Building relationships is key to a successful partnership between law firms and our business partners.

Tips for Building Relationships

Here are some suggestions for ways business partners should approach decision makers in the legal industry:

- Learn all you can about the firm. Not all law firms are the same. Visit the firm's website before your meeting. Is it a large firm? Does it have multiple offices? What are their areas of practice? What makes them unique? It is impressive when you already know a little about the firm, so the administrator does not need to spend time talking about the "general information." This information will allow you to use your valuable time to talk in detail about what you perceive the firm's needs to be and how your product or service can address those needs.

- It's always best to have an appointment, rather than dropping by with the hope or expectation that the administrator is available.

- Three "P's" – Don't Push; be Patient; and be Prepared

- Make a good first impression. For example, a "10-minute" meeting is set up for you to come in and introduce yourself and your company. You show up with four people and take the "tag team" approach. It was unexpected, and now the administrator may need to find a conference room. Plus, it is quite clearly going to be longer than a 10-minute meeting. If you feel it is important to have others with you, whether it is the initial meeting or subsequent meetings, make those needs known to the administrator prior to arrival and schedule the appropriate amount of time. Surprises aren't usually a good idea.

- Approach each contact, each meeting, each phone call, each negotiation, and each proposal as a partnership. Strive to develop long-term relationships – don't look for the quick sale.

- Ask administrators what they would like your next step to be - and respect that. Maybe the product or service you have is really a "hot item" right now, or perhaps there are a couple other things more pressing for the next two to three months. Ask how often the administrator would like you to follow up with additional courtesy calls to check on the status of a proposal or see if the firm is now ready to look more seriously at your product/service. Confirm the preferred method of communication (phone, e-mail, mail). There are so many efficient ways to keep in touch – find out which works best.

- Continue communications with the administrator until you have been asked to contact someone else within the firm. In other words, don't go over the initial contact's head, including calling the managing partner to inquire on the status.

- Most law firms make decisions very slowly, and therefore, don't expect immediate decisions. If you have a "sale of the century," but need a decision within 24 hours or even two weeks, it won't happen. Give us some time.

- Talk about the trends you are seeing in the legal industry. Administrators look to you to educate them about industry trends from the business partner's perspective.

- Highlight service advantages and the accessibility to you or another person in your company who can resolve issues should they come up. Administrators like to know they will be taken care of once the deal is done and that they are not just left to a toll-free service number and the infamous voicemail nightmares.

- Concentrate on highlighting your company's virtues and strong points and offer examples of how other professional organizations have benefited from your product or service.

- Complete all items in the Request for Proposal (RFP). Incomplete responses create additional follow-up and waste time in the decision-making process. Instead, make sure you've addressed every question/item listed.

- Be direct, be honest, and make sure your initial proposal is your best deal. It is extremely frustrating to hear that you "could have" reduced the price, if we had asked. When you have our business, be proactive to make sure we are always getting the best deal. Don't wait for us to find out that we can save money from a competitor, and then have you lower our price.

- Offer references from other law firms. The legal administrative community is large and vast, and yet it is very close and tight-knit. Administrators are your very best references. Be assured that when you provide top-quality products or services or go the extra mile, they will all know about it. Everyone benefits!

- Even if you are not selected as a business partner for a firm this time, there are many reasons influencing the decision. Maintaining a positive relationship after an unsuccessful negotiation is vital to both parties' success. The administrator may change firms or may become disappointed with the original selection. If there was a positive post-negotiation relationship, the administrator could come to you in the future. And, if you maintain a positive relationship in spite of a lost bid, the administrator may still become a good referral for you when you call upon other administrators.

- Do what you say you are going to do.

- Provide exemplary customer service before, during and after the purchasing decision.

Exhibitor Conference Tips

One of the main benefits of sponsorship at the Copper level and higher is our ALA**MN** Conference. Here are a few exhibitor tips:

- Be visible and approachable during exhibit time. If possible, stand during the exhibit hall time. Smile and make eye contact. Wait until a break to check your email.
- Please remember that attendees want to visit as many exhibitors as possible during the limited exhibition time so don't try to keep them too long at your booth.
- Think in terms of providing information – not about making a sale. Start building the relationship.
- Let us know what's new in your industry.
- Ask the attendee if they would like your literature now or if they would prefer having it mailed or emailed to them after the Conference.
- Don't be hurt if an attendee does not stop at your table. Not all attendees will need your product/services.
- It's not just about **new** business … it's about maintaining relationships with your existing customers and clients. Spend some time visiting with your current customers.
- Ask your current customers and clients to make introductions to other attendees.
- Participate in social functions with the attendees – it's a great way to build relationships.
- Please remember that we have been out of the office for a day, and we need to get caught up, so try to wait a couple of days before calling us.
- DO follow-up on your leads, though. Take notes on the business cards or note cards. If someone is interested in your product or service, contact them within two weeks (or when they have suggested you contact them).
- Have Fun!!!

Please visit the ALA**MN** website (www.ala-mn.org) for other valuable information, including Frequently Asked Questions. The ALA website also offers a significant amount of helpful information for business partners (http://alanet.org/resourceforvendors/welcome.aspx)