PDSA

Solutions for the Real World

PDSA Special Report

Attracting New Clients

Where Is Your Next Client Coming From?

If you are an independent consultant or contractor you always need to be thinking about where your next job is coming from. This is one of the hardest things any professional has to do. This special report offers ideas for building your business.

How to sell yourself

The biggest lie in marketing is this: A talented sales person can sell anything to anybody, anytime. Maybe there are a few snake charmers out there that have this skill, but they will never sell a second item to their customer (or get a second project), once the buyer realizes they've been had.

The truth is you must have 2 qualities to sell someone consistently:

1. You must be valuable
2. You must be present

You must be valuable

Buyers buy because you solve something, provide something, make them thinner, sexier, happier, more relaxed and on and on. You deliver something they want or need. As a developer, you must solve a problem for your client -- and, you must communicate what you solve in words they understand. It's no use being an incredible coder if your buyer doesn't perceive you can solve their problem.

You must be present

I've heard it said that "90% of life is just showing up." If you're going to sell someone, you need to be there when they finally decide to buy. Sounds simple, right? But most people fail, and fail miserably, at this.

If you know an application manager that frequently hires developers, you might chat with them at a conference to let them know you're valuable (you understand their problem and you know how to solve it). But it's unlikely that manager has a project for you at that moment.

That's because there are many circumstances, most outside your control, that must come together in order for you to get the project: budgets have to be approved, staff must be moved around, the client's company must make a strategic business choice, the economy must improve, and who knows what else? So the manager may not (in fact, most likely won't) have a project for you right now. Yet sooner or later, they will suddenly need a developer, and you want to be the first they think of.

You do that by consistently 'showing up'. Send an email pointing out a technique you learned recently that you think the managers team could use. Or phone with a question you thought they might help you on. Or mention at the conference about a project you just completed that sounds a lot like the one they're just starting. Any help you can provide, and with some regularity, puts you at the front of the line when an opportunity comes available.

Ask your Current Clients

The best place to get your next job is from your current clients. If you have done a good job for current client, ask them for a referral to another business (or division in their company). Don't be shy, just step up and ask them. Most people are happy to help you out when they have been happy with your work. As you are working for someone, you should always be on the lookout for a new project you can do for them or someone else in their organization. This means you need to be introducing yourself and getting to know others in the organization. If you are a somewhat shy developer, then this can be tough, but it is very necessary.

Become a Business Consultant

The days of being just a "developer" are almost over here in the United States. Instead it is much more important that you become a business consultant. That means that you know how to solve business problems using technology, and you are not just "another developer". Those developers that can talk business and not computer jargon are going to be the ones in the most demand here in the US. Coding is becoming a commodity and will continue to be outsourced off-shore. You want to be the one guiding the developer's off-shore and creating the business rules, and the architecture that they will use. This will make you more valuable and keep clients coming your way.

Create a Niche

If you have just completed a successful project for a client in the real estate business, chances are you learned quite a bit about that industry in order to have been successful. Take that knowledge and let other companies in that same industry know about your special skill. Most business owners value developers with knowledge in their industry. To prove you understand the industry, write a case study on what you did on that project that made it successful. Don't talk about the bits and bytes and the cool algorithms you created, talk about how it saved the company money, made them money, saved them time, etc. Talk about the business value you added to the business and how you can do the same thing for your new employer or client. In a short time you build up a collection of case studies in maybe a couple of different industries that can help you land niche jobs within companies in those industries.

Network with Complimentary Companies

Get to know companies in your area that have complimentary services to you. Talk with network people, DBA's, even delivery people. You never know who is talking to your future, potential clients! You need to actively let these people know that you are looking for work. Even when you are not, you need to let them know that you are. You also need to let them know about your skills. Take them to lunch and get to know them. Developing personal relationships and networks of friends is the best way to get new business.

Use Recruiting Firms

If you are an independent consultant with no employees and are just looking around for another job, recruiting firms can help you. Get to know several of them. Make sure you stay in good with them. That way, your next job could be as simple as making a phone call. If you are stable, reliable and do a good job, you will be on their "first call" list when a new job becomes available.

Attend User Groups

I know a lot of people think user groups are not worth it, but I find them extremely valuable in terms of networking. Again, the more people you know, the better your

chances are of someone thinking about you when a job comes up. Besides, some user groups have some great speakers come in, so you will probably learn something as well.

Become an Expert

It helps if you are looked at as an expert in a certain area. If you have any talent for speaking, writing, pod-casting, even blogging, you can use these to your advantage. When someone speaks, or shows up in print, people consider them an expert. This can go a long ways to increasing your chances of getting that next job. Even answering questions in on-line forums for other developers can sometimes help you be considered an expert. If you do this enough, you might even become an MVP, which is one more credential that will put you above a similar candidate in terms of getting a job.

Off the Wall Ideas

Sometimes you have to get creative and think "outside-the-box" to get noticed and get that next job. How about trying out one of the following scenarios next time you go after your next job.

1. "Give me a chance to prove how valuable I am going to be for you. I am willing to give you 8 hours for free over the next 2 weeks if you give me 80 hours of paid time to try me out. That is how confident I am that I am the best person for this job."
2. "I am so sure that I am the best person for this job, I will let you pay me less than my normal rate for the first week. This way you can see how valuable I am. I will start my base pay at $50/hour for the first 40 hours. Once you see how well I fit into your business, you will then pay my normal rate of $75/hour."

Summary

Getting new clients takes work. The best strategy is networking! You can never know enough people. That way you are showing up at opportunities, even when you aren't actually there. Your contacts will hear something and help you out. Try to do something that makes you stand out from the crowd, whether this is speaking at a user group, writing, or using one of the "off-the-wall" ideas presented here.

Contact Information

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