



# 10 DUMB THINGS SMART PROFESSIONALS GET ASKED TO DO

**BY SUE-ELLA PRODONOVICH**

Professionals tend to be smart people. But they're often asked to take some pretty dumb approaches when it comes to business development (BD). Here's my list of the 10 worst BD things lawyers, accountants, architects and engineers get told to do.

## **1. RECITE AN ELEVATOR PITCH**

As a professional, your work is nuanced and complicated. Reducing what you do to an elevator pitch isn't just demeaning, it also sells you short. So ditch the pitch and take a more nuanced approach to BD that demonstrates you're more interested in listening and discovering. You can show-off your knowledge and the range of what you do through articles (but make sure you read 7 below first), speaking about your topics and sharing practical and relevant insights with your existing and would-be clients. Don't resort to the patter of a door-to-door salesman.

## **2. CROSS-SELL OR UPSELL**

Cross serving clients is great because it's in their best interests. But Cross-selling and upselling are not. What's more these are high-risk approaches that can sour your relationship with good clients.

Most clients are sophisticated enough to know your firm offers other services. If they want them they'll use them. And, if they don't know what you do, again let them know by helping them with practical articles and seminars, or including them in your firm's events - not through the hard sale.

Read more about cross-serving [here](#).

## **3. FILL OUT SOME MORE FORMS**

So many firms make their fee earners fill out a multitude of forms and get high-level sign off for even the smallest BD efforts. Want to take a client to a \$200 lunch? That will be 45 minutes of form filling (and \$500 of the firm's billable time). Trust your professionals to do the right thing and give them some space when it comes to BD expenses - so long, of course, as they're complying with the taxman.

## **4. DELIGHT YOUR CLIENTS**

One of the biggest fallacies in professional services BD is the idea that we have to delight our clients. If you ask me, that's the worst possible advice. Of course, you should be nice to them and provide a great client experience. You should do what you can to help reduce the effort they need to put in at their end.

But don't get into the trap of trying to delight everybody on every level. Some clients may want to depend on you for a cheap and reliable service. Others may rely on you as a trusted confidante rewarding you with loyalty and friendship. The point is that clients are human, they have different expectations, and the laws of [diminishing marginal utility](#) apply.

## 5. BECOME A TRUSTED ADVISER

Another fallacy professionals are often told is that they need to become their clients' trusted adviser. I think that's sound advice for some clients but trying to be a trusted adviser to all your clients is a waste of time. Instead, you should play many different roles depending on who your client is and why they've come to you.

Some will want to use you transactionally, others may want to use you more holistically, and others again may want to use you along with a panel of other providers. Trying to develop a high touch approach towards everyone you ever work for - and being disappointed when they don't reciprocate - is bad for your self-esteem and bottom line.

## 6. UPDATE YOUR DATABASE

In the olden days it was usual for partners to be asked to review a list of their contacts' details (usually for the Christmas card mail out). Some were given a spreadsheet to edit. Others were given fancy input forms to feed very expensive CRM systems. Groan. Precious time that could have been spent on clients or networks or professional development or supervising others.

Smart firms have tapped into smarter CRM systems like [NEXL](#) which automatically build themselves and even provide ideas to help Partners with their contacts. They can teach you something about your network - now that's adding value.

## 7. START USING SOCIAL MEDIA (BUT WITHOUT ANY SUPPORT)

Article writing is a great way to show off your expertise and a BD tactic I strongly recommend for most professionals. But putting together a quality article takes time - even a day or two. Let's face it, most professionals have no more than 150 hours of non-billable time a year they can use up. And yet, I've seen firms put their professionals on punishing article-writing regimes that would leave a full-time journalist feeling overwhelmed. So, if you're going down this route, be realistic about a publishing schedule and enlist outside help if you need it.

The same goes for social media. How often do you see a professional start an account, go in guns-a-blazing for a week or two and then do nothing else ever again? Using social media well requires time and effort. If you want someone to do it properly, you need to put your firm's resources behind them.

## 8. GET OUT OF YOUR COMFORT ZONE

The best business development [takes place inside your comfort zone](#), not out of it. Good BD is all about being yourself. If you're being made to take clients to a sporting event you have zero interest in, or to give a talk on something that doesn't interest you, your lack of enthusiasm will shine through. I'm a firm believer in the notion that we all have skills, hobbies and passions and we should all be doing what we can to exploit them rather than hide them. If you like sailing, take your clients sailing, not to the footy.

## 9. ANNOY YOUR CLIENTS

Client feedback is a wonderful, even essential, thing for most professional services firms. It can help you refine your processes, hire the right people, develop the right strategy and come up with new products and services. But, as with most things, there's a right way and a wrong way to do it. The right way involves being systematic, timely and efficient. The wrong way usually begins with asking professionals to get in touch with someone they haven't seen for 12 months to give them a form that takes hours to complete to rate performance in work they can't even remember. When done this way, [client feedback is likely to annoy your clients](#) and help you lose work, not win it.

## 10. SIT THROUGH AN HOURS-LONG TRAINING SESSION TO GET THE FIVE MINUTES YOU NEED

How often are professionals made to go to a BD seminar or retreat where 99% of what's said isn't relevant? These sessions are often so pointless and so dull that by the time the information you're interested in finally gets mentioned, you've switched off.

In a post-pandemic world, time is the new currency and being respectful of others' time is more important than ever before.

With that in mind, I've developed BD45™, a 45-minute Zoom session that answers your specific questions about doing BD better. From building particular skills to working on a specific pitch and from developing an effective business strategy to starting a new practice, I can give you exactly what you need to know and nothing you don't.

Book your 45-minute session at [BD45.com.au](http://BD45.com.au)

## FURTHER READING

November 2020: [Short, Sharp, Smart: The Future Of Business Development](#)

Feb 2020: [How To Get More Work Out Of Your Clients And Your Firm](#)

March 2019: [Why The Rainmaker is Dead: The New rules For Winning Work](#)

April 2018: [How Not To Annoy Your Clients When you Ask For Feedback](#)

May 2017: [Why Business Development Works Best When You're In Your Comfort Zone, Not Out of It](#)

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