

Small- to mid-market firms in the design and construction industry rarely operate from a

Marketing Concrete

Process-driven sales approach

By Elizabeth Allen



formalized approach to sales and marketing. Instead, they tend to focus on business development, which – at best – is usually loosely defined and difficult to forecast predictably. Led by the Rainmaker, most sales teams are strategically hamstrung, as typically the entire business development process is both driven by, and reliant upon, one very tired individual.

Principals need a new option. They require a process that will drive accountability between the strategic marketing plan and the day-to-day activities of the sales team. Without a process to follow that re-aligns the culture of the organization from the top down, it is difficult to sustain accountability when roles and responsibilities become more tightly defined.

Therefore, the key to a successful sales approach lies in addressing the following questions: How do we communicate with prospects? How do we organize our sales team? How do we document our progress? How do we evaluate our performance?

The methodology CODE™ – addresses these questions through the following four phases.

Phase One: Lead generation

The first phase, lead generation, focuses on the question: How do we effectively generate leads? Traditionally, the Rainmaker generates, qualifies and closes deals. Current market research indicates there is a better way.

Extensive interviews with end-users indicate they don't consider themselves to "be in the market" to review construction options until they've visited with their financier or consulted an architect. Thus, prospects are, in essence, invisible to general contractors until they are almost fully engaged with or through the pre-planning process. This places the general contractor in a commoditized position, being asked for a bid when the project is about to commence, and puts them at a disadvantage when attempting to

secure negotiated or design-build work. To overcome this challenge, firms should adopt the concept of proactive prospecting.

Proactive prospecting is an outbound communications effort, lead by junior-level talent that is geographically defined. This prospecting effort is supported by innovative jobsite signage designed to initiate creative communications and drive brand awareness with local business decision makers. The jobsite signage has been found to be a highly effective tool to achieve brand awareness when combined with actual prospecting contact calls.

When both tactics are synchronized, the effort cost-effectively identifies prospects when they are at the earliest points of awareness that they may build, renovate or relocate. The results of proactive prospecting generate real-time market intelligence, identifying very early stage design-build and negotiated work opportunities. Unlike the traditional effort lead by the principal of the firm, or the Rainmaker, a systematic sales approach can be initiated and managed by junior-level talent.

Once initial qualification efforts are made, the lead generated by junior-level talent transfers accordingly to a seasoned professional with more advanced technical skills who then further qualifies the prospect, leading them into a formal understanding of what disclosures must occur prior to the request for proposal.

A key observation associated with lead generation is there really are only two types of prospects: those who have purchased construction management services before and those who have not. Both types of prospects require structured interactions designed to uncover the pain of the prospect's past building experience, or to identify areas on the education curve required to engage effectively with the decision-making process.

To manage the prospect throughout the

long education or assessment curve, there must be a joint investment in highly structured meetings designed to create and maintain an

atmosphere of mutual trust and disclosure. In confirming the intent of the prospect at this juncture, the prospect successfully moves from phase one into phase two: lead qualification.

Phase Two: Lead qualification

Phase two initiates when the prospect is confirmed to be moving forward on some front and will take a first meeting to discuss further plans or intentions. From this point forward, interactions with the prospect are structured to explore and answer effectively the eight key questions associated with lead qualification. These questions are:

1. Is there a definitive timeline for the project, and is the financing in place?
2. Have we met and spent time with the decision maker?
3. Do we know the criteria that will be used to select a contractor partner or review the proposal?
4. Who is the competition?
5. Have we addressed the proprietary nature of the solution we will provide?
6. What are the prospect's assumptions about price and definitions of value?
7. What is the timeline for a decision to be made once a proposal is submitted?
8. What are the next steps to move the client through the pipeline, or should we remove them? What is the agenda for the next meeting?

Phases Three & Four: Sales and post-sales

In reviewing the answers to the prospect-qualification questions, it becomes an easier

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task to forecast more accurately the closure and completion of deals. This is clearly evidenced in phase three: the actual sales process. If phase three is properly supported by the execution of phases one and two, the preliminary work leading to the sales presentation will often result in an elimination of competition, disclosure of client budget and generalized agreement regarding the details of the formal proposal paperwork.

In phase four, post sales activity, the pro-

cess assumes that in adhering to a formalized approach, it is possible for a sales team to learn collectively and evaluate regularly its own performance for ongoing improvement. Much like safety and project management processes benefit from systematic approaches, a process-driven approach to business development reduces the pressure on the Rainmaker, creates a predictable customer pipeline and uniformly drives measurable sales team performance. **CM**

Elizabeth Allen passionately believes in the importance of a sustainable sales process for general contractors. For the past five years, she has made this issue the sole focus of her consulting practice, and in doing so, has pioneered a new sales and marketing methodology – CODE™. Recognized as “best practice” in a national peer network, she is currently working on a book summarizing her work. She can be reached at www.codeconstruct.com.