

the Zweig letter

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New markets need business development

> Establishing a presence and creating credibility in a new market requires a comprehensive business development approach.

Until recently, **Simmons & White, Inc.** (West Palm Beach, FL), a 16-person site development/civil engineering, traffic engineering, sustainable design, construction services, and expert testimony firm, didn't have a significant business development program.

The firm worked primarily with private clients and obtained most of its work from referrals. Project delivery remained the primary focus. Recently, firm leaders realized that to support growth and sustainability in the current economy, they needed to boost their business development efforts.

"We knew we needed to create a business development culture within the firm and to keep business development a continuous effort and ongoing commitment," says Vice President Gregory Bolen.

A comprehensive business development plan ensued; geared at offering new services to current clients and expanding into new markets.

Get someone in charge

The first step Simmons & White took was hiring a seasoned marketing director "to help guide this process," Bolen says.

The process included a 15-question list that helped the firm identify goals and guide a business development plan. Questions varied from "What are our goals?" to "How much should (or must) we invest to reach or exceed our expected results? Which tactical activities are likely to provide the best results?" and "How do we set up a process to make sure we nurture demand within our target markets so

we gain the most effectiveness over the long term for our investments in marketing and sales?"

Simmons & White also created and expanded a number of initiatives within the firm, including:

- Using the project delivery process to expand relationships and gather vital client information
- Strategies for strengthening relationships with clients
- Networking
- Maximizing return on investment (ROI) from conference and trade shows
- Talking less, asking more, and listening
- Deciding what strategies and tactics yield the highest ROI

Simmons & White evaluates its proposals and initiatives by measuring how effectively the message gets across to targets and checking them against the firm's position statement to find out whether the firm is matching its strengths with market needs and how it compares with the competition.

Bolen says the firm asks, for example, "Do we have clearly agreed-upon target markets? Have we completed the research on market needs? Have we created a target market database of contacts? Do we know who the key players and stakeholders are? Do we understand what the top firms in the target market are doing and do we think we build on their successful model of 'think outside the box?' and Have we set realistic and challenging goals? Will the strategies brainstormed accomplish the goals set? Are they realistic for staff to accomplish? Have we developed an adequate budget to make it all happen? Are we staying abreast of the marketplace?"

Producing results

"Since implementing our plan, we have increased our growth in the public sector and have won multiple contracts just within the past six months," Simmons & White's Bolen says. "We measure our effectiveness by tracking the results, our win/loss rates of proposals, using a go/no-go procedure for decisions, tracking hits to our web site after a direct marketing effort is executed, tracking which potential clients are now clients, etc., and utilizing our client relationship management (CRM) and other systems effectively."—

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