

Sweet and powerful business development

By Linda Julian

Good business development starts with the word "no". No, not the right client. No, not the right matter. No, not the right fit for us now. No, not one where it will yield a highly satisfied client.

In the same vein, great marketing is largely about finding your "sweet spot" - and finding ways to do lots more of that work. Better still, only that work.

Finding your sweet spot

Maybe it will take a little effort to locate your sweet spot. Maybe it's in-your-face-obvious.

Your sweet spot is:

- where you do your best, finest, and most interesting work
- where you "click" with clients you enjoy and who appreciate what you do
- projects which aren't too hard to get or painful to manage
- profitable
- a great place to make a professional future.

Powerful differentiation

Possibly, your sweet spot is unique. More likely, your sweet spot is an opportunity for some much sought-after differentiation.

What you do especially well, for clients who recognise and reward your work, is probably quite some way from what just any other similarly-qualified professional can do for them: mostly the greater the distance (more differentiated) the better (more rewarded, widely recognised, and profitable).

It's worth finding that special alignment of characteristics which causes a client or project to hit your sweet spot. Once you

know what that magic combination is, look for work that fits the parameters and become braver and bolder with the words: "no, while I'd love to help you, it isn't my 'sweet spot' - let me refer you to a trusted colleague who'll do a great job for you".

That's the precursor to a surge in your success and rewards.

Don't dilute it

If you're a stand-out professional expert in an area, you only dilute well-founded strong claims by attaching others which are weak.

Most of all, don't water down business development around your sweet spot with a host of "we can do that too" which simply relegates you to "also ran" or "me too" selling.

What does this mean in practice ?

Well, if you're an insurance lawyer with a wealth of expertise in liability and professional indemnity, it will dilute the impact of your sales pitch if you also decide

www.julianmidwinter.com.au

Tel +61 2 9968 4168
Fax +61 2 9960 4480

Suite 16 357 Military Road
Mosman NSW 2088
Australia

Email julianmidwinter@julianmidwinter.com.au

to claim significant expertise, say, in marine insurance, just because a few years back you did a couple of cases in that area.

If you're a corporate and commercial specialist, it will only water down the sales pitch you're making in this, your stand-out area, to also claim that you're an expert in a half a dozen other areas, only tangentially connected.

For those whose claims to fame are as technology specialists, it does little to help make an effective case by adding a few more areas where you can "get by".

Disempowered messages

To unsophisticated consumers, a lawyer is an expert in all matters legal, a computer expert is expected to know about any computer system, and a management consultant can expertly advise any business.

Sophisticated clients know there are important differences.

It may matter little to this group to receive relatively disempowered, mixed messages which capture your sweet spot and distance competencies with the rest of the areas where you can "get by".

Differentiate around your sweet spot

The astute client looks to you for leads and evidence of distinctive niches in which you're expert to assess degree of fit with their wants and needs.

You reinforce your case by being clear about where you're not the stand-out expert.

You further strengthen your position by framing those limitations positively.

Whether it's a one-on-one pitch for business, a full proposal, or formal tender, don't dilute your core claims of exceptional credentials and fit by hyperbolising the rest (where you are simply one-of-many).

Big questions

Being a stand-out professional and effective business development is about far more than getting work. It's about getting the right opportunities to service and satisfy the right clients.

Professionals need to ask these questions about each and every potential engagement:

- Is this the right client ?
- Is this the right matter ?
- Is it a strategic fit ?
- Can we do a good job ?
- Am I the right one for this file ?
- Is it likely to yield a satisfied client ?

Then, you need to make a clear "go/no go" decision.

If the answer to any question is "no", your answer should be "no go" this time.

Power your business development by focusing on the sweet spot.

About the author: *Linda M. Julian is a director of Julian Midwinter & Associates, strategic practice development consultants to the legal profession. Nearly three decades experience working with legal practices throughout Australia, Asia, and the Pacific, place her in a unique position to advise on strategic management and practical business development issues. Her down-to-earth, pragmatic approach to the critical business issues facing the profession, combined with creative ideas and pragmatic advice, make her a popular conference speaker, regular contributor to professional journals, and an in-demand consultant and advisor*