Must-Do Tips No 28: Understanding The Client's Business

At a recent professional marketing seminar, the crucial ability to understand the dynamics of a client's business received major prominence. In a nutshell, the knack of providing competition-beating insights for clients into their businesses is a crucial component in any effective CRM programme (and indeed, for prospects to whom we are selling). Unfortunately, the recent example of a leading firm's relationship partner who did not even know the headquarters location of a major international client (a direct cause of losing the said client's business) shows where a lot of professional firms appear on the scale of excellence in this matter.

We can talk of the *mechanics* and the *motivation* for investing time in achieving such understanding. Motivation may come from the individual, the firm's reward and other systems, or from the pressure exerted by change and its agents. The mechanics of achievement are a bit more straightforward. This month, we have three ways to help improve the excellence of client business understanding for your professionals.

Tip 1 - factory visits (vs. the lure of the office)

It never ceases to amaze this writer how few professionals at all levels make it out of the office doors - well, maybe once a year to go for lunch. Bemoaning pressure of fees and work, they beaver away with nary a thought to the potential of getting off their butts and investing time in seeing the client in his or her own environment, making new contacts, learning more about how the client's business ticks , etc. A radical thought here - next time, why not have the meeting at the client's premises?

Tip 2 - play the public domain

Over the years, we have developed a simple but telling measure of how tuned a firm is to client focus of this type. We call it the Annual Report Index. Quite simply, we ask how many of the 'team' have read the latest Report and Accounts of their key client - you know, just to show that they grasp the basics. Responses do vary (occasionally, we have come across some very high percentages). But generally, the average does not rise above 30%. The best CRM practitioners take advantage of the extensive market and organisational data available to all of us - of which the R&A is only one small part.

Tip 3 - education, education...

Hidden in one of the possible reasons for the statistic in Tip 2 is a fundamental truth that a lot of firms MUST address. Many professionals do not read the R&A, because *they do not understand its contents*.

Members of the law and other professional specialisms (even accountants, who can understand the figures but not the rest!) invest little or no time in CPD to upgrade their business understanding and skills. Let alone apply them. Oh dear.

People Scope offers workshop programmes and consulting advice to professional firms on the above issue and more generally on Client Care and Client Relationship Management - for more information, hit 'Reply' and type **CRM**. For more general information about what we do, go to www.peoplescope.com.

We welcome feedback from you on what you think about "Must-Do Tips". If you like it hit 'Reply' and tell us specifically what you like. If there is a topic or issue that you would like us to cover, what is it? And if there's something that annoys, tell us too! We want to improve.

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Best regards.

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