  - How were the others eliminated?
- **After losing an interview:**
  - Resist the temptation to make another presentation!
  - How did we do?
  - Where do we need improvement?
  - What won it for the selected firm?
  - Ask if you can look at the other proposals.
- **Act on the information leaned in debriefings:**
  - If your firm needs training in presentation skills, get it!
  - If the other proposals look snappier with great graphics, hire a graphic designer or whatever it takes to make your proposals eye-catching and easier to read.
- **Debriefings during a project:**
  - This is a good chance to keep in touch with your client.
  - Debriefing should be done by someone other than the Project Manager.
  - Generally, you want to find out how your firm is doing on the job. Are there problems that need to be addressed?

## **SOME INSIGHTS ON WORKING WITH THE MEDIA**

- Build a relationship with the editor.
- Find out what kind of stories they are looking for.
- Try to establish yourself or someone in the firm as a “go to guy” when a reporter needs an expert opinion or a quote.
- Return reporters’ calls as quickly as possible. They have deadlines.
- Don’t be surprised if you don’t make it into a story.
- Don’t ask to review a story before it is published.
- Understand what “off the record” means and how it is used.
- Write in newspaper style.
- Write story about project award and project completion.
- Other story ideas: new hires, promotions, awards, new technology and just about anything else you can think of!
- It’s all good publicity for the firm.

## **NEWSLETTERS, BROCHURES, WEBSITE, AWARDS**

- **Newsletters:**
  - Should provide good information...no fluff!
  - Periodic newsletter with lots of pictures may be O.K.
  - Very time consuming.
  - Post cards are another option.
- **Brochures:**
  - Lots of pictures and bullets
  - Company overview
  - List of services
  - Client list
  - Can be tailored to different markets
- **Website:**
  - Use a good design firm and a good writer!
- **Professional Award Competition:**
  - Build Maine Awards
  - Engineering Excellence Awards
  - SMPS Awards
  - AIA Awards