

Alternative Ways to Make BD Connections

by Susan Shelby, CPSM

Although many great business deals are forged over a handshake with a long-time associate, that approach may no longer cut it in a field where competition is increasingly outnumbering opportunities. It's more important than ever to know your client, speak to their needs, get creative, and earn their trust.

It may be necessary to spend a little money to reach your goal, but the outcome can far exceed your initial investment. For example, socializing is one of the best ways to reach your client. Who doesn't like a party? You're not stuck behind a conference table sipping water from crystal tumblers—you're mingling with peers and colleagues, sharing a cocktail and a laugh.

Consider these two examples:

- Margulies Perruzzi Architects (Boston, MA) has a gorgeous roof deck overlooking Fort Point Channel. They take advantage of the view and the weather by holding a series of small cocktail parties throughout the summer. Then, by holding an 'end of summer' party—inviting everyone who had been included throughout the summer—then give their contacts double-exposure to the firm as well as create low-pressure networking opportunities for their firm.
- GEI Consultants, a geotechnical, environmental and water resources engineering services firm, created an industry conference within a niche service area and invited leaders in the field to participate by speaking and running seminars. In its third year, the event has become known as the go-to event for this professional service.

Less casual opportunities exist by positioning your staff as thought leaders in the industry:

- **Host industry association events**
- **Invite clients to brown-bag lunch seminars**
- **Become a guest at strategic conferences**

These options allow for professional edification and a chance for the client get to know your firm without the formal pressure of evaluating a proposal or sitting through an interview.

Awards galas, open houses, anniversary parties, networking events, volunteer activities, hospitality suites, company outings, and sporting events can be perfect venues for spending quality time with new people who may turn into long-term business relationships.

Susan Shelby, CPSM, is the founder and principal of Rhino Public Relations, a specialty public relations practice focusing on the unique PR needs of architectural, engineering, construction (A/E/C) and related firms. For more information, please visit www.rhinopr.com.

Don't Overlook Your Project Managers!

Your most powerful—and often overlooked—BD assets are your project managers. Why do these seemingly quiet “toilers in the field” hold the key to your success? Here are a few reasons:

- **Clients know that their project will be managed and executed primarily by the project manager.** Not the principal-in-charge, not the BD director, not the CADD operator.
- **The project manager is the client's go-to person for any problem.**
- **The project manager has authority to solve most day-to-day problems,** the kind that most often show up and take much of the client's time.
- **The project manager can give the client a current status report** more quickly and accurately than anyone else... whether related to budget, schedule, or deliverables.

The result of all this interaction and trust is that the project manager has the client's ear and attention more than anyone else in your firm. So the project manager is the logical one to approach the client from a selling perspective—cross-selling, up-selling, and prospecting for the next project.

The selling doesn't have to be explicit or “hard-sell”... that style almost never succeeds. The project manager can just keep his ears open and ask leading questions to learn of upcoming opportunities.

If you define project managers' roles as including selling to their existing clients, train them, and measure and reward success, you will have moved your BD program to a higher level of effectiveness. ■