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## The Power of Stories

A state trooper was driving through a rural area one day and as he passed by a farm, The farmer yelled “pig! pig!” at him while shaking a pitchfork. The trooper wasn’t the sensitive type. The trooper rolled down his window and yelled back, “Redneck! Redneck!” The trooper then hit a large pig crossing the road.

Stories stick with people. They are a perfect vehicle to send both factual and emotional messages to readers. Use stories frequently in your proposals. They lighten the load. They make your organization better and different.



## Easy to difficult: Focus business development activities

by **Dennis Schrag**

The marketplace for most professional services remains sluggish. Clients are taking a wait-and-see perspective. It is hard to find good projects. As you seek new projects and new clients, be careful. Focus your time, energy and efforts to get the most bang for the buck.

The last few months I have been busy conducting reputation studies for a variety of organizations. I telephone interview my client organizations’ customers, past customers and prospects. The results of a reputation study are astonishing – sometimes frightening – and always powerfully helpful. One of the questions I usually ask is, “What services do you wish XYZ offered?” I am always startled

at the number of respondents who list services that my client organization currently does offer.

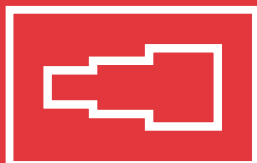
It is easy for clients to think of your organization as a municipal streets organization, when that is the primary service they purchase. Think of this as “customer myopia.” Have you cross-sold your total collection of services to all those who only buy one category of service? My friends, that is low-hanging fruit just sitting there.

There is a simple, logical and little-used hierarchy for selling professional services. Selling trust-based services is never easy. But once trust is established, why not get the most from your efforts?

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INSIGHTS...IN SIGHT

## Here are the four gradations of selling professional services from easiest to most difficult.

**Low Hanging Fruit:** Targets or goals that are easily achievable and which do not require a lot of extra effort.

Sell exiting customers additional services you provide. Cross-selling. Why is this the easiest sale? The client knows a few people in your organization. If you performed well on the past projects, you have their trust. Make them aware of the depth of services you offer. Visit with them and discover their needs. Then ask to submit a proposal, or better, a contract addendum for a new-to-them service.

Sellers are wise to focus time and energy on clients where trust is fertile.

**The Jugglers' Finesses:** Selling new-to-your organization services to existing clients. The next-hardest transaction to complete is selling a new-to-the-firm service offering to an existing client. The good news is there is a trusting relationship. The bad news is your organization does not have a track record. (If the person/people performing the new service have a track record with some other organization, let prospects know.) If the new service is highly connected to the organization's current service offerings, it is much easier. For example, your organization has provided interior design for some time. You are now expanding to business consulting services with the same client base.

**Hit, Field and Pitch Selling:** Selling well-established services to new clients. If your organization has a wholesome reputation and accomplished technical people, selling your well known services to new clients is the next logical step. It is not easy, but it can be done. It takes time and persistence. All the client needs is trust in your

organization. Use testimony from similar customer types to help build the trust. Show photographs of work done with previous clients. Show client satisfaction data. Provide helpful information and become a trusted professional friend. In time you can win them over.

**The P.T. Barnum Sale Effect.** The Barnum Effect is a term that is used in psychology. It is the tendency for people to accept very general or vague characterizations of themselves and take them to be accurate. P. T. Barnum believed that a good circus had "a little something for everybody." Selling new services to new clients has to be in this category of psychosis.

I discovered a well-established regional consulting engineering firm was opening a new office in a state some distance way. Let's just say, it was a Midwestern firm (can you say "snow?") opening an office in the sunshine belt (can you say "golf?") Whatever the motivation, I was amazed at the decision.

Not only was the new office in an area where there was considerable competition, the new office was not an engineering firm. It was offering exclusively architectural services. New office. New location. New service. No established connectivity. No trust-based client relationships.

Realistically, unless your checkbook is loaded and you have years and years to invest, this plan needs some serious quality assurance/quality control.

A related quote from Barnum comes to mind: "There's a sucker born every minute."

Start with the low hanging fruit. Start right now.

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