



## INSIGHT ARTICLE

### **Become Your Own Client...**

Brand and Marketing Consultant, Sam Bridger, looks at how to approach your new business strategy when you don't have a dedicated business development team member.



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**Question: We're a small agency and would like to grow into a bigger small agency! There are 4 of us and none of us focus solely on new business. Do you have any strategy tips to help us start working towards growth?**

Sam Bridger: Whenever I read a letter on this topic, it always make me think of the words "Physician, heal thyself".... It's amazing how many agencies fail to take the advice they regularly give to their own clients. Helping your clients to grow their business is what your job is all about - so the answers already lie within you. Step one is to become your own client!

Start by outlining your strategy. Define your objectives and cover off the basics; do a thorough SWOT analysis, complete staff and client 360s, review your closest competitors - what do they do well, what do you do better? - have a think about the type of clients you currently work for, the experience of your staff and so on. Is there a limit to your ambition? It's not such a daft question, as you clearly want the business to stay small and manageable. This should direct your strategy - going for a huge account that will put immediate pressure on your resources is clearly not sensible. Focus on finding and developing clients that will allow your business infrastructure to grow at a controllable rate.

It's as important to identify your weaknesses as your strengths. What skills are lacking? If most of your clients are - like many others - steadily shifting their spend from print to digital, do you have the right staff and resources in place to manage that? Anticipate your clients' needs - if you're already working closely with them on their marketing strategies you should have a clear vision of where they're going - be ready to help them get there. (And if you're not, make steps towards getting more involved).

When you have identified your strengths, you should have a clearer idea of where the 'quick wins' will come from. In most cases, the best advice is to try and grow the business you already have – always far cheaper and easier than pitching for new clients.

You often hear agencies bemoaning the fact that their client list is 'missing' a bank or an airline (or whatever), but I don't recall ever seeing a headline in Campaign that said "XYZ agency would be so much better if only they had a car account...". Focus on your existing skills and think about how you can use them to sell yourselves to similar clients (not necessarily within the same category). If you're based outside London, don't dismiss approaching big, local clients just because they already have a roster of large London agencies. You could try to build a reputation as a reliable, local 'second string' agency, delivering ad hoc, fast-turnaround projects (lots of regional clients use local agencies in this way). This is another good way to get your foot in the door and build up your business gradually.

Consider your communication plan carefully. Ideally, your main marketing channel should reflect your area of speciality (whether it be digital, DM or advertising). This is your shop window, your opportunity to give potential clients a 'free sample' of your skills. And whilst lots of clients complain about unsolicited mail from agencies, most accept that it's part of the job and the good – and useful – stuff will always escape the trash.

Clever virals or quarterly e-newsletters are a useful way of regularly getting your name in front of your prospects (and easy enough to delete for those that really don't want to be bothered). And don't overlook simple networking – real, face to face contact is always best, but there are plenty of social networking websites that can help you build your contact base.

Finally, and probably most importantly of all, one of you needs to take responsibility for the new business strategy. Without someone taking ownership and leading the programme, it's likely to slide down the bottom of everyone's 'things to do' list. A final note of caution, though. Making one person responsible does not absolve the rest of the team from the work! Generating new business leads is everyone's responsibility – it may even be worth making this a specific objective in their annual appraisals.

Good luck!

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