

Winning business directly

According to PCG's latest annual membership and satisfaction survey, commissioned in May 2004, 11% of respondents procured all of their work and a further 35% most of their work through agencies. This contrasted sharply with only 4% who got all or most of their projects through direct marketing, with referrals and renewals from existing clients faring somewhere between the two extremes.

Some freelance contractors and consultants recognise their shortcomings in this area, and one frequently hears the comment, "I'm not used to selling myself; I'm just very good at what I do." For this reason, many are happy to continue working with and relying upon agencies to find them clients and contracts. Many others, however, are keen to find a way of obtaining work directly as a means to having more control of their work stream and direct contact with the client.

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Networking

As mentioned in the previous issue of *Freelancing Matters*, word-of-mouth or referral marketing can be a wonderful source of new business, particularly for small businesses. If this is to be a cornerstone of your marketing strategy, it may be well worth considering joining a formal networking organisation so that you meet owner managers and senior decision-makers from a mix of different business types. After all, if you are an IT contractor, for example, there may be limits to the opportunities passed on to you by fellow IT contractors.

Most of the networking groups, such as BNI, BRE and Refer-on, operate in a very structured way, requiring you to attend weekly meetings, and setting the expectation of regular lead generation by all members. They welcome visitors, so it may be worth using this to see if this approach is appropriate for you.

Cold calling

Another method is to cold call potential clients. Unless done with a modicum of smart thinking, cold calling can, however, be soul destroying. In every corporate organisation, there is inevitably an army of gatekeepers whose sole function in life, it would seem, is to prevent you from speaking with anybody who might be able to influence your chance of a commercial opportunity there.

The first place to start is to think if you know anybody in the organisation or have a contact that might know someone. Failing this, you should ask to speak with someone in the department where you want to work. You should have a prepared introduction, including a very brief overview of your company and the skills you offer. You may be referred to several different people before you get to speak with the right person who actually controls the budget that would fund you.

You may be routed to the HR department at some point in this process, and if this happens, you should avoid discussing your objectives with them, and try to find the budget holder. It will almost certainly take several calls and a large dose of persistence, but in the end, if the company needs your skills and you handle the calls well, you stand a chance of succeeding.

The image that you project over the phone is very important; you should be polite, focused and articulate. You should also keep track of the calls that you make, so that you start to build up a profile of the organisation and that you are prepared if any of the people you have telephoned return your call.

Testimonial from a new member



My name is Gualtiero Chiaia and I recently joined PCG, soon after the incorporation of my company, Prisma Quantitative Finance Limited.

Forming a new company can be a very daunting task. A fellow contractor working in the financial/IT sector in London referred me to the PCG website.

Even before joining the group, I used the PCG website to collect a wealth of useful information, including a downloadable guide on all the different aspects involved in freelancing. Becoming a member was a very easy choice, and soon after the company was formed, this was one of the first expenses on

Website

Only 7% of respondents to PCG's survey declared that they got some of their work from their websites, with no less than 71% saying that none of their work came from their websites.

Perhaps the overriding factor here is the relatively small proportion of freelance contractors who have good, commercial websites. Certainly, many who do have noted a huge shift in the balance of new project enquiries, away from agencies to enquiries via their websites.

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This is clearly an area in which many freelance contractors would do well to invest. An effective website should have the following attributes:

- ◆ Proper domain name - .co.uk or .com, for example
- ◆ An introduction that clearly explains your company's proposition
- ◆ Content-rich pages and dynamic content
- ◆ Easy to navigate, quick to load
- ◆ Optimised for a good search engine ranking
- ◆ Listing in one or more of the major directories
- ◆ A response mechanism and email opt-in
- ◆ Easy to understand, jargon-free content

the company's accounts.

Not only does PCG offer legal protection in dealing with possible investigations by the Inland Revenue to all members, with the option of low-cost extra insurances to cover the legal costs, but also provides fundamental information on all the different freelancing angles.

As a member, I soon joined the forum hosted on their site and posted a query on matters related to IR35. I was positively surprised by the many replies and encouragement received by other members. Not only were their suggestions invaluable, but I also felt reassured by having a professional body standing behind me.

From the very first days, I felt that joining PCG was definitively money well spent.

Gualtiero Chiaia