



Is it Just My Agency? The 3 “C’s” to Successful Pipeline Building: Consistency, Consistency, Consistency

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Too many agencies prospect in fits and spurts.

Too many agencies are terrible at marketing themselves.

Too many agencies don’t take the time to build an organized new business process.

Winning new business starts with building a solid pipeline of potential opportunities.

Building a solid pipeline starts with developing and maintaining the 3 “C’s” of business development.

Absent of these 3 “C’s”, an agency’s efforts will be stunted, challenged, and frustrated.

The first and potentially most important “C” is **consistency of outreach**... being there as much as you can, as often as you can. After all, the “game” is a bit of an aperture marketing game. Today your prospect is fine, tomorrow they have their boss breathing down their neck, or a new initiative demands a new look and fresh ideas. Being there when they are ready to make a move means always being on the radar, not just when you can make the time.

The second “C” is **consistency of messaging** used in reaching out. Just like an advertiser’s brand, your “brand” needs to define itself in as compelling and as unique a way it can. Given at the end of the day, all agencies deliver the same “staff”, finding the reasons-to-believe your agency is able to get the prospect to a better place is central to convincing them that you can help. Show them you understand their situation, bridge their situation back to your work, then make your compelling case for why your “way” is better than the next agency on the block.

And the third is the **consistency of the methodology** used in your outreach. You can have the most outgoing, smartest salesperson in the world working on your behalf and if he/she isn’t organized in their approach, doesn’t have the right tools to reach out with, doesn’t have the right support to help develop lists and messaging and reporting, the program will eventually fall short.

Following the 3 “C’s” is particularly important in today’s economy. With fewer opportunities and more agencies knocking on the same door, doing it the way we’ve always done it isn’t going to win the day.

In a recent survey conducted by business development consultancy Reardon Smith Whittaker (www.rswus.com/surveys), 150 agency principals highlighted the consistency of the pain many are feeling in today’s market, stressing the need to be better stewards of the 3 “C’s”.

Is it just my agency?

Doesn’t seem to be so.

According to the survey, close to 60% of those responding state that their business is flat to declining versus a year ago.

51% of agency principals state that winning new business is “harder” or “a lot harder” than it was three years ago – as compared to only 40% agreeing with the statement in last year’s survey. So it’s clearly getting tougher, not easier to create opportunities.

What could be the root cause?

When asked, 37% of principals seem convinced that the top reason for the slowdown is the fact that there are fewer opportunities to be had (as a result of company consolidations and lower levels of spending), and that it is increasingly harder to break through to prospects (44%).

With the economy placing ever-increasing pressure on the advertiser’s financial performance (see RSW’s “A Client’s Perspective on Economic Conditions”: www.rswus.com/surveys) there seems to be ever-increasing pressure on a marketer’s time. With company cut-backs comes less time to talk to agencies. With less time and fewer dollars to be spent on marketing, advertisers are more hesitant to give the agency that simply wants to talk about itself any time. Reach out needs to be compelling, relevant, consistent and on-going. Reaching out with new thinking, best practices, or anything that can add value to the prospect’s world will only improve your chances of penetrating and getting on the radar screen.

Is it possible we are doing something wrong?

Interestingly, agencies are still relying heavily on referrals and networking as a resource for new business. Anecdotally, we have found that the rate of network and referral opportunities is slowing down... which makes sense given the consolidation and reductions in spend.

What agencies aren't doing a lot of (or maybe not doing effectively) is "prospecting." Only 16% of new business came in via prospecting in 2008 and in 2007. This could be a function of the fact that "pecting". Only 16% of new business came in via prospecting in 2008 and in 2007. This could be a function of the fact that fewer new business managers are being brought on board (36% state they hired a new business manager in the 2008 survey as compared with 48% in the 2007 survey). This could also be a function of the fact that the new business managers being brought on board continue to underperform (with 58% of principals stating that they have replaced their new business managers at least once in the past three years).

The lower success rates associated with new business managers could be driven by the fact that new business managers overwhelmingly aren't squarely focused on the job of reaching out and prospecting... they are focused on lots of other activities – which based on our experience, is recipe for disaster. While 90% of principals state that their new business manager was/is responsible for "setting meetings" and "cold calling," 60%- 70% of principals state that they are also responsible for "presenting to prospects," "managing mailings," and "creating presentations,"

We have found that the less a new business manager is focused on the core activity of consistently reaching out, the more likely they are to meet with less-than-optimal success.

So what are we to do?

Only putting an on again/off again effort against outreach, or letting your new business manager do a lot more than they should be doing to generate opportunities isn't going to help you open up the doors that are harder and harder to open.

Key is following the 3 "C's." Consistency of outreach, consistency of messaging, and consistency of methodology. Sitting back and waiting for all this economic nonsense to pass and the referrals and network opportunities to pick back up would be a bad course of action. When the economic chips are down, it is time to ramp it up!

If you manage the process inside, make them develop a system, force them to create a "brand story," and keep tabs on how well they are sticking to it. And for God's sake, let them stay focused!

If you feel like bringing on more overhead and dedicating more time to the effort is simply outside of your capacity at this point in time, consider outsourcing the activity. More agencies are turning to outside resources to support their new business efforts. According to the survey, 31% of agency executives state that they have or do use an outside service to help open doors and set meetings on their behalf. This is up significantly from the 16% that stated the same in last year's survey.

More firms are turning to outsourced services because they are less costly, more focused, and expert at what they do. The good ones know how to manage the 3 "C's" more effectively than any agency can on its own. The right firm can help you build the consistent, compelling message, the right firm can help you build a well organized, strategic target list, and the right firm can help you maintain the consistency of utilizing a well-oiled, market-proven methodology.

At the end of the day, you didn't get into the ad or PR or design business to be an expert at lead generation. You got into the business to be expert communicators and idea people. In these tough times it may make more sense to keep overhead low, focus on your current clients, and use your new business energies to win prospects handed over to you.



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