

Winning new work by working smarter, not harder

by Colin Dunn

Following his presentation in Hawaii at the robnixon conference for the accountancy profession, Colin Dunn summarises the key points of his address.

Win new work by working smarter, not harder

I asked the group to consider how effective their client nurturing meetings have been to date. Some firms have had extraordinary success with these meetings whereas others have been struggling to turn positive meetings into new revenue streams. If you are in the latter category, my suggestion is to put some more rigour around the process. We need to think about process, content and follow up.

If you have had a meeting with a client that went nowhere, it is likely because of one of three reasons:

1. The client did not see a big enough need to change
2. The client did not see you or your firm as the person to help them change
3. You didn't do a good enough job at outlining the next steps to the client.

Process kick start

Indeed, some industry experts recommend you carry out 20 nurturing meetings per partner per month. The reason they suggest that number is so that you actually do SOME! It is not a magic number. If you only did half, your firm would grow dramatically. But the key is to book them in. I recommend blocking out complete days where all you do is visit clients. Schedule them back to back, three in a day. And a key here is to have your personal assistant book the meetings for you.

I have heard from accountants that some clients have declined when offered a free nurturing meeting because they don't know what the meeting is about. So you need a SCRIPT for the person booking the calls. My suggestion is a simple script along these lines:

"Mary has been thinking about your business and has two or three ideas she'd like to run by you. She is in your area on Thursday and said it would be important to catch up. There's no charge for the meeting – how does 10am suit you?"

Use this script irrespective, not just when a client queries the purpose of the meeting. Why? Because it will make you think about two or three ideas in preparation for the meeting! When I was running business improvement assignments for clients in the UK, I used to pull together a team of people from across the firm and we would brainstorm my client's situation and come up with a list of 50 ideas that the client could take to improve their business. We would bind and present it to the client





on the conclusion of the initial project. Clients would love this and would often engage us to help them implement some of the ideas. You can do this in your firm, or if you are lacking the necessary resource, utilise your network. The point, of course, is to come up with just two or three significant ideas to discuss with a client at your nurturing meeting.

Once you have your ideas, think about the questions you're going to ask to direct the client towards the issues you feel would be of benefit. Asking the right questions is a major key to winning additional work. Some firms use my web-based marketing tool, TRUST, to systematise that process before meeting with a client (see <http://renewgroup.com.au/trust.html> for more information).

Leading professional services consultant, Andrew Sobel, advises firms to tell new business clients that every six months, the firm will come to the client with three major ideas and invest a day workshopping the ideas at no cost to the client. Then, if the client likes one of those ideas, the firm will set aside some time immediately to work with the client on a paid engagement. This process forces you to be innovative and proactive.

Substantiate the words you use with case studies and testimonials

I recommend preparing two case studies (one for existing clients, one for new clients) for each of your service areas, plus a further two for each speciality service and niche industry in which your firm operates. Internally, you need to translate your services into what author and speaker Andy Bounds refers to as 'afters'. In other words, how will the client be better off AFTER you have done your work. Link your 'afters' to personal motivations. Use language such as "you'll be able to afford that new car" or "you'll be able to take care of school fees for the kids" or "you'll be able to sleep more easily in the knowledge that you have your cash flow under control" or "you'll feel much better knowing that all of your affairs are properly structured and the family will be financially looked after if the worst happened to you". (Refer to Andy's book, *The Jelly Effect*, for great pragmatic scripting around this).

Follow up effectively

Block out time in your calendar to write any proposals that may come out of your client meetings. Call your clients to follow up exactly when you said you would – and remember, speed is of the essence so, if you meet a client on Tuesday, have the proposal to them by Thursday at the latest and agree to talk again on the Friday or the Monday (if they say they need the weekend to review it).

Process, content and follow up. With a more rigorous approach to each, you'll find your client development improves significantly.

About the author

Colin Dunn is the Principal of ReNew Group Pty Ltd. ReNew Group provides consulting services to professional services firms. Colin's passion is to help professionals achieve balance between optimal earnings and desired lifestyle. Colin started his career with one of the fastest growing accounting firms in the United Kingdom, working in audit, corporate finance and business development. In 1996 he joined Results Accountants' Systems (later RAN ONE) where he played a pivotal role in content creation and product development, before running the European operations and subsequently the Australian operations. He co-founded ReNew Group in 2004. For more information, please visit www.renewgroup.com.au or email colin.dunn@renewgroup.com.au.