

CULTIVATING RELATIONSHIPS (2)



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

In Dimension 18, we viewed the components for a systematic programme designed to build relationships with your key prospects. We saw that while some relationships are being cultivated, others are harvested. At the same time, because a systematic approach is undertaken, immediate opportunities are pounced on rather than being missed. We also described the tasks for 'background' and 'tactical' collateral. This Dimension looks at the timing, quantities and the formats.

For the background schedule, we need to kick off with the positioning piece. This sets out the shop window, clearly and simply explaining what you do better than anyone else. It goes out once a year, because in addition to having to adjust messaging to react to market changes, in 12 months an amazing amount of job movement takes place (Pearlfinders' *DecisionMaker Moves* charted 1350 decision-maker job changes in 2004) and so you'll find you are in effect 'launching' your programme to many.

Viewpoints/opinion pieces, echoing the creative execution adopted for the positioning piece, progressively build the case for your services, with one going out at least every 2 months. If you're focusing right down on the most fertile audience, you'll have perhaps 50 to 100 organisations (depending on your model), with 2 to 10 decision-makers and influencers at each, to target. On top of this, your wider audience will include any group relations, existing clients and PR contacts etc. So a print-run of say 500 to 1000 for the positioning and subsequent viewpoint pieces is needed.

Tactical activity; PR pieces, latest case studies, research-led insights, awards, niche capabilities, seminar invites etc.; are timed to be out of phase with the background schedule, landing about a month apart. Ongoing gathering of feedback from conversations with prospects will reveal continual adjustments to keep your marketing relevant. This requires a flexible, modular collateral platform in hard and electronic format that may constantly evolve. All the pieces developed should then be stored on your website for download by prospects and your own prospecting team. The tactical pieces may go out in units of 1 to 20, simply done with

laser copy run outs, for speed. Having said that, they should reference the positioning concept design and should be 'bind-able' in packs featuring ONLY the most relevant information required for making your case. This tends to be a more effective way to approach the creds pack/brochure task. Premium pieces contain your smartest thinking, and if possible, your most lateral creative executions, tailored to the 10 – 20 toughest nuts you really need to penetrate. Cost per unit may be high, so identify the *real* tough nuts only. Overall then, the schedule may look something like this:

Jan:	Positioning Piece + cover letter
Feb:	Tactical
Mar:	Viewpoint 1 + cover
Apr:	Premium Piece / tactical
May:	Viewpoint 2 + cover
Jun:	Tactical
Jul:	Viewpoint 3 + cover
Aug:	Do not send out in August
Sep:	Viewpoint 4 + cover
Oct:	Tactical
Nov:	Viewpoint 5 + cover
Dec:	Tactical

Relationship building should integrate with seminars, conferences, PR, advertising initiatives etc. It's planned, NEVER ad-hoc and involves building a detailed picture of what's going on inside the prospect; corporate developments and people moves. It's also run on a database platform, to carefully record their feedback: what do they think of your agency? What do they think of your work and why?

Stop-start new business activity is a big waste of resources. Without nurturing, prospect relationships wither inside 3 months. You should be patient – they may not want to meet you because it's not the right time, but will want to progress matters when they've got a brief. We regularly hear from agencies regarding accounts landed 2 or more years after first contact. As good things are worth waiting for, no matter how long the cultivation process lasts, you must be consistent with your branding, continuous with your contact and remember like any other relationship - understanding, commitment, time and dialogue all play their parts before it becomes meaningful.