

CULTIVATING RELATIONSHIPS (1)



Even those who eventually mate for life start out as total strangers

Relationships build business - unfortunately they also take time to create. Usually, service businesses make relationships from networking, word-of-mouth and from reacting to media reports, but the problem is the ad-hoc nature and unpredictability of these methods. You can build the business you want faster if you systematically cultivate your market, pro-actively nurturing conversations with *each* decision-maker for *each* brand. By way of example, this approach recently prompted these comments from senior decision-makers for agency services: -

RAC: "You're now firmly in my pile of people to see. As long as you keep doing what you're doing you'll get there in the end". **A major energy company:** "We're thinking about reviewing based on the relationship we've developed with you. If we do review we'll certainly be in touch". **Coors:** "Have no fear, you are firmly on my radar". **Carlsberg Tetley:** "I know you well from the relationship we've built with you, culminating in your team coming in - I know where you are and what you do - I'll be in touch when something applicable comes up." **Diageo:** "I've noticed the great work you've been sending me over the last 12 months." **Citroen:** "Keep doing what you're doing and maybe one day it will be the right time to talk further."

The above comments reflect a carefully scheduled direct communications programme. While some are being cultivated, others are being harvested. Because systematic coverage is adopted, immediate opportunities may also be seized: -

A major e-business: "You sound great. Please stay in touch, as we're looking at trying out others in the next few months." **Heineken:** "From what you've said today, I really want to meet you." **A major games producer:** "Your process sounds great. We're currently thinking about testing out other disciplines."

The anchor point for an integrated and efficient prospect relationship building programme is an intelligent range of brand-building collateral, co-ordinated with the overall marketing plan. This

works to keep you front of mind and accurately positioned. The bedrock of this is 'background collateral', components of which are: -

Positioning Piece - You may believe you're well known by the target market already, but what for? And bearing in mind the churn rate of decision-makers - by whom? This piece replaces the generic brochure approach. It's a simple, bold execution that clearly positions the agency by stating what it is you stand for - that one thing you do better than anybody else.

Viewpoint/Opinion Pieces - Create leadership around the case set out in the positioning piece. They add explanation, depth, science and authority, so that over the series they present a compelling reason for you to be selected for pitch.

Premium Pieces - Are deployed to create access to the tough nuts at the strategically critical prospects and provide closing tools for other high value targets. They imaginatively but accurately support the positioning concept.

Case Studies - These prove the case set out by the pieces above, working in tandem with them as appropriate - remember The Rainmaker Survey clearly demonstrates that most prospects are only interested in cases relating to their own sector.

Overlaying this background schedule are tailored tactical communications to the relevant subsets. These exploit niche insights, specific competencies, new case studies, recent awards or published editorial. Tactical collateral can easily amplify investments in PR, advertising or conference attendance. The major components are: -

PR Clipping - For endorsement and content.

Insight Piece - Research-based insights provide very effective 'educational' hooks for prospects and reaffirm your authority for the chosen position.

In our next DIMENSION we'll examine schedule, timings, formats and quantities of these pieces, seeing how they all come together to cultivate prospect relationships more efficiently.