

Building Alliances

Who knows who you want to do business with? Find 'em, meet 'em and see where there might be some common ground.

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Most small businesses build their client base one customer at a time. That is, they engage a sales or marketing campaign to hopefully attract a number of people into a pipeline so they can eventually sell them on a product or service. The company pushes out the message, the phone rings and the new prospect is in the proverbial pipeline.

This is called a one-to-one sales approach and obviously it works or companies wouldn't use it so often. But there's a much better way. It's a one-to-many approach called building alliances.

Here's how it works. First you ask and answer the question, "Who knows who I want to do business with?" You look out into the marketplace and identify other businesses – other than competitors – that market to and serve people that are the same people you would like to serve. Now you need to be very clear who your target market is first, of course – but once defined you will readily see there are many businesses targeting exactly the type of client you also want.

Next you pick up the phone and contact the owner or leader of that business and suggest that you have mutual interest that would be worthwhile to discuss. In your meeting you will want to accomplish three things:

- 1 – You want to understand who your prospective alliance business serves, confirm that their values and approach to business are consistent with yours and understand how they are unique or better than others that do the same thing.

2 – Next you want to learn about how your prospective alliance partner attracts business, what marketing methods do they use and how their approach aligns with or compliments yours.

3 – Finally you want to make sure your new prospective partner understands what you do and what differentiates you from your competition – hopefully proving that you are the best choice for them to collaborate with in future marketing efforts.

If everything lines up – its time to talk turkey. There are endless possibilities here but let me give you some examples from clients I have served over the years.

- Working with an automobile dealership, we challenged their sales people to find marketplace alliances to drive traffic to the showroom as opposed to waiting at the front with their noses pressed up against the glass. One sales pro made an alliance agreement with a successful home builder in the area where every time a new home was finished, when the builder delivered the keys to the new owner he would also mention there was a surprise in the garage. When the homeowner opened their new garage door they were pleasantly surprised by a brand new auto from the dealership. Inside was a note from the salesman inviting the homeowner to enjoy the car for a few days and to contact him to arrange its return. Of course the home builder looked like a hero and created quite a buzz and the auto salesman had a new prospect.
- A medical practice successfully stimulated new traffic without advertising by personally meeting other local physicians that practiced related but different disciplines. My client took the time to explain and promote his expertise to his colleagues, took the time to learn about their specialties and made agreements for mutual referrals.
- A real estate agent made a concerted effort to approach landscapers, home painters, carpet sales people and the like with the purpose of finding the “higher end” service providers in each category. The agent assembled a resource list of service providers to former and future clients and easily negotiated an agreement with each service company to feed her leads for homeowners that indicated that they might be thinking of a move.

- A chiropractor networked with area massage therapists and developed an obvious referral crossfire where his clients were encouraged to find a massage therapist that fit their liking while the doctor enjoyed regular referrals from therapists that knew their clients needed more than a back rub.

And the list goes on. Who knows who you want to do business with? Find 'em, meet 'em and see where there might be some common ground. The worst case is that your business will now be known by a fellow business owner – and who knows where that might go.

The best case is that you'll tap a one-to-many relationship that can drive a new, abundant stream of traffic to your business.



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