



WHY ARE WE HERE?

It's a big question - and one those using lead generation services find themselves asking from time to time. Dynamics 105 looks at the critical role of qualification and 'torchbearing' in new business meetings.

Rainmaker Consulting **New Business Dynamics 105**

5.1 | The Meeting:
Qualification and calibration

5.2 | Torchbearer:
Actor, vicar, doctor, politician,
scientist and stripper

5.3 | The Ideal:
The best blend for proactive new business generation

5.4 | The Follow-Up:
A sequence of actions that maintain momentum

THE MEETING

The 'meeting' is the basic currency of new business activity

In order to win high-value new business, at some point in the chain of events there has to be a new business meeting, which is attended by a 'torchbearer'. With New Business Dynamics 05, we look at the characteristics of a good torchbearer and examine what's required to achieve the best new business meeting for them to do their stuff. Companies that combine these two elements together manage the best 'proactive new business' outcomes. Everything revolves around the meeting. It's an opportunity to look someone in the eyes and establish chemistry. It offers the time to deal with sales objections and make reassurances. Far more questions may be asked, and in greater depth, than with that afforded by a telephone conversation, so cementing the fit between requirement and provision. As such, a great deal of value is placed on the opportunity for companies to meet face-to-face with their ideal sales prospects. Those that use or who are thinking of using lead generation techniques find themselves focusing on the 'meeting' as it plays such a pivotal role, but often at the expense of the necessary activity that precedes it and that which follows. It is oversight in these areas that typically gives rise to the question...

...**"why are we here?"**



The question 'why are we here' is easily solved through qualification so what makes a qualified meeting?

The criteria for qualification are never one-size-fits-all – they will always be unique to you - but there are three stages to the qualification process that must be covered in order to solve the question: 1) pre-qualification of the meeting 2) the meeting itself and 3) post qualification through the follow-up, aimed at driving the absolutely critical feature of 'next steps'. Good business development people are always looking for next steps, in order to ensure a flow of 'inevitable' actions from the initial identification of a lead to an organically developing client-relationship many months later. It's all about momentum.

Things you need to know: -

Pre-Qual:

- The decision-maker's credentials - are they truly a decision-maker?
- Where do they fit into the organisation - are there influencers, procurement personnel or ultimate decision-makers that need to be kept in the loop?
- Who else is involved and how? - we need to ascertain how to make them aware of our approach without offending the primary contact
- What's the brief for the meeting? - and as precise as possible with the details 100% confirmed
- What named agency support do they tend to use and how – retained/by project/off the roster?
- What characteristics and service features do they look for from an agency?
What is their culture/business attitude?

Meeting Qual:

- Reconfirm the pre-qual
- The budget - what is it and who holds it?
- What's the ultimate objective, i.e. what is all this really aimed at achieving? What will it lead to next for the organisation?
- Scope - how might this brief and then the relationship as a whole develop going forwards?
- Is there important background on the company and the market that will qualify this opportunity further?
- Is the meeting about building a relationship in order to get closer to the account/brief? If so, a speculative meeting is OK, but one person's qualified speculative meeting is another person's waste of time

Post-Qual:

- What are the next steps? What does the other party want you to do? Is there something that the other party would like to see as a further demonstration of commitment or competency?
- What do they think about what they saw and heard at the meeting? Is it compelling, or are there any gaps, and if so, what would they like to see that would fill them?
- Desk research to evaluate what you've heard from the prospect in terms of their take on things - are they being realistic? Can you provide some strategic advice now that might head them off the rocks and place you in the position of 'lead counsel' vs. the other agencies you're competing against?

If a new business campaign doesn't live up to expectations, poor qualification of what you want out of it can be to blame

A reason some companies ask themselves 'why are we here?' is because they expect new business on a plate, especially if this is how they're used to having it served. In this case, they have usually failed to consider the difference between proactively generated 'cold' and 'warm' leads. They may also have failed to invest enough time and thought in refining the message for cold prospecting purposes, which is very different from warm messaging, and they have failed to establish and then focus their resources on the most fertile targets for that message. If you want to use a lead generator and be successful at proactively generating cold new business opportunities you have to address these areas. You have to invest in adequate planning, in carefully targeting a compelling value-add at the right audience, and then diligent and continuous relationship building. This will get the dialogue to the point where the argument may then be delivered face-to-face by the torchbearer and chemistry may properly be established.

The uncertainty principle

The physics of very small things says that if you measure a thing, you need to interact with it and so you change it - so it's no longer the thing you wanted to measure. When companies measure new business results by meetings, they are distorting what should be their true objective, which is new client wins. An effective new business meeting happens because it's ready and it's right and it's logical, not because someone got sold into doing it. What do you really need - new clients or new business meetings? Some people like doing meetings because it gets them out the office and makes them look busy. Fortunately for the majority, the new business meeting isn't the objective, it's winning new clients. If your objective with a lead generation supplier is to get meetings, then qualification will go right out the window.

"I want at least 10 meetings a month".

TORCHBEARER

Chasing shadows

Too many new business development people chase shadows because the company has in effect asked them to. Insufficient qualification of the real objectives for a new business campaign clouds the point and leads to a non-specific desire for 'results' - for quotas to be fulfilled. As the company searches for something tangible by way of result on investment, the definition of what defines the quota may meander around quite a bit. The knee-jerk criterion is for value of new business won (which is of course purely the responsibility of the torchbearer/new business director – and not in the gift of the lead generator at all). As this realisation dawns, a target number of pitches may be substituted. But again, there is far too much outside the control of the lead generator to warrant this. Once this is recognised, people then look to measure results by: new business meetings, the number of phone calls or written communications, the numbers of decision-makers spoken to, the level of the decision-makers, the quantity of mailers dispatched, or any combination thereof. Not qualifying how you measure success realistically at the outset will be both expensive and wasteful.

When the torchbearers have asked themselves 'why are we here?' for around the third time, it puts pressure on their organisation to sort it out. This is then typically applied back on the lead generator in pursuit of better-qualified meetings. But as the definition of a qualified result may not have been properly established in initial planning, all they can do is increase the level of activity, hoping the numbers will provide a higher proportion of qualified meetings. At the same time, the torchbearer is now impatient for results and reluctant to miss out on anything, so they keep attending poorly qualified meetings. The end 'result' is that ineffective new business campaigns roll on for far too many months, and that everyone gets browned-off and ends up blaming each other. The point is that since what constitutes a speculative meeting of value is entirely subjective, what makes a qualified opportunity for one agency may be a complete waste of time for another.

It can be confusing - 'lead generators' create 'suspects' not 'leads'. The companies that use them make their own 'prospects' out of these 'suspects'.

A true 'prospect' can only be created face-to-face

When companies employ what they term lead generators, they're not in fact looking for 'leads' in the received sense of the word. This is something a data-broker would provide. More generally they think they're looking for new business conversions from 'warm prospects'. But good lead generators don't create warm prospects; in fact, they don't create 'prospects' at all. They're better termed 'suspect' makers. Because what they should be doing is meticulously pruning and qualifying lists from primary contact with decision-makers – and from this they create meetings for torchbearers to pitch the company's solutions. These represent the opportunities for companies to create true 'prospects' face-to-face, i.e. ones that now have a reasonable chance of conversion to new business.

Chemistry is the primary factor

It is essential that professional services companies either identify an effective torchbearer from their existing staff, or recruit one. This is not an area for cutting corners or for taking default positions on who makes the best torchbearer for an organisation. It remains true that people buy people. Our own research time and again confirms that chemistry is considered the primary factor for winning new business, especially in a competitive situation. However a good argument for why someone should buy one set of services over another still needs to be the foundation upon which chemistry may be built. In other words, the buyer may feel that supplicants are all saying something similar and that their value broadly equates, but come decision-time, it often boils down to "I like these guys more than the others - so we should work with them."



‘Just get us in front of people and we can do the rest!’

In the first few days of a new business programme, Rainmaker's account directors attend prospect meetings with clients to observe their approach first hand. Over the years we've developed insights into the techniques - personal or otherwise - that work best. And having attended a very large number of meetings, torchbearers display certain traits, which in our opinion fall into certain types...

And Torchbearers may behave like...



Actors

Craves an audience

With a self-belief that borders on a personality disorder, this is the one who says "just get me in front of people and I can do the rest". They improvise with the objections the audience throws at them with presence and charm. But they never ask enough questions – the thing is they know they're good and that's enough! They've memorised their lines well and can adjust the script, stretching the proposition accordingly. If the suspect is excited by passion and confidence they may fall for this one, but only if it's already warm. If it's proactive new business you're after this is the wrong torchbearer for the job - their experience of new business success is mostly from the warm scenarios (networked, pitch-invite or walk-up).

Vicars

Passion can be a good thing but may lead to dogmatism

And when that happens, some torchbearers stop listening to what people want and start telling them what they think they need instead - these are the vicars. They just can't comprehend why everyone doesn't immediately get the value of what they're selling. With the patience of saints they repeat their sermons again and again, getting quite upset when the lights don't automatically come on in people's eyes.



Doctors

Our favourite - but does require a bedside manner

This one is closest to best practice, in that they probe, listen, probe a little more, and then confirm back what's being told to them. Only then do they diagnose and look for understanding and acceptance from the suspect on this diagnosis. And then, not in the meeting but back in the office, they write out their prescription as a tailored proposal. It needn't be long - it might just be a teaser for their solution, but it's enough to demonstrate it's workable and based on understanding, enthusiasm and commitment. Without a bedside manner however, this torchbearer will fail to impress in a competitive situation, displaying a lack of empathy reminiscent of the 'scientist', and they may be plain outgunned by the flash promises of the politician.



Politicians

'I'm a winner, my company is a winner, and I know we can make you a winner too!'

Always on message and on brand, politicians expect to be picked because of their personal rank, the size and fame of their company and also because of their company's client list. As such they don't feel they need to sell, so they don't ask enough questions. They might feign attention, but they're not really interested in what the other party has to say. This one has a certain arrogance that may be reassuring to some larger clients. They're in the business of making big promises. Confident, authoritative, flattering – they evaluate the suspect and then tell them precisely what they think they want to hear – irrespective of whether they can fully deliver. Promises, promises – though with great charm and eloquence they make a positive first impression and do some follow-up too, mainly to check on their ratings. But where's the substance here? Do the suspects ever feel particularly special or different?

Scientists

Technically speaking, this one will pitch a good solution based on the theory

You'll get nuts and bolts, too much (boring) and often totally irrelevant detail, limited people skills and not enough inquiry into the specifics of the other party. There'll be a lot of assumption too, mixed with a slight hauteur. If you don't fit their model, there's really no point in you having got together with the scientist in the first place.



Strippers

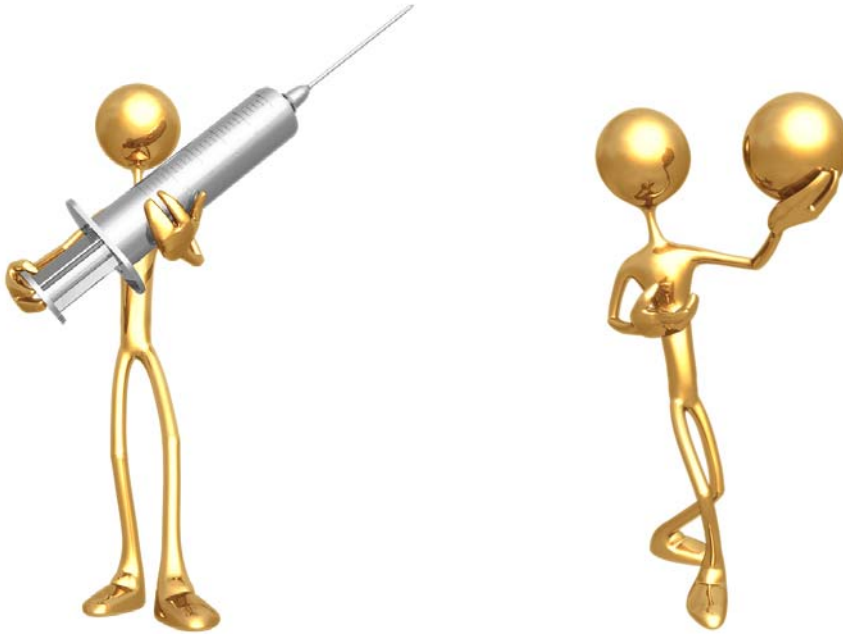
This one bares it all

Then the show's over and they go. Interaction is just not what they're trained to do. They show the prospect what they've got and that's likely to be the last we'll see of them unless the prospect themselves does the chasing. Don't expect any follow up activity from the stripper - they'll expect you to come back for more and assume you know where to find it if you want it.

THE IDEAL

Most torchbearers are a blend of these six types

But we think the most successful for proactive new business purposes are a mix of 75% doctor and 25% actor



Remember that desk and primary research would happen prior to setting up meetings. In this way, guesswork and assumptions are removed as circumstances are discussed directly with the decision-makers.

This is the order of things that ideally needs to happen: -

- 1. Research**
(the meeting pre-qual and arranging the meeting)
- 2. Matching**
(during the meeting: the face-to-face matching of supply and demand - why should they use you over others?)
- 3. Chemistry**
(also during the meeting: personal chemistry conducive to trust and doing business)

...but some torchbearer types work in

reverse...

1. **Chemistry**
2. **Matching**
3. **Research**

With the actor, the vicar and the politician, everything relies on a sort of 'one-way-chemistry'. Does the suspect like the torchbearer and/or find them impressive, and are they already warm to the agency brand? These torchbearers establish rapport, and then they zone-in on the argument for why the other party should use their company. Only after that, do they finally look around for the qualification for what they're asserting. They do this because they don't know how, or don't want to sell to cold prospects. Companies whose cold new business development is torchbearer-led, rather than lead generator-led, will usually have the worst experiences using lead generators internally and/or externally, because they're not very good at constructing a competitive case in a face-to-face meeting.

Cold prospect development is essentially falling down here, because these types of torchbearers don't generally do qualification, or like doing research, or invest much time in preparation – it's a bit of a chore. They shoot from the hip, but generally at big targets they can't miss. In essence, they're good at just being themselves. They probably won't understand why the suspect isn't eating out of their hand the way they usually do when they're warm.

To sum up: new business directors that want to have their cake and eat it should employ the doctor type, but these should possess some of the charm of the actor. In this way, they'll prosper from both warm and cold developed opportunities.

General rules for meetings: -

Gain permission to interview/probe

Confirm that the other side is prepared for, and expects, you'll want to find out and understand the issues they face in some depth - that they aren't just expecting your credentials. You'll also need to ensure they are broadly aware of your offer and expertise prior to the meeting. This will allow you time in the meeting to concentrate on understanding their issues, and afterwards to submit early thoughts, or an initial proposal to gain momentum.

Succinct and relevant explanations/cases

Use case study/proof points that relate only information about your business that matches what you've uncovered from the prospect so far.

Recap your basic credentials then shut up about yourself!

Literally a 1 minute preamble – “We work for people like (sexiest clients) A, B and C. This creates serious advantages for them enabling D, E and F” etc. Then “So tell us about you, what are the current issues you face?”

Prepare

You'd think it's obvious, but appropriate levels of research prior to the meeting will accelerate the discovery process, boost your credibility, and get the other side to open up. As well as the Internet, use candid notes from whoever arranged the meeting, and Pearlfinders archive reports.

For smaller companies forewarn on costs

Consider telegraphing ballpark costs in the meeting, to avoid wasting both parties' time. An understanding of your basic pricing model puts the prospect in a frame of mind to consider buying.

Return the contact to the prospecting programme if no progress is made

Ensure the 'process' gets loaded back onto the prospecting programme - don't start wishfully thinking about the business coming in - continue to prospect and remain in this frame of mind – stay hungry.

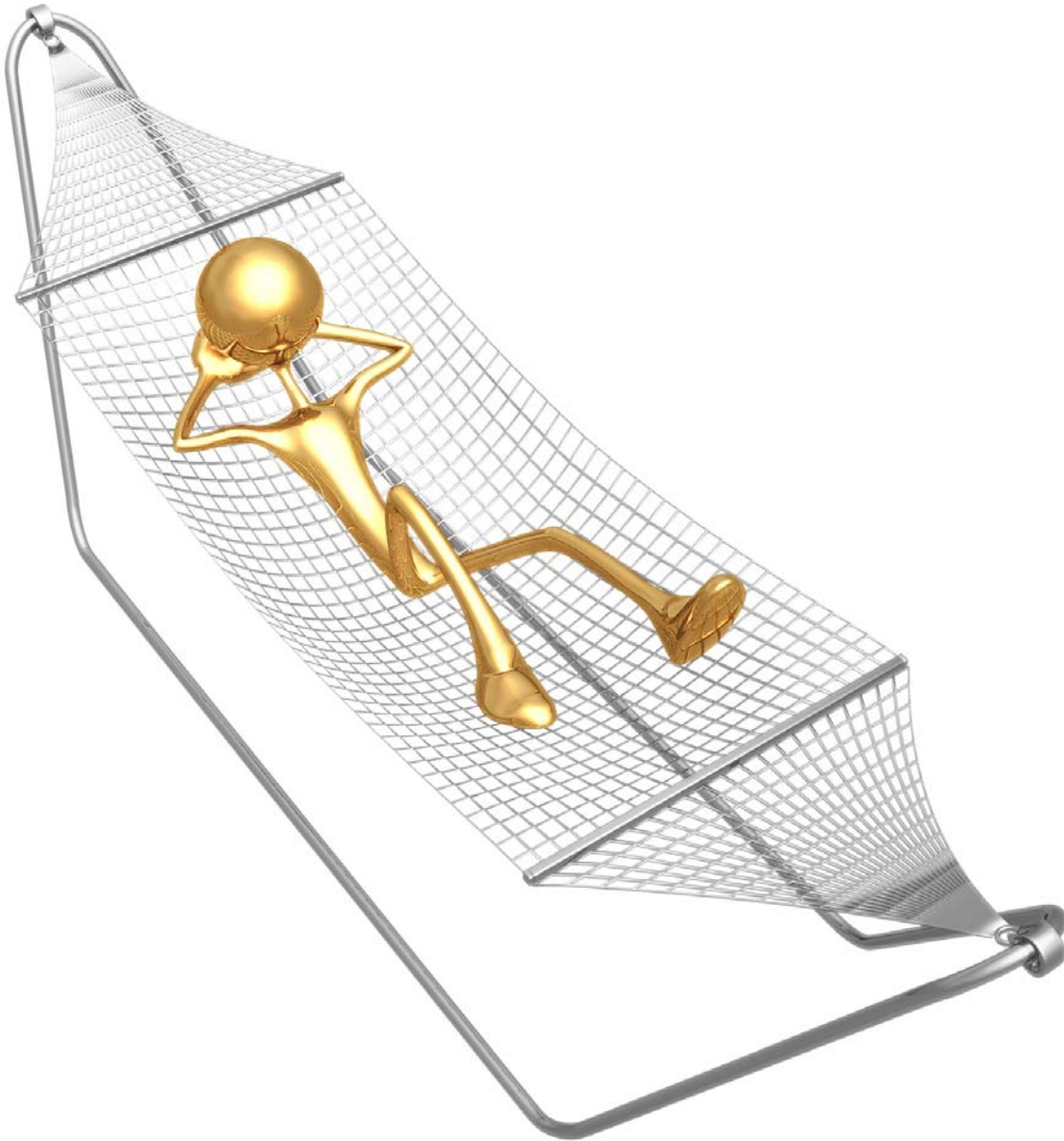
Look the part

Clients value trusted advisors, and trusted advisors have a certain look.

THE FOLLOW-UP

Never rest on your laurels

You did a brilliant meeting, so now you're tempted to kick back and wait for the inevitable response...



But people forget, they get distracted. The right follow-up to the meeting (no matter how well you thought it went - a subjective thing) is essential: -

The general rules: -

- **Send a 'thanks for your time' email within 24 hours. Outline briefly what you'll be doing next in the process and gently remind the prospect of anything they said they'd do**
- **Forward additional, supporting information within 2 working days**
- **Send an outline proposal, if one is called for, within one week**
- **Make a follow-up call to check they've received it 2 days later and to remind them of your 'voice'. Try and chat with them if appropriate**
- **If there's no immediate work to try and progress - stay in touch by forwarding relevant marketing collateral at 6 weekly intervals thereafter – and programme these into your diary/database**
- **Ensure there's momentum. If you did your targeting model right in planning – and the pre-qual was good, then you've met these people for a reason - you have to find a way to stay in touch with the organisation**

In conclusion

Effective proactive new business is about discipline, hard work, adequate resource and good technique. Those that can get it together here do well, those that can't - don't. Lastly, there are two client 'types' that are their own worst enemy in all of this. We can call them 'the Greedy and the Gullible'. If your torchbearer says 'just get me in front of people and I can do the rest' - be a little suspicious. But, if in addition your lead generator suggests your new business campaign should follow a set formula (e.g. I can get you 4 meetings a month, 30% of these will enable a proposal, you should convert 1 in 3 and so win 5 new clients per year - or something like that) you should start asking some serious questions, or standby for the one on the front cover, one that we'd rather save up for a star-lit night...

intelligentnewbusiness.com

timetobloom.co.uk

pearlfinders.com

The contributors to New Business Dynamics 105 are Rainmaker Consulting Ltd, Blossom and Pearlfinders Ltd. If you'd like to find out more about their services please call +44 (0)20 7837 1122 for more information.