

Reproduced from

MASSACHUSETTS
LAWYERS WEEKLY
www.masslawyersweekly.com

December 19, 2005

Increase new business
by re-connecting with past clients and colleagues
By James Hassett

When you want to build new business, it is always easiest and fastest to start with people who already know you. Your current clients should come first. After that, the next place to look is past clients and colleagues. According to research quoted in *The Rainmaker's Toolkit* by Harry Mills, it's much easier to sell to a lost client (the chances of success are 1 in 3) than to sell to a new prospect (the chances of success are 1 in 8).

How to re-connect. Make a quick list of people you used to work with. Most can probably be located with a few phone calls or five minutes on the internet. Then all you have to do is find time to pick up the phone or send an email.

If the situation feels awkward, look for a natural reason to re-connect or an excuse to resume contact, such as:

1. If you see an article about their company or industry, mail a copy with a note.
2. Search the web for something about your contact or a fact of mutual interest, then email a link.
3. Use a more personal reminder, such as a change at a restaurant where you used to meet for lunch.
4. Try to arrange a meeting the next time you attend a conference in their city.
5. Ask for advice, if you're hiring a printer or a graphic designer or another vendor.
6. Invite them to a talk you're giving.
7. Send an announcement and a personal note about something they would find interesting about your firm, such as the promotion of an associate they worked with.
8. Ask if they would serve as a reference.
9. Offer them a referral for new business.
10. Make up your own excuse.

Follow up. As soon as you re-establish contact, follow up quickly to move the relationship forward. Provide a simple next step by asking a question that is easy to answer, such as “Did you see this article?” Don’t ask about business opportunities or referrals until you feel comfortable that the relationship has been re-established. If the person does not respond to your email or message, you may be tempted to quit there. But maybe your email never got there as a result of a spam filter. Or maybe your voice mail arrived when they were very busy, and got lost. There is always a time to give up on trying to contact a past client, but it is never after a single try.

Take the first step today. Make a list of five ex-clients and colleagues you’ve lost touch with. Prioritize them, define an action item for each, set some deadlines, and pick up the phone. Most people will be glad to hear from you. The hardest part is that first step.

James Hassett has over 20 years of experience as a consultant and business development coach, and a Ph.D. in Psychology from Harvard. This article was adapted from his new book, *The Law Firm Business Development Workbook*.