

Propeller

PR | Content | Business Development

The new playbook for **business development**

Growth strategies for a fast changing landscape

The
Business Development
Handbook



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0.1 Introduction

As we move deeper into a fresh year, it is an opportune moment to review Business Development (BD) strategy and the approaches teams can use to achieve their goals.

This guide combines insights and advice for BD leaders proffered by brand-side marketers and experienced agency leaders at **2021's BD100 Winning Together** event alongside guidance from Propeller's own specialist new businesses experts.

You'll find sections on how to make that initial contact with a prospect, the ways tech can be used to support BD operations, tactics to improve pitching and the importance of safeguarding the wellbeing of new business teams.

The business landscape is starting to look brighter despite the stop-start brakes on the economy caused by the pandemic - and now is the time for agencies to invest energy and effort into improving their reputations and their marketing.

Marketer confidence is on the up and it's likely to be accompanied by a willingness to review and innovate.

But agencies cannot afford to be complacent and face challenges including:

- Appealing to prospective talent
- Diversifying the team
- Implementing new digital tools
- Thinking strategically about how to develop relevant content

BD is the lifeblood of an agency. If it's not treated as a priority for your business, then your organisation will not operate at full effectiveness. And BD is everybody's business - everyone can contribute and should be encouraged to do so.



0.2

Marketing your agency

Agencies create marvellous marketing assets for their clients that provide differentiation and cut-through. But it's often the case that they are not so great at marketing themselves. The skills that agencies demonstrate on behalf of clients should also come to the fore when attempting to build their own profile and engage with prospects.

Personalisation has been a mantra for the B2C world and BD teams need to adopt this mindset, research their targets carefully and craft tailored messages if they want to break through to time-pressured marketers fielding a barrage of calls and emails. Without some form of personalisation 'cold calling' methods are just not as effective.



We have to be producing the best content not just for the client, but for ourselves. Produce it in a dynamic and interesting way - agencies miss a trick not using the skills they have for themselves.

Angela Gaskell, MD and Co-Founder of HDY



Agencies can embrace their creativity and let it shine through when crafting approaches. The key to developing relationships and successful engagement with potential clients is authenticity.

Getting onto the client radar means that you must look to embrace what is individual and special about your offering.

Breaking away from the herd should be a priority and the right content and channels can help to make this possible. Identify which channels are best suited to connecting with individual brands and marketers. Some prospects will prefer being contacted via established methods, whilst others may be open to messages on social platforms.

Demonstrating thought leadership is essential for inbound marketing - this is the process of generating awareness amongst potential clients and offering them a path towards your agency. There is a need to create content that attracts interest, sparks curiosity and can drive a conversation.



Most brands and businesses face the same challenges - so content which reflects the pressures on these audiences is the best way to encourage someone to stop scrolling and read.

*Alexandra Willis,
Communications and Marketing
Director at Wimbledon*





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Whatever we do to promote ourselves as an agency has to be fun, spontaneous, and to live and breathe our brand.

*Graham Goodkind,
Founder of Frank PR*

”

LinkedIn is an indispensable platform to showcase thinking - but it has to be used strategically. Amy Binns, Head of Brand at KFC UK & Ireland, says: “I follow people for their thoughts and experiences. Sharing thought leadership pieces on LinkedIn is a powerful way to tell personal stories.”

Other social media can be used to bridge the gap between BD teams and potential clients. If you know a client is putting a lot of spend into imagery and short form video, then maybe those are the right formats to use to showcase the agency's skills.

In a world where people are video calling more than communicating face to face, agencies must figure out how to display their culture on a screen. A good starting point is your website's tone of voice - this could be the first point of contact a client has with you and your first chance to make an impression.

But not all of your tactics have to be digitally-led. Taking a counterintuitive route can work in your favour. For instance, a creative talking point in the actual office for visitors - such as a quirky feature in your boardroom - can be an excellent device to help client recall. Or how about a physical mail out of your latest piece of thought leadership with a request for a meeting?

“

One of the best ways to sabotage your content is not to tie it to your goals. Know why you're creating content.

*Ellen Gomes, Learn
+ Engage Integrated
Marketing Lead at LinkedIn*

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The Knowledge

- Focus on developing research that could help a client - prospects often do not have the time or resources to develop insights into market trends and will welcome agencies that offer help
- Regularly publish interesting content that invites conversation and isn't 'cookie cutter' but could only come from your agency
- Bylined articles are regarded as table stakes - if the culture of your agency allows be confident in your decision to break away with standard activity and do some 'fun' marketing as well
- Be selective with the clients you target - research whether they have a budget that can accommodate the costs of your services



0.3

The benefits of technology-based tools

Many agencies increased their investment in digital tools in recent months spurred on by the pandemic. Digital tools, however, do not replace the very human skills of BD teams in relationship-building. Instead, they should be used to augment BD strategies and activity.

Introducing and optimising technology for BD is a gradual process - results may take a short while to come through but mapping out what works and what doesn't allows agencies to isolate the techniques that are efficient and effective. These lessons can then be implemented in future campaigns.

Clients are embracing digital transformation and they will want to see their suppliers are similarly forward-thinking. When pitching to brands, draw attention to the way in which you incorporate modern technology into your operations. This will illustrate your commitment to adopting best business practices.

Distribution is the decider

Creating great content will not be enough to power successful lead generation. Publishing high calibre content on a regular basis is important but there has to be investment in placing the content in front of the right eyeballs - the client-side decision-makers and influencers.

There are plenty of tools to help with this. Using CRM platforms allow BD experts to build intel over a sustained period of time. By collecting data about which email campaigns resonate with audiences you can gradually customise your marketing to make it more effective.

Batch-and-blast emails are unlikely to connect with clients. There is still value in utilising outbound marketing techniques but inbound marketing is a more sophisticated strategy, as has become abundantly clear in recent times.

CRM systems allow you to track individual metrics, such as the time spent on different pages of your content. BD teams can use these digital tools - with HubSpot being a prime example - to see the open and download rates of email campaigns. This information can subsequently shape future campaigns.



The Perfect New Biz Tool Stack

Propeller's recommendations for 'tried and tested' CRM and sales enablement tools:



A CRM that's powerful and easy to use and provides a complete solution to sales and marketing automation.

Find out more [here](#)



Kulea doesn't just provide Software as a Service; it provides software and a service. By automating manual and repetitive sales and marketing jobs, Kulea frees up agency time to focus on winning new business and supporting existing clients. Its intelligence helps to deliver outreach campaigns that are better targeted and more effective.

Find out more [here](#)



A sales prospecting tool providing the latest decision-maker insight, predictive intelligence and sales triggers to help identify future opportunities.

Find out more [here](#)



POWERING BUSINESS GROWTH

ALF Insight is a leading business development tool for agencies seeking to target the biggest brands. For more than 30 years it has been used to find contact information for key decision-makers, industry reports and advertising spend. So helping agencies to prospect, pitch and win new business.

Find out more [here](#)



Cognism provides B2B organisations with access to a comprehensive global database of account, contact and event information. At a granular level, it looks to improve workflow integration through mobile phones and verified email addresses. Cognism was named as one of [LinkedIn's 15 Top Startups of 2021](#).

Find out more [here](#)



SALES NAVIGATOR

LinkedIn is a go to tool for every business developer. Sales Nav lets you tap into the power of LinkedIn's network to gain extra insight on target accounts, set alerts and reach out via personalised inmails.

Find out more [here](#)

Content and technology are entwined - content drives the initial interest, and the data gathered from the channel and platform touchpoints can be analysed for insights to power the next action in the path to conversion.



Content and technology are two sides of the same coin in today's market. It's important to create personalised content that will attract prospects based on their interests, but it is also vitally important to have the technology behind it to track and report on how those prospects are actually engaging with the content. With that data, you can then further personalise and produce content for your intended audience

Caleb Buscher, Senior Channel Account Manager EMEA, HubSpot



The Knowledge

- Tech augments the human side of BD work - the tools on offer can help your agency's content to thrive
- Adopt a CRM-based system soon or be left behind - these are becoming a standard tool for BD teams
- Invest sufficient time into integrating technology into your operations - the challenge lies in capitalising on new systems and getting them to work for your agency





0.4 Pitch Tactics & Advice



If a traditional business is losing out to new, digital competitors they'll want an agency who knows how to answer this challenge. How they can solve challenges is more important than brand knowledge - and even more important than category experience.

Paul Phillips, Managing Director of marketing consultancy AAR



Not all business development paths lead to a pitch and most teams would be happy to be awarded the business without having to go through an extended process. But the pitch remains an integral part of the new business landscape and the BD team plays a huge part in success or failure.

The BD team will have the best knowledge of the target business, its decision-makers and the brief. They will be essential to training the pitch team - and may well be in the pitch itself.

Do your homework

Preparation is key to winning a pitch. Understanding the potential client is paramount. Read through the brief closely - and suggest relevant solutions to the challenges that are posed. This highlights that you are aware of the obstacles that lie ahead.

'Winging it' is not a viable strategy. The agency must be capable of identifying the target audience with which the brand is looking to connect. This level of insight can instantly put you on the front foot in the pitch.

The pitch teams that challenge clients tend to thrive.. Brands want to collaborate with experts in their field - it is the pitches that are full of confidence, opinion and insight that stand out from the crowd.

Most agency pitches lean heavily on pre-prepared presentations. These visual aids can act as prompts, helping meetings to proceed in a structured fashion. However, don't be constrained by the pitch deck - forward thinking agencies will pick up on physical and verbal cues to expand ideas and thoughts.

Fewer slides with fewer words and more talking directly to the decision-makers in the room will make a better impression. And definitely don't just detail your all-important agency values in writing - communicating them through actions will be markedly more effective.



Clients are looking for chemistry - a sense that there could be a long-term partnership, and that the people in the room will be those working on the account.

Annabel Venner, former CMO of Hiscox and a Chair of the Marketing Society Fellow





Staying on the radar

Make sure your agency is listed or known by the following platforms and intermediaries. Each of the following provide a useful client-side view on how your agency is positioned and often act as a guide and trusted partner for brand decision makers:



AAR understands how challenging pursuing new business can be; that is why it looks to ensure that no time is wasted. It acts as an impartial new business and pitch consultant, advising on everything from brand positioning to pitch presentation techniques and pricing structures.

Find out more [here](#)



brings brands and agencies together to showcase the industry's most powerful and recognisable work through a mix of technology and expert advice.

Find out more [here](#)

The Drum. Recommends

Part of the global media brand 'The Drum', The Drum Recommends helps brands to find the right digital and marketing agency partners by showcasing client reviews, work and people.

Find out more [here](#)



Search consultants who help brands to find right agency partners across creative, digital or media.

Find out more [here](#)

OYSTERCATCHERS

Specialists in agency search and marketing transformation.

Find out more [here](#)



Keep doors open

Pitches are not guaranteed to end with a handshake and a contract signing. If you are the losing agency BD teams must decide on whether the feedback provided merits follow-ups. If there is an opportunity for future business then keeping a line of communication open is wise.

Paul Phillips believes that the tone of feedback should dictate when a follow-up is appropriate. "When you find out that the [the client says] the timing just isn't right, you should definitely stay in touch. But like in speed dating, if you are rejected, read the room and move on."

If there is a clear rejection it is a waste of time and resources to continue pursuing the prospect. Experienced BD professionals are expert communicators but also know when to end a conversation.



Like in politics, you never know when someone will be in leadership or opposition. So it's important to maintain relationships.

Alexandra Willis, Communications and Marketing Director, Wimbledon



The Knowledge

- Don't lean on your deck too heavily and prune rigorously - no client ever said "I wish there were more slides in that presentation"
- Understand whether your prospect genuinely wants blue sky ideas and thinking outlined in the pitch alongside the requested smart ideas and executions for their regular activities
- Be careful with follow ups if you don't win the business - take stock of the feedback provided and figure out if a relationship can still bloom



0.5 Culture is your biggest asset & Advice

“

Broken management means broken culture. Work to build a positive, inclusive culture that keeps people motivated and helps them build their careers.

*Dani Bassil, CEO of Digitas,
at Winning Together*

”

Clients are buying solutions - but they are also very much buying culture. Your agency culture feeds into the way you look at the world and the solutions you offer up to clients. Therefore agencies need to build and maintain a strong culture - that's how to attract the best talent and the diverse thinking that will 'wow' a client.

Those occupying BD leadership positions are often agency MDs in waiting. There are a multitude of skills that make BD practitioners great agency leaders. They are already strong communicators and relationship-builders, resilient and adaptive. To fulfill their leadership potential they also need to understand how to knit a team together and build a positive culture across the business.

The ability to seamlessly switch between conversations with prospective clients and members of other departments is an important skill. Collaborating with team leaders across the agency gives BD leaders an overview of operations unmatched by any other department head and the opportunity to identify exciting new business opportunities.



Attracting the right talent

BD heads are in a battle for talent just like other departments and so need to know what millennials and Gen Z employees - who are gradually making up the bulk of the workforce - value most. The shift away from thinking that employees only care about salary has been accelerated by the pandemic. Younger employees focus on the type of experience organisations offer when they consider jobs - so think about what kind of experience is offered in BD.



The mindset of potential candidates - and current staff - have changed. Agencies must understand these or miss a trick. Anyone that is recruiting will know the pain of finding a perfect candidate, only to find they have taken another job. Speed is essential in the realm of recruiting.

*Katy Howell, CEO,
Immediate Future:*



Be on the lookout for those with a creative spark. Problem solving skills are a must - and being able to think outside the box could prove to be the difference between a successful venture and one which becomes a disappointment.

Diversity in the workplace is of increasing importance. Clients are asking to work with diverse teams and as the BD department is usually the first contact point with agencies, it makes sense to staff up from a wide range of talented individuals.

This is not box-ticking. Diversity brings a new set of useful experiences and insights to your operations and problem-solving. But make sure your teams are not just diverse - they need to be inclusive too or hirings may walk away quickly.

Return to office policies can also be a flashpoint for recruitment if there is no clarity. With hybrid working now considered the norm, agencies need to be upfront about their expectations with those occupying new BD positions.

If you are a pro-office employer, ensure that this is stipulated in the job descriptions you post. Similarly, if you are in favour of a hybrid system, make this message clear. This can help to avoid situations whereby new hires resign and the costly and disruptive recruitment process has to begin again.

Once an individual has been recruited, allow them a settling in period. Although they may possess the basic, raw skills required of them, this does not mean that they will 'hit the ground running'. This ideology is outdated, and will put a strain on other elements of your business.



Supporting the team

BD teams are situated at the heart of an agency's success and this can lead to a lot of pressure. Agencies have a duty of care, and a responsibility to nurture their people. Professional burnout has become increasingly rife during the pandemic with long hours and stress being primary contributing factors.

The wellbeing of BD teams is sometimes allowed to fall by the wayside. Often judged on the number of wins under their belts, it is important that the huge amount of behind the scenes work they undertake is also considered.



Good BD people are a rare commodity. There is nothing wrong with hiring fast, but give them time to be able to do their job. Don't start applying the thumbscrews in month one, month two, month three. Give them a year.

Ali Wallace, Founder of DNA



The roles of BD professionals tend to focus on hitting targets and meeting deadlines. It is stressful and high-pressure situations such as these can be unhealthy over extended periods of time.

BD teams risk becoming isolated if they spend large spells away from the office. Agencies should be mindful of the mental health related problems that could develop in this type of scenario.

Investing in external support is a simple yet effective way to help staff and should begin on day one. Tanba is a prime example of an organisation to turn to for support. It provides training courses - hosted by experienced industry experts - to empower BD teams. By giving access to cost-effective marketing tools and knowledge it equips teams for the new business mission.

Those struggling with well being can also find support with NABS, which has more than a century's experience in providing bespoke assistance to advertising and media-centred businesses.

The Knowledge

- Give new employees time to adjust - they need to learn how your particular agency conducts business
- Support your BD team; they can feel huge amounts of pressure and need to know the agency is looking out for them. Noticing when the pressure is building allows time for changes to be implemented
- Honesty with junior members goes a long way - demonstrating that you value them can help with career development
- Have a mixture of informal and formal support structures - this offers multiple outlets to employees that are struggling



0.6 Conclusion

Business opportunities are picking up - now is the time to build the foundations for accelerated growth. By finessing the agency's thought leadership, producing relevant content and choosing the optimal moment to reach out to clients, your BD efforts can prosper.



Marketers are time-poor, with an ever-expanding remit and new challenges to tackle. It is imperative to ensure that your agency stands out and is front of mind when they do start to look for partners and begin assembling a pitch list.

Clients increasingly expect a sophisticated and strategic approach from potential partners and the value of personal connections is vital. Make sure that you invest in building long-term relationships with the brands - and people - you want to work with in the future.

Change invariably brings new opportunities. If you take the time to put a clear plan in place now, you will be well positioned to take advantage of change to drive the growth of your agency in this fast-moving landscape.”

Jody Osman, Propeller Group Director of Business Growth



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