

Making the Ask

12 Tips for Business Development Success

You have spent countless business development hours and dollars developing relationships. You've put in the time to know anything and everything about the client and their project. So, now what? Make the ask!

Clients aren't mind readers. Unless you let a client know that you want to work with them, they may not automatically think of you for future projects. Making the ask is a hallmark of a confident, proactive, and professional business developer; it represents a pivotal moment in the client relationship.

Asking for a project shifts the ownership of the situation to the client and empowers them with the responsibility to say "yes" or to give a good reason for saying "no." Either way, you'll gain valuable insight with a successful close or learn what else the client may need before making the final decision about a project. Making the ask establishes an open, honest tone of "You have a need, I have a solution. Let's do business together."

Here are 12 tips to prepare you to make a successful ask:

1. Be proactive. Don't wait until an RFP has hit the street. As soon as you learn about a project, do the proper research, develop your project approach, formulate your team and then schedule a meeting with the client to discuss.
2. Choose the right time and place to talk to the client. Instead of cornering someone at a social gathering and giving them the hard sell, ask for their card and follow-up at a more appropriate time and place. The right time and place are about the client's right time and place, not what is convenient for you.
3. Treat every single client separately and distinctly.
4. Always use "we" instead of "I" when making an ask because "we" connotes that the ask is on behalf of the firm with the strength and backing of your organization.

ABOUT ELEVATE MARKETING ADVISORS

Elevate Marketing Advisors develops marketing and business development campaigns to invigorate your brand, differentiate your firm, and drive business to your bottom line so you stay focused on design and delivery of your discipline.

We are driven to help people and firms realize their beyond through relationship, advocacy, and an elevated client experience. We do this through a daily commitment to our guiding principles:

- Embrace Authenticity
- Reject Mediocrity
- Invest in Relationships
- Deliver with Intention
- Have Fun and Kick Ass!

12 Tips for Business Development Success, continued

5. Phrase your request in terms of the benefits to the client. Speak to “what’s in it for them.” Why will the client benefit from awarding your firm the project? If you’ve done a good job explaining the benefits of your service, you have every right to ask the prospect/client if they’d like the opportunity to enjoy those benefits by awarding you the project.
6. LISTEN to the issues and concerns of the client. Credible leaders are credible communicators. They use listening and probing skills to gain important information and to strengthen their bond with the client.
7. Give the client an appropriate amount of time to make an informed decision. Don’t pressure, manipulate, or overwhelm them in hopes of pressuring them to say “yes.” This tactic often backfires.
8. Accept the client’s answer whether they say “yes” or “no.” If you truly believe in what you’re selling, you’ll want to successfully meet the needs of as many prospects and clients as possible. Making the ask helps you do this by encountering concerns or objections to overcome, or by giving the client the right to say “no” and letting you move on to the next potential client.
9. Should they say “no,” consider proposing alternatives. For example, “if we are willing to sub civil engineering to someone you currently work with, would you be able to give us a project?”
10. Stay positive. If you are met with rejection, focus on what you have learned about the client or their project. And, consider that every ask you make is practice for the next.
11. In or lose, thank the client either way for their time and willingness to consider you. By treating them with respect and care they are more likely to say “yes” in the future.
12. Follow up. If you lose a project and the client is important to your firm or practice, look for opportunities to build a stronger relationship with the client, learn more about their needs, and better position for the next project.

Winning work in the A/E/C industry is all about relationships. And it often takes time and patience to build a new relationship and gain the trust and respect of potential clients. Just like building relationships in our personal lives takes practice (remember your first boyfriend/girlfriend and what all you learned from that relationship) so does building business relationships.

Use the techniques above to make the ask. Listen to the client and get educated about them and their needs. Communicate your experience and passion for the project. Ask the client for the work. And, show your appreciation when you are awarded the project.

EXERCISE: For the next week, keep track of the number of times a salesperson actually asks you for the sale when you make a purchase. Take note how they make the ask and how that played into your purchasing decision about the product or service.