



# 7 LESSONS THAT WILL HELP YOU BUILD A BD JUGGERNAUT

**By Sue-Ella Prodonovich**

A long time ago - let's call it 2013 - I [went to a talk](#) that stayed with me. It was given by [Bob Bratt](#), DLA Piper's Chief Executive Officer and Executive Director, US Operations.

The reason I still think about what Bob had to say was that it was practical and, in the way most brilliant things are, it was kind of simple, even obvious, too. Yet, in many ways, it also challenged prevailing wisdom and the status quo. And it's still equally relevant, five years on.

Here's what I took out of that day and how it applies to all professional services firms. (Please note, these are my words not Bob's - all of his ideas are paraphrased and seen through my own experience and lense).

## **1. YOUR BEST BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT MANAGER IS SOMEONE WHO'S BEEN A BUYER**

No one knows their own business like a client does. For example, no one knows a company's legal department like their General Counsel or a corporate's financial department like their CFO.

They know what makes them tick, what they'll pay for, why they choose suppliers and where their pain points lie. They know what differentiates firms, what professionals are well-regarded and where reputations lie. In short, they know pretty much every reason why you'll get work and every reason you won't. So why not use that to your advantage by making a General Counsel - or at least an in-house lawyer - your law firm's head of business development? (Accounting firms can do the same with a CFO, COO or CEO).

Pilfering business development managers from client side is nothing new for advertising agencies. It happens constantly. But professional services firms are a bit behind the game here. So, if you have a Business Development (BD) place to fill, look to your favourite client types - or the ones you want to attract - and see who has the knowledge, background and connections to take your firm to the next level.

## **2. WORKING TOGETHER WORKS**

'Disunity is death' isn't just a saying that applies to political parties. It applies equally to professional services firms.

When there are silos, when information isn't shared, when people act only in their own interests and not in the interests of the firm, we all end up poorer for it (quite literally too when you consider the lost fees).

When it comes to BD and sales, unity matters more than anything. The most effective BD experts are relied upon by a firm's technical specialists and work hand-in-hand through the whole process, from identifying a target, to compiling intelligence, to setting up meetings to following up.

By joining forces you'll be combining all those sales skills with the professional skills and knowledge of the market. How powerful is that?

### 3. CENTRALISED IS BETTER THAN DISPARATE

While we're on the topic of silos, Bob talked a lot about the need to centralise collateral. I often see firms without any centralised structure for marketing or business development or client intelligence. And, often those who do have a centralised structure make it a weak one, where effectively each practice within the firm can do things whichever way they want.

This doesn't just lead to a duplication of work, it also leads to multiple brand identities and a situation where no one in the firm gets to see the big picture but only their patch of turf.

A better approach is to keep everything in the one place - your marketing, your intelligence, your proposal collateral - and to give your firm a central repository for growing revenue.

### 4. THE PEOPLE YOU KNOW ARE BETTER THAN THE PEOPLE YOU DON'T

It's often said that it's twice as easy to sell to an existing client than a new one. I think the same is true for referrals. The people you know, who've referred you in the past, are much more likely to refer you again. So focus on pleasing these guys and doing what you can to get more work out of them. Bob said to focus on introductions from known networks. I say don't go chasing rainbows (or waterfalls).

### 5. THE LOW HANGING FRUIT SHOULD BE EATEN FIRST

Speaking of which, when it comes to winning work you're better off playing the percentages and going after the work you're likely to win rather than living in fantasyland. That means reducing the amount of time you spend on unqualified tenders and upping the amount of time you spend on qualified ones.

I'm not saying don't have a crack at all, but do it sensibly. For instance, DLA Piper takes a gateway approach for most RFPs that looks at they were invited, how entrenched the incumbent is and how likely they are to win. By running a similar analysis in your own firm, you'll find your BD ends up becoming a lot more profitable.

### 6. CONSISTENCY MATTERS

I don't have to tell you that, whether it's learning a language, training for a marathon or studying for a law degree, regularity of practice matters more than anything. Business development is no different. As a minimum, Bob said you should be conducting business pipelines every month, where you identify targets, work out where you stand with them and decide on what you're going to do next.

I also think this consistency should flow over to reviewing your practice and measuring how you're performing. For instance, if you're not getting new work in or new enquiries, you may not be feeling it right now but six months down the line you could be feeling it acutely. So do things frequently, spot the patterns and stay ahead of the game.

### 7. YOU'VE GOT TO KEEP TOUCHING PEOPLE

For professionals, sales don't usually come from someone calling you completely out of the blue and asking you to do stuff for them. (OK, sure, sometimes they do.) A whopping 75% of sales, yep three-quarters of them, happen after three or more 'touches'. That's why, Bob says, it's vital your marketing and sales teams work together and keep you **top of mind and tip of tongue** with potential clients. It's also why I can't stress enough the importance of writing articles, giving talks, sending newsletters, inviting people to events and generally reminding them you're out there.

Because, if there's one thing I've learned when it's come to BD, things don't happen overnight. They require persistence and commitment and teamwork and, just as I said at the start of this piece, having the right people performing the right roles.

When that truly happens, you'll have built yourself a BD juggernaut which can't help but bring in more work.

## FURTHER READING

In June 2013 Sue-Ella attended the Legal Sales & Service Organisation's Rain Dance Conference in Boston. The conference included a presentation from Bob Bratt, COO of global law firm DLA Piper's US operations which provided insight as to how the firm successfully revitalised its sales efforts.

[Here's Bob's seven ideas](#)

## WANT MORE?

If you'd like help with building the skills and smarts of your team email [Sue-Ella](#) or [get in touch](#).



### **Sue-Ella Prodonovich**

[sueella@prodonovich.com](mailto:sueella@prodonovich.com)

Sue-Ella is the Principal of [Prodonovich Advisory](#), a business dedicated to helping professional services firms sharpen their business development practices, and attract and retain good clients.

© Prodonovich Advisory. Please respect our copyright and the effort taken to produce the original material in this document. This document or any portion thereof may not be reproduced or used in any manner whatsoever without the express written permission of the author.