

Virtual Business Development



By Lindsay Young, CPSM, MBA

Virtual business development seems to be a recently coined and common term in the A/E/C industries, as business development looks much different today than it did a couple of years ago. The opportunities to drop by prospects' offices or meet them at a networking event are few and far between.

Our industries are still struggling to figure out what the next steps should be as business developers. In my experience, there are a few things we can do to continue to drive business and make connections during these uniquely challenging times.

Utilize LinkedIn

This powerful business tool has been underutilized for years. Overall, the business community doesn't understand the true value in the platform and how to harness its networking potential.

First, creating a strong, complete profile that contains keywords throughout is instrumental in helping people find you.

Regularly share information (through articles or videos) about how you help clients, along with trends in the design and construction industries. This will keep you visible among your existing connections—don't discount their importance and ability to help you win work. Comment and share information on their posts, too. The more engaged you are on the platform, the more your connections will see you in their news feed.

Nothing has changed in marketing and business development as far as wanting to be Top of Mind. This is your digital Top of Mind!

LinkedIn offers a featured called LinkedIn ProFinder, where potential clients can search for freelancers. You can enroll as a service provider and submit short proposals (usually answering five to 10 questions) about the service being requested. LinkedIn will match your profile with the requested services. At time of writing, ProFinder was free for the first 10 proposals with a free LinkedIn account, but you must upgrade to a LinkedIn Premium account after 10 proposals.

Send a Delivery System Coupon

Before COVID-19 affected how we interact, you could just pick up the phone or send an email inviting someone to coffee, lunch, or happy hour. Face-to-face interactions are much more limited now, and when they do happen, it's often on a necessity basis.

That doesn't mean you can't still have meaningful interactions. How about inviting your prospect or customer to a virtual meet up? Send them a delivery system coupon (DoorDash, Uber Eats, Instacart, etc.) so they can order something for your meeting.

Networking during these challenging times is still possible—it just takes some extra creativity and thinking outside the box.

Ask the Right Questions

Even with almost everything going virtual now, it can be difficult to connect virtually with people if you've never met them before. Asking the right questions is key to engaging your prospects and customers. People appreciate being asked, "How's it going?" or "What are you currently challenged with?" or "How can I help?"

The importance of empathy hasn't gone away, in fact, it's more important than ever. So, we still must be genuine in the way we seek information. That's why it's good to ask people about things outside the workplace too—it helps build the relationship. Make sure to ask open-ended questions, so the other person doesn't feel like you're interrogating them.

Virtual Presentations

Virtual has become the standard for presentations or interviews you're conducting for an existing client or prospect. We've all seen that it can be challenging trying to communicate over a computer screen. Your energy level must be 20% higher when presenting virtually compared to in person.

But in many ways, presenting now is no different than before. Be prepared and practice your presentation. Know what the client's hot buttons are and address them. Make sure they can see and hear what you're saying. Your visuals (presentation) should be strong and support your message.

Set the expectations for everyone to have their camera turned on during the presentation, so you're able to receive some visual cues. This will be helpful in reading your audience. As always, be genuine and engaged.

Virtual business development will continue to evolve. As marketers and business developers, this is our opportunity to be creative and bring in new ideas for our firms to get work. ■



LINDSAY L. YOUNG, MBA, CPSM, is chief difference maker at nu marketing llc, in Rogers, AR. Young helps companies grow their business through strategic business development and marketing plans and budgets. Reach her at 316.680.3097 or lindsay@numarketingllc.com.

Ivy Tech Community College's George and Frances Ball Building, Muncie, IN. RATIO Design, Loftus Engineering, Inc., and Pepper Construction.
©Susan Fleck Photography, fleckphoto.com.

