

How to Align Biz Dev and Marketing for Professional Services



People who work in business development and people who work in marketing both want the same thing: to grow the company.

But getting everyone working cohesively is a challenge (that's putting it mildly!).

The problem is typically twofold: One, people on each side of the biz dev/marketing divide don't understand how the other side of the equation works. Two, the handoff from marketing to biz dev is often fumbled or occurs at the wrong time.

Biz dev at a lot of services businesses is often different from product companies; often, there are no true "salespeople" and the responsibility for growing the firm falls to partners or other principals as part of their job. This works because it is typically a very consultative sale and having subject matter experts engage with prospects is the best way to create the necessary trusted relationship with those prospects. But it can also create obstacles—not having full-time salespeople almost automatically means you're spending less time on growing revenue.

Here is a simplified approach to create alignment between these two vital functions:

Make marketing and biz dev equals

In many organizations, business development automatically assumes leadership. We get that—sales brings in the clients and puts up the numbers. But, in a healthy organization, marketing is **not** subservient to sales. Make marketing an equal partner.



How to take action:

Create unified KPIs for marketing and biz dev. Instead of having goals like lead generation for marketing or closed sales for biz dev, create a shared goal like revenue growth for the combined team.

Agree on your firm's approach

Where do you want to take the firm, and what is the agreed-upon path to get there? What type of marketing approach are you going to take? A lot of firms rely upon networking and referrals—is that still working for you, or have you outgrown that approach? If so, how can you embrace a new approach? Marketing should lead this decision-making process, but with significant input from others to understand what an ideal client is and where to find them.



How to take action:

This is largely a function of the biz dev and marketing leaders having a relationship based on mutual respect and commitment to the same goals. Firm leadership needs to be sure these folks are playing nice. Additionally, determining your firm's approach should be informed by the people who are on the marketing and biz-dev frontlines. Be sure to get input from the people interacting with prospects and clients.

Agree on the goals and definitions

Your plan for the year does not have to be super intricate, but it does need to be established and agreed upon. Map backward from the revenue goal to create the plan that will get you there. What does that mean in terms of new client logos? How many leads does it take to translate into one new client? What constitutes a Marketing Qualified Lead (MQL)? What constitutes a Sales Qualified Lead (SQL)? Where do the leads come from? Once you're on the same page and have common definitions and goals, you can work together.



How to take action:

Schedule a goal-setting workshop to brainstorm and prioritize goals, establish ownership and identify interdependencies, and identify timelines and resource allocation.

Understand each others' tactics

If the marketing leader determines that the focus should be thought leadership and brand building, the business development leader must understand that that means the focus is on nurturing prospects over time. If firm leadership agrees to this, you can't start pounding the table in the middle of the year because things are not happening fast enough.



How to take action:

Encourage quarterly cross-training and shadowing among your marketing and biz dev teams—including leadership. This approach leads to greater understanding of pain points and opportunities, and humanizes teammates that may not often walk in their colleagues' shoes.

Gather feedback and communicate

Talk to each other. Be honest. Explain when things are not working, and why you think that is. Stop doing things that don't work. If it isn't working but you feel it will if you give it more time, stand up for that idea. Don't gaslight your teammates. Don't point fingers.



How to take action:

Establish closed-loop reporting that enables biz dev to report back to marketing on the quality of leads, which allows marketing to adjust tactics based on input from prospects.



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