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Hector Garcia • Dec. 19, 2018



Your small business clients are uniquely suited to help your practice grow; in fact, they are very likely your most innovative thinkers who are most open to new ideas. However, due to limited finances and staffing, they may be more in need of your services than some of your larger clients.

Their potential for growth is a big part of the potential for your own firm's growth,

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In fact, authoritative content on your site is another key part of your clients' perceptions of you. They expect your firm to come with a strong digital presence – more than just some canned blog — with professional and unique content on your site they can use to grow their businesses.

Another part of your pre-engagement impression is specialization. Is your market vertical, drilling down into a single niche, or horizontal and able to satisfy different clients across multiple industries? You bring your niche markets to every new engagement. Your small business clients appreciate and recognize that expertise – or they might not be working with you in the first place.

#2: Understand Your Value. Even the clients you know well will rarely give you a numerical representation of value, so a conversation can help discover it.

Clients should know as early as possible in the new engagement the value you can bring. I even advocate charging for the initial interview. Credit the client afterwards if he or she agrees to the project or to hire your practice, but never do the needs assessments for free.

Next comes the value conversation. Research your client's company – even the ones you think you know well – to understand what they value and how you can provide that value. People buy based on an expectation of a result, or your “why.” Spell it out for your client: “We will only undertake this engagement if we can agree, to our mutual satisfaction, that the value we are creating is greater than the price we are charging you. Is that acceptable?”

Other details determine the value you bring to the table. If the owner has a sales tax question, how quickly does he expect an answer and how do they want that answer? How important is it that your firm guarantee results? Does the client want a specific list of services, or is he looking for broad or dynamic scope of work?

Next comes presenting your various service options during the proposal presentation

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#3: Solidify Your Performance. While performing work, interactions and touch points offer many chances to demonstrate your value. Perhaps you need to train or educate the client's staff, or explain financial statements or reports. How often does the client have questions? How much detail does he or she need in answers or tax opinions? Will the client require your firm to document project notes, procedures or instructions, or create a manual at the end of the project? Every one of these steps demonstrates your value.

#4: Quantify Your Results. Again, clients don't give a numerical representation of value, but you *can* get a sense of the economic and perhaps emotional value derived from your work. For example, ask or determine the cost to the client of *not* solving the issue at hand. How much did your client pay in the past for similar services? If it's less, what did he or she not get before now?

A big part of results value is to guarantee your work with objectively measurable results. For example, what is your firm achieving and can you measure it? Will your firm refund the client if the results are not achieved? Have you given the client a value guarantee where he or she can adjust the bill based on the perceived value, even after the project is completed and even if they're wrong?

#5: Tail Value. After completing the project or work, you have to present the enduring value of your service. One way to keep the work going is to help the client make sound business decisions, and move beyond the typical accounting firm to become a valued and trusted advisor. Consistent communications and client surveys are another follow-up tool, but actual personal contact such as a phone call can be much more effective in helping you stand out.

Demonstrating your value isn't mysterious, so go with your instincts. If the shoe were on the other foot, would you hire you and your firm?

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