

5 Things You Must Do to Increase Law Firm Top-line Revenue in a Pandemic

By [LawVision](#) on May 28, 2020

The French have a saying: *“plus ça change, plus c’est la même chose”* Which roughly translated means (and pardon my French) *“The more things change, the more things stay the same.”*

The more I work with my Business Development clients through the COVID-19 crisis, the more I realize that despite some attitudes and fears, the fundamentals of business development have not changed one bit.

Business development, at its core, is simple. The fundamental elements are:

1. Know who you want to pursue
2. Make sure they know who you are
3. Create a systematic way to build trusting relationships
4. Hold substantive conversations to uncover needs
5. Match their needs to your capabilities

Today all of those elements still exist. If you want to build new business and increase top-line revenue, you still need to understand who you want to serve and how you can make sure they know about you. You still need to build better relationships with your contacts within that market and use tools like pipeline lists and business plans to make that effort systematic and intentional. You still need to have conversations about your targets’ current challenges, decide if you can help them, and offer your help. The only difference now is that the fundamentals are both more relevant and more comfortable to carry out.

1) Know Who You Want to Pursue

With the distractions we face today, having a focused target market is essential. Your target market is a group of people, not a practice area. The best target markets focus on a narrowly defined group of people who together constitute a community. The business developer’s job is to become a part of that community –this hasn’t changed. If anything, it has become more critical.

Immediate needs created by the current crisis may necessitate a pivot in the work you are doing, but your workload does not define your target market. Target market is all about who you want to pursue. Get clear on where you want to spend your time. If the crisis has opened up a new area of expertise or interest, then decide where you can make the most impact. Build thought leadership and relationships within a community of people that need that new expertise.

Whether you have a new target market or are still pursuing the same one, you need a set of goals for your pursuit of that market. Readjust your outlook given the state of the market, set a goal for the year, and create action items to support it. Don’t fret about the lack of clarity in the world; If conditions change, you can always re-set the goal later.

2) Make Sure They Know Who You Are

The need to make people aware of you and your capabilities has not changed. Keep in mind two basic principles to make it happen.

Leverage the missed conference

If you are like most of us and missed your big networking event for the year, deploy time tested tactics for connecting with people who were also unable to attend. Don't be afraid to reach out to other would-be attendees. They need the missed the benefits of the event as much as you and will appreciate the opportunity. Get the attendee list or list of speakers and connect with people you missed. Consider these possible approaches.

1. "I was planning on attending your breakout session but didn't get a chance, do you have a few minutes to discuss?"
2. "I'd planned on connecting with you at the event to talk about..., is that still of interest to you?"
3. "I was slated to speak on topic (X) and was looking forward to the dialogue. I'd like to get your views on this issue."

Don't squander good content

Of course, this is an excellent time to write articles, alerts, and posts. Webinars, Zoom calls, and increased social media contact are now commonplace. Most firms have become proficient at creating excellent content and advisories regarding the COVID-19 crisis. However, increased content output carries with it a considerable danger. Don't get caught thinking all that brilliance will automatically result in clients. Make sure you turn all "Awareness Activities" into "Relationship Activities." Prospects rarely read content and immediately decide to hire the author. Find a way to connect personally and turn a "one-to-many" activity into a "one-on-one" activity. Try the following:

1. "Our firm just posted a playbook for how to bring employees back to work. Two sections apply specifically to the nuances of manufacturing. Can we schedule some time to go through them together?"
2. "I am writing an article on how the Private Equity market will rebound. Would you be interested in co-authoring it with me?"
3. "I am finishing a post on COVID-19 testing in the workplace. I'd appreciate your feedback on it."
4. "I am presenting a webinar on PPP, could you join as a guest expert?"

3) Create a Systematic Way to Build Trusting Relationships

Effective business development rarely happens without an intentional, organized, systematic approach. The busy life of a lawyer often creates a haphazard, less useful method. The essential tools to combat this are a good list of people to pursue and a strong habit of referring to it often.

Work Your List

Never has this simple tool been more crucial than it is right now. Crisis brings change, and change brings movement. As new challenges arise, prospects will be looking for solutions. Being on your prospects' radars can't be overemphasized. Passive efforts will cause you to miss important people at a time when new challenges and needs appear daily. Sitting in an office hoping the phone will ring didn't work before the pandemic, and it won't help now. Work the list.

Build Rapport

The good news is, in many cases, it is easier to get in touch with people and build personal rapport. If you have had trouble in the past establishing a personal relationship, this is the time to do it. We are all tackling challenges we have not

encountered before. Empathizing with home-schooling, the search for certain home goods, being in close quarters with family, and trying to solve new challenges at work can build personal rapport and bring you together. Being a human goes a long way: “How is your family?” “Are you working from home?” “How is it affecting your personal life, professional life?” “What are you worried about?” “Are you still able to get goods to market?” “Do you anticipate layoffs?” “How has this affected morale?” The safe assumption right now is that everyone has current ongoing challenges, both immediate and personal. Empathizing with and finding ways to assist with those challenges shouldn’t be difficult.

Uncover Needs While Solving Problems

When working with clients on rush matters of high importance, don’t be afraid to ask an additional question about their world while you have them on the phone. A good best practice is to have at the ready a list of things you would like to know and ask one each time you are in a conversation. It is a mistake to wait until you’ve solved current problems before getting additional information about other issues and problems. Don’t wait for the crisis to be over. Ask them about them while you are helping them –no better time.

Work the Calendar

Don’t succumb to the inclination to postpone things indefinitely because no one knows what the future will hold. Get commitment for next steps and get it on the calendar. You can always reschedule later if need be. Keeping business moving forward is crucial, and if you don’t grab dates now, you will be deep into next year before you can execute on your good ideas.

4) Holding Substantive Conversations to Uncover Needs

For many people, the most challenging part of business development is asking for an audience with people they don’t know. The best way to overcome those fears and create practical approaches is by using the concept of a “value proposition.” A value proposition is a tool, an approach, or information of value that earns you the right to have a further and more substantive conversation. Examples include information about a new regulation, a tool to help a company audit its intellectual property, or a new deal structure that creates higher valuations. Value propositions help you get in the door to have a substantive and valuable conversation in a way that is comfortable and leads to a broader needs assessment.

Value Propositions are like gold when you have them, but it is challenging to create them. The best value propositions are created by anticipating industry and client needs and offering solutions. That process is much more comfortable in today’s environment where prospects are learning about new time-sensitive needs daily. Value propositions answer the question, “Why would I give you twenty minutes of my time?” If you know the industry and understand current challenges, prospects will welcome your assistance.

5) Matching Their Needs to your Capabilities

Business development is less about convincing someone to do what they aren’t predisposed to do and more about matching needs to capabilities. If there isn’t a match, it doesn’t mean you failed; often, it just means the opportunity wasn’t right. Right now, general offers to help or direction to the firm’s Covid-19 portal or content are not enough. Offers to help must be about a specific identified need. Consider approaching a client with three problems you think they might be facing. Confirm those problems exist and solicit the sharing of additional challenges. Offering well thought out solutions to specific identified issues always trumps general offers to help.

The friend who calls when you have a bad cold and asks you to please let him know if he can help in any way, though kind and well-meaning, is not nearly as helpful as the friend who just shows up at your door with a bottle of cold medicine and a pot of chicken soup. Identify actual needs and offer specific solutions

If you want to bring in business during a pandemic or any other time, stick to the fundamentals. Know your target market, create productive awareness activities, use tools to keep your efforts intentional and systematic, use value propositions to get an audience, discuss specific problems, and then match needs to capabilities. It worked before, it will work now, and it will work in whatever the new normal turns out to be.