

A Career in Business Development

At Blossom we specialise in recruiting and training business development professionals for careers in advertising, PR, design and marketing agencies. Though all of our recruits have the right skills and talent, some of the most successful have no previous experience in business development. This is a short guide to what is involved, what to expect and the qualities sought after.

1. Business Development

The term 'business development' applies to four areas which marketing agencies may use in order to grow: -

New business
Client development
Change and innovation
Corporate transactions

At Blossom we focus on the first, 'new business', which is devoted to the sales and marketing aspects. In the marketing agency world the terms 'new business' and 'business development' are frequently interchangeable. Likewise 'new business' and 'sales' may be interchangeable - the former, generally in relation to business-to-business (client) transactions, and the latter, business to consumer (or customer transactions).

2. New Business

Most things in our lives are a product of transactions. 'Sales people' are the instigators of commercial transactions and without them successful businesses would not exist. Although a peculiar middle-class snobbery still exists about the career that being in 'sales' represents, those in the know - the entrepreneurs and the elite in our society - covet people with the ability to sell and especially those that can sell intelligently.

Being a new business developer certainly puts you in the commercial front line. You are a breadwinner, a catalyst for exploration and change, the voice of your company, and one of the most important assets for the future of your company.

New business professionals know how to research, know how to engage with buyers effectively and to manage relationships towards ever-greater value for all parties. For the vast majority, these abilities need to be trained.

3. The Qualities Required

A good new business developer requires a balance of qualities, which are unusual to find. If you do not feel you have most of these, then a career in new business is possibly not for you.

Enthusiastic	Empathetic
Resilient	Mentally 'balanced'
Energetic	A good listener
Articulate	Intelligent
High stamina	Sensitive
Persistent	Curious
Enjoy conversation	Well-read
Confident with the phone	Conscientious
A fast worker	Great attention to detail
Target-driven	Creative
Likes to work under pressure	Imaginative

Having said that, intelligent new business technique will certainly not work for people that are: -

Aggressive
Bullish
Egotistical
Self-centred
Have a high sense of entitlement / self-worth
Don't like to work too hard

4. What Do New Business Professionals Say?

"The core functional elements of my role day-to-day are to build a prospect list using my very carefully sculpted database, email potential new clients well tailored emails, then follow these up with a phone call. I contribute to strategy, attend regular internal meetings and make CALLS – lots of calls."

The idea of 'lots of calls' may unnerve you or alternatively it may excite you. Your job will be to energetically reach out to the market for the services of the agency that you work for. You must introduce your business to its potential buyers, find out what their requirements are now and ongoing and then keep in touch with them to maintain a good relationships and ensure your agency is always front of mind with them. There are many techniques to do this and tools to make this easy and don't worry - this is what we train people in every day.

Someone else told us - "While business development can be perceived as 'salesy' due to the fact we work to targets the reality is it's extremely consultative – it is sales but it's sales with a very nice twist."

And another said - "The stereotype of a sales role is when you are pitching a product, something physical. New business is different; it's about professional services, pitching people and talent, building relationships and selling something more intangible but with high worth. With new business there is bigger scope. The sell is creative, innovative and free flowing, it has no real structure – it needs an intelligent approach."

In any new business role there will always be targets, but not huge volumes in the sense of having to pick up the phone 100 times a day. That's not it at all. You need to make a lot of calls but they will be tailored and make a lot of sense to the person on the other end of the phone - or reading the email. New business has science. So you must be someone who is "functional and really quite uptight about accuracy and managing information, as this is at the centre of everything you do".

But beyond the critical business of reaching a quantity and quality with the dialogue you get underway and manage with the market, there's a lot more to being a new business professional...

Insight

Firstly there's insight – you will have access to a number of intelligence tools. For example every morning you will look at your Pearlfinders business information screen and search for relevant insights and news developments at the companies you target, to act upon each day. Perhaps you notice that a major American fashion brand is looking to get more involved in music activity and that they've brought in a new marketing manager. You pull off the contact details and call the buyer right there and then, who confirms they've just started in the job, and they ask you to send them some taster info on your agency ahead of a more in-depth chat that they're happy to diarise for next week. It's a bit frustrating you can't make progress with this right now, as the agency you work for has superb experience connecting bands with global brands. But you draft a tailored email and get it out straight away, as you want to be first to get his attention. It looks like a perfect medium-term new business lead for you.

Teamwork

Secondly there's your wider team. You've spoken with 3 or 4 great prospects but they've asked you some challenging questions that you couldn't answer straight away. You need the opinion of your peers as to how to tip the balance on your next call, confident that if the response to each is relevant, you will set-up some great face-to-face meeting opportunities. So... you arrange a 30-minute meeting with your new business director, client services director and the creative director. You explain the challenges and ask them how best to respond, talk through some previous projects / work the agency has done that fits the bill. Then using this insight you are well prepared to go back and set up a meeting with the prospect.

Marketing

Thirdly there's marketing. You may have 250+ companies on your target list, but talking to all of them all the time is impossible, so you will take a lead in deploying regular and relevant marketing pieces to this audience. You need new case studies, a great piece of direct mail and a new 'thought piece'. You will centralise this activity, and book time in with the creative team to get these built –perhaps you tried the first draft at writing the copy, but with the wider teams support you get this done, on time and on budget. Then there's the website, you notice that the blog section hasn't been updated for a while, so get straight on the case whilst also uploading two brand spanking new cases studies – you also spot some copy needs adjusting on the site and also need to insert some 'bumps' from other pages to highlight them. Finally your CEO pops in and debriefs the company on a great new client win (courtesy of the meeting you set-up with them 6-months ago) so you send a first draft press release to the team and once approved get straight on the phone to the marketing press to get some coverage.

5. A Day In The Life

We asked a new business professional who we really rate, to keep a diary for one day and tell us what they did:

Do 1 hour on call backs to the primary targets the team agreed on from earlier conversations. I call our senior account director about our experience in the Scandinavian countries and she gives me some great ammunition to take straight back to the prospect. Arrange a meeting between the prospect (the Marketing Director of a well-known fashion retail brand), our NBD [New Business Director] and the Senior Account Director for 2 week's time.

The MD drops in to confirm our agency is acquiring a social media business, and so I take the details and type them up into the press template, which I get out to all of our contacts straight away. I'm optimistic this will get us some good coverage as live events can combine brilliantly with digital media.

Do another hour following up the utilities mailer - have two superb conversations, one based on the Pearlfinders information from earlier and tell the NBD straightaway who wants to pull together some tailored insights that we have on utility activity around last year's FA Cup final.

Spend the last hour creating 2 emails to reinforce what I covered on the phone, not pushy, just informative, punchy and check carefully for grammar and typos as I think people that sell communications ought to show they're good at it themselves (especially if it's my agency's brand on the line).

But the day's not quite over, I rally two account execs, the intern and the receptionist around the table to stuff 100 of the new positioning piece we met about last month and which has just come back from the printers. This is going to the primary prospects, our clients, and our own network. I'm going to give it 4 days to 'settle' before doing follow-up call, starting with 2 of our clients that have huge organisations with parts that we haven't yet won work with and which our account directors don't have time to sell us to. I'll warm things up and then the account directors can take it from there.

OK. With the mailers, all stuffed, labelled and franked - I check emails - get off a twitter on the corporate page about the new social media arm - with what I feel is dry humour and head to the new bar on the corner of the market to meet the account guys and the new person who's just started.

At the end of the diary day they added for us: You must "think on your feet and not take 'no' as a definitive answer". You must be "resilient, not easily offended, open minded." You must be "adaptable and optimistic - never give up when you're on a bad run." "You will have that conversation with someone that makes you smile, the one that gets you that brief or that meeting. You can't replicate that feeling."

6. In Conclusion

At Blossom we feel well qualified to offer these pointers. We are the talent and training arm of the Intelligent New Business Group, which is the largest and most successful new business support services group in the UK. This means: -

- We're new business experts - we've advised the boards of over 200 marketing and creative agencies of all sizes and service category on new business best practice
- We've placed hundreds of first class new business professionals into the marketing services industry
- We are widely respected as a centre of excellence for training new business professionals at all levels

Being a new business professional is not easy but it is rewarding, and if you are prepared to put in the hard work in the first few years, it represents a fast track to senior positions in marketing agencies.

If this sounds like you, then drop me an email: james.cudd@timetobloom.co.uk.