

“The Extreme World of Selling Professional Services”

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What’s different?

In short...everything. From the rules that govern our activities to the outlandish expectations of the buyer, our selling paradigm has dramatically shifted. The once common belief that the words “professional services” granted immediate access to, and established credibility with, senior executives is now a faded memory. The term “Subject Matter Expert” is used so often and without merit that decision makers are not sure whether to take copious notes or wait for the punch line.

It is no wonder that those attempting to acquire new clients through traditional selling behaviors and techniques find a very skeptical audience.

What’s at stake?

In short...everything. From the existence of our businesses to our livelihoods and careers, never before has so much been on the line. Our investment in our profession and confidence in our ability to contribute to the greater good has been called into question. Even day-to-day internal management issues such as; resource planning, recruiting, and professional development are being tested. It seems that all that we do is in doubt, except, the necessity to find and keep good clients.

It is clear that we must transform our deep-rooted business development behaviors and hone our ability to communicate value or face being an “also-ran” in the ever expanding field of work groups that call themselves, professional services firms.

What do we know?

Some common observations...

- Professional services are perceived as commodity-like
- Creating differentiation has never been more difficult
- Prospective clients are not aware that they are receiving inferior service
- Discounting has become more important than ever
- Clients are using their buying power to demand more for less
- More time is required to educate decision makers

What can we do about it?

A lot...while our job requires special skills and talents to overcome the unique challenges of selling professional services, there are practices that can be applied to guide the client acquisition process.

Today's professional understands the need to apply science to selling and looks to a comprehensive architecture to maximize effectiveness and reduce the costs associated with winning new business. This architecture includes:

Assessment...a set of criteria that expose vulnerabilities, identify critical success factors, uncover areas of differentiation, and recognize where competitive advantage exists.

Approach...a strategy required to win. This is determined by an analysis of the client's life cycle and value chain combined with the findings of the assessment.

Landscape...an understanding of the politics of the target organization. This type of analysis reveals insights necessary to understand client decision making and align with the most relevant executives.

Actions...a set of logical and sequential steps that incorporate what we know about the target client with the tactics necessary to secure the engagement.

Summary

There has been so much written about the field of professional services selling, most of it directed at the "characteristics" of the rainmaker. It is only recently that attention has been given to the science behind new client acquisition and enabled the rank and file professional to more effectively identify, qualify, and pursue new business.

Professionals face unique challenges when selling; restrictions on what you can sell, when you can sell it, how much of it you can sell, etc... The demands of selling your service, and delivering your service, can be overwhelming, only the application of a logic based process can improve the outcome of your selling efforts.