

Sales & Marketing 101
FOR ACCOUNTANTS

Finding new clients



A practical guide to finding new clients.

When giving companies strategic advice or helping with initiatives to save money, improve productivity or boost revenue, accountants always come top of the list of the most trusted business advisers. But they don't always follow best practise within their own firms.

As accountants face stiff competition from online accountancy offerings and traditional firms, it is a good time to assess their approach to finding new clients. Often processes are manual and there is a lack of integration of systems, which means the new business effort isn't as effective as it could be.

Embracing new technology, having the right processes in place and a dedicated business development team can help accountancy practices to finetune their new business approach and increase revenue. CRM is a concept many accountants might not have even considered, but it can be extremely effective at helping accountants find new clients, develop their pipeline, manage their new business teams and ultimately grow their bottom line.

THE ADVANTAGES *of an evolved approach*



There needs to be an evolution in how accountants approach new business and there are some clear advantages to assessing their approach to see where improvements can be made.

For a start, a dedicated team can be instrumental in taking new business to the next level. Even if the budget doesn't stretch to a whole new team, having people within the practice who are tasked with new business activities and a senior partner to lead the effort can really help.

A practice wide new business strategy underpinned by technology is the next step. It's no good if one partner is working off one spreadsheet, the next partner off a different document and marketing using yet another application. A single platform will give the practice visibility of the pipeline and enable it to gauge how successful the new business effort is and how different people within the team are performing.

CRM can do just that and give the firm an overview of the new business effort. Ultimately it will help accountants to find new clients and increase the bottom line. There are three critical steps on the CRM journey.



Step one:

BUILDING A NEW BUSINESS PROCESS

Selling is a combination of art and science, whether you are selling cars or accountancy services. The art is the flair of the accountancy business development person at building relationships and communicating the benefits of what they are selling. The science is the actual process – how the knowledge is captured and shared and how the insight from the data in the system can help the new business team do their job more effectively.

There are some key principles for defining a robust sales process.

- **New business cycle and the pipeline:** a clearly defined business development cycle and pipeline is important to understand at what stage of the cycle a prospect is. A common language to manage leads and opportunities is useful – when you talk about a 'lead being qualified' or a 'deal closing,' everyone understands at what stage of the cycle it is.
- **The customer journey:** the process should reflect the different stages the prospect is going through before they become a customer. The qualification process, for example, and judging if the prospective client's requirements match those of the practice. If they do, it leads to a more effective engagement.
- **Integrating business development and marketing:** an effective marketing function will ensure the right messaging and tools are provided at the right stage to move prospects through the accountancy sales cycle. Business development should test the leads are the right 'shape' – a standard measurement is BANTS (budget, authority, needs, time, size) – if the right budget is available, if the discussion is at the right level, if requirements match, if the timeframe is manageable and if the size of the prospect is realistic. Once all boxes are ticked, the sales team gets a 'BANTS qualified' lead.
- **Best practice:** building best practice into the new business process is important. For example, good new business people know they have to speak to the prospect's financial director or procurement team as a part of qualifying the lead. Locking this knowledge into the process means everyone does the same. Sharing best practice will raise the sales game across the practice.
- **Embedding the process in CRM:** using a sales and marketing funnel – a process for ensuring leads move from one stage to another through the sales cycle – it's possible to embed that process in the CRM system and use the knowledge to underpin the sales execution process. For example, different grades of leads can be color coded, or flags can be used to highlight different actions.



Step two:

CREATING EFFECTIVE NEW BUSINESS LEADERSHIP IN ACCOUNTANCY FIRMS

Having a senior partner who heads up the new business effort is key, to provide guidance to the team, help them develop their pipelines and close new business deals. It is a continuous cycle of improvement, where the team learns from each other, from their results and the knowledge is fed back into the process. CRM can underpin all of this. New business leaders should prioritize:

- **Managing pipeline, understanding metrics and forecasting:** CRM can be used to analyze what is happening across the pipeline – the conversion rate, how long deals take, the win and loss ratio and deals according to what stage they are at in the cycle, or what member of the team owns it. This type of management information is valuable – for example, if the conversion rate is 30%, the sales director can forecast how much of next quarter's pipeline might convert.
- **Improving new business team performance:** using CRM, sales leaders can look at the performance of individual sales people. From their activity levels, meeting reports, deal planning and conversion rates the new business director can see what is and isn't working. For example, Helen might have a lower number of sales but a high conversion rate, so she might need help to manage her workload. Tony might be top of the leader board, but his conversion rate isn't great, so he might need training. Activity management provides an important insight as it highlights good performers within the team and identifies areas for improvement.
- **Aligning new business and marketing:** the sales leader can set lead generation targets for marketing and define what a marketing qualified lead looks like - for example, they might want to target CFOs at manufacturing companies of 250 plus employees. And they can set pipeline targets and ask marketing to source opportunities of a certain value. This can help to define the marketing strategy and ensure marketing is engaging in sales driven behavior. The sales director can also set lead generation targets for marketing and new business teams. For example, if the conversion rate is 33%, the average deal is \$10,000 and the average sales cycle is three months, there needs to be \$1.5million of qualified leads next quarter in order to convert \$500,000 of business, so marketing and sales need to generate 150 new opportunities to fill the pipeline. The sales director might decide to provide coaching to boost the conversion rate to 40% - this could mean \$600,000 of business in Q4 from the same size pipeline.



Step three:

ENABLING YOUR NEW BUSINESS TEAMS

Given that at many accountancy practices, the people who work within the new business team also have their day jobs, CRM is a tool to help empower them and make them more effective. Here are a few ways in which CRM can help sales team performance:

- **Prioritization:** if an accountancy practice is using an excel spreadsheet to track the pipeline and log their activity, it won't be intuitive enough to help teams prioritize their work load. CRM uses dash boards and color coding to create a daily do list. The activity list can be looked at in the context of how much it is worth – it can use scoring to say which leads should be followed up, depending on their shape and size. It can also flag up neglected opportunities. All of this can be used to track if the sales team is on top of its activities or not.
- **Website intelligence:** combining website tracking data with CRM information in real time can be really valuable to new business teams. It can tell you who is on the website, what company they are from and what they are looking at – it might be a financial director from a manufacturing company the firm has already spoken to in the past and is a 'warm' lead. So it can give insight into prospects who might be in the pipeline already, as well as new prospects.
- **Maximizing resource and time:** CRM can make new business teams more efficient –for example, if someone is meeting a prospect in Southampton, the system can flag up any other prospects who are in a certain radius that might be worth meeting too. CRM can also track references and match case studies to prospects without them having to search for it. It makes them more efficient.
- **Managing deals:** CRM can also help the new business team embed best practice when it comes to looking at individual deals – for example, if they have a particular lead but they haven't spoken to the financial director, the system could flag this as a risk as it will be a priority activity.



IN SUMMARY



Accountancy practises are maxed out when it comes to business as usual and servicing clients. So developing a robust process for finding new clients and using technology and CRM to improve the productivity and efficiency of the new business team is key. It will give the management team practice-wide insight into the new business effort and ultimately, it will help to increase top line revenue and grow the business. What's not to love?

