

Biz Dev During a Crisis: Focus on Empathy and Retooling Your Plan

Considering that you may be experiencing a significant slowdown in your caseload and client work, you knew it was just a matter of time before we gave you a friendly reminder that *now* is the time to pull out your marketing and [business development plan](#), dust it off and put some action items into place.

But first, let's talk about your relationships. A successful business development plan always has a focus on client relationship and retention. Proven tools for a client service and retention plan include keeping clients informed, showing responsiveness, being transparent about costs and other proactive communications. All of those are great practices when you have active matters underway and work to complete for your clients, but what about now, in such a strange and difficult time? What can you do to keep your communication lines open with your clients and prospects in the current COVID-19 crisis?

Connecting with Clients During Crisis

Now is the time to simply and genuinely reach out to clients, and check in with them and their state of well-being. This can be as simple as saying, "I was thinking about you and wanted to ask how you're doing." Do not focus on how to position yourself to ask for more or new business or to set up a meeting. Instead, ask if there is anything you can do to be of help – from one human being to another. [Empathize with them](#), and remind them you're in this together. Your concern, sincerity and sentiments will go a long way.

There are many ways you can pass along positivity, hope and helpfulness when reaching out to your clients in a time like this. If you have spent any time on social media recently, you've probably seen a lot of light-hearted and [humorous content](#) – anything from amusing memes to people finding creative ways to pass the time (e.g., a current favorite pick-me-up is [Quarantine Challenge 2K20](#)). You probably have also seen encouraging and inspirational messages, or offers like a small business owner of a yoga studio conducting free online classes. The point is to let these examples influence your approach when you choose to connect with your contacts.

You can also consider any of the following when checking in with your clients:

- Send a handful of healthy recipes. (Better yet, send them a video of you making a recipe, along with directions.)
- Send "comfort food" recipes, including "how to's" for the younger family members.
- Send digital coupons or gift cards for home delivery services.
- Offer to conduct a reading, writing or art class for your clients who are homeschooling to give them a break or change of pace.
- No need to start a formal book club – just share your recommendations and favorite



Evyann O'Keefe

Senior Vice President
Marketing & Business
Development
347.213.7656
eokeefe@jaffepr.com

authors.

- Invite clients to a virtual coffee meeting ... and of course, when appropriate, virtual happy hours via video conferencing such as Zoom or Facetime.
- Send photos of your “co-workers” to remind them we’re all in this together. This includes your dog lounging on the couch, cat sitting on your keyboard or kids “working” at a desk.
- And of course, share the fun, inspirational, creative and quirky content that you’re finding on social media. Seriously, what we’ve been seeing surpasses Super Bowl commercials!

The point is not to make your “wellness check” about the work you’re doing for the client or providing a business-related guide, industry news or the steps your firm is taking to handle this crisis. (We’re sure those communications have already gone out.) Save all that for a separate communication. Instead, [connect with your clients on a human, kind and empathetic level.](#)

“Appreciation can make a day, even changes a life. Your willingness to put it into words is all that is necessary.”

~ Margaret Cousins

About Your Marketing Plan ... It’s All about the “Pivot”



Of course, with the slowdown that many are experiencing, now is the time to re-examine your marketing and business development plan. Although we’re a little more than 90 days into the year, your plan will surely have experienced some setbacks in light of all that’s happening, such as delays or reasons to change your course of action. With that in mind, start thinking about what will have to be in place when we eventually begin to return to normal. What can you do now to set up productive business development successes when it’s business as usual again?

Once everyone is back in the office, business development initiatives will probably take the backburner to client service and business operations. Therefore, take this downtime to examine (or create) your business development priorities for the remainder of 2020, and yes – look beyond into 2021 as well. We might be losing face-to-face interactions with others right now, but you're not necessarily losing the opportunity to connect and be thought leaders.

Prioritizing your time and efforts has always been the focus of business development planning, but these priorities will be extraordinarily important when we have moved past this pandemic. We previously shared "[5 Ways to Cut the Clutter in Your Marketing](#)" plan, and each of those tips should be reviewed and considered. These tips can be incorporated into your modified plan, including prioritizing your efforts and outreach, pushing any efforts that aren't fruitful or are too-overachieving down to the bottom of your plan, and eliminating initiatives that give you dread or are redundant. The key is to be flexible about how your plan will unfold in this constantly evolving climate. Keep your plan moving forward, and results will happen.

Here are some easy things to do to "spring clean" your business development plan.

- List and evaluate your professional development organizations. Do you feel that they are a good use of your time, energy and money? Do you enjoy the time spent, and do you feel like you get any support or learn anything from them? Are potential clients or referral sources in regular attendance?
- Consider the speaking engagements that were canceled as a result of conferences being postponed, rescheduled or canceled. Convert your presentations into webinars, client alerts, articles or blog posts (really, any form of thought leadership you feel most comfortable with), and distribute to your network for free.
- Consider reconnecting with people you have lost touch with. Find that list of contacts you've been meaning to reach out to, and work with your marketing team to come up with a strategy to reconnect.
- Commit to an amount of time you're going to spend on business development. (Be honest and realistic.) The COVID-19 crisis has made us shift (pivot!) and reprioritize how we spend our time while isolating, but what does that mean for us after this is over? Imagine what your schedule will look like when it's back to business as usual, and make sure your modified plan fits with your availability and schedule.
- Focus on your strengths! As you spend more time away from the traditional office environment, what activities, work, etc., do you find yourself missing? Would you like to speak to large groups, or would you rather network with a smaller group of like-minded people? There is no right or wrong answer; just the right answer for you. Make sure your modified plan supports your strengths and not your weaknesses.

The Coronavirus pandemic will create unknown and long-lasting impacts not only on business, but also on how we treat each other as humans. It is important to remember that every person is affected by this crisis, and that the landscape will look different when we emerge. Focus now on creating lasting relationships based on empathy and understanding that will leave the door open for additional and new business opportunities in the future that are based on trust and respect. We will never take daily, face-to-face interactions with colleagues, friends and family for granted after this is all over. Let's make sure to connect with those in the present, even if it's not possible in person right

now.

Are you looking for guidance or help with your business development plan? Reach out to [Evyan O'Keefe](mailto:eokeefe@jaffepr.com) at eokeefe@jaffepr.com or [Glennie Green](mailto:ggreen@jaffepr.com) at ggreen@jaffepr.com for assistance.