



Can We Effectively Build Relationships During a Pandemic?

By **Amanda Karp**, VP, Client Solutions

I have spent almost 20 years delivering client solutions. Creating deep relationships has been the cornerstone and most satisfying of experiences on my professional journey. In-person meetings have always been my preferred method to strengthen partnerships and connect with industry colleagues and clients. So how do we approach client relationship management and overall new business development in a time where the ability to make an in-person connection is extremely limited and many purchasing budgets have been reduced?

Not Communicating is Communicating

One thing is clear; not communicating because it is too challenging or because you feel there will be no sales results now is not an option if you want your existing relationships or future relationships to outlast Covid-19.

In these unusual times, one might believe that it is almost inappropriate to reach out to build new relationships. I'm afraid I have to disagree. If you can provide value without adding pressure or creating the expectation of business, then connections are more important and expected than ever.

Are you not participating in virtual industry events because it is just not the same? It is certainly not the same, yet I have had some interesting interactions with people who are determined to make the most of our "new normal." Several have led to new and unexpected opportunities. If you are not at virtual events connecting – there are plenty of people happy to talk to your clients and prospects in your place. The quality of speaker content is high and the topics are contextual, allowing you to also pick up useful nuggets and relevant success stories by thought leaders that you can share with your relationships.

The Pace has Changed

Be aware of new circumstances, and do not be in a rush. People have new work and home-life challenges they are juggling, and many are working different hours – learn about them. Many companies have downsized, colleagues are taking on additional responsibilities, and there are pressures to make up for lost revenue. Understanding what matters most today and having patience for tomorrow allows people to feel supported yet not pressured. Taking an aggressive sales approach is never well-received at the best of times, but adding pressure when people perhaps have increased stresses could lead to doors being permanently closed to you.

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What is Partnership – Really, Truly?

Challenging times give us pause to reflect on what true partnership really means. It is a term that can be loosely thrown around in sales interactions during the relatively good times, but its true meaning is often not revealed until things get tough. There is a substantial difference between a client with whom you have a good relationship each time they give you business, and between a client for whom you consider not just the next project but the years ahead. A client and for whom you are always seeking to add value, even when you are not invoicing.

Connections That Are Meaningful Today

Human connection is golden. If you can bridge the gap of physical distancing, be collaborative, and take an agile, problem-solving approach, this may be one of the best times to forge these new relationships. We are all navigating unfamiliar territory, and each of us wants to succeed and contribute to our businesses. So, how can you do this effectively during these times?

Now is the time to ask how you can help. Can you help someone solve a research question creatively? Can you share market intelligence or useful content? Can you offer a new perspective or alternative approaches? Can you share how peers are solving similar problems? Can you listen to personal stories?

It may be that your clients do not need anything from you. In which case, let them know they are appreciated and that you care about their company and about them personally, whether or not they are bringing you business at this time.

The most significant and rewarding relationships can take time to cultivate, and it may take months of building trust, asking about business, offering free advice, and lending an ear. If you can add value and be an authentic advisor without expecting an immediate return, the longer-term outcome can be meaningful partnerships built on trust.

Be a Radiator

It is easy for even the most optimistic of us to be swept along in bemoaning the state of our world. Make it your objective to have interactions that change thinking and lift the spirit. Be deliberate in communications that are optimistic, heart-warming, stress-reducing, and laughter-inducing. Together, as partners, we will all get through this!

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**What do you do that adds value for your colleagues and clients?
I would love to hear what has been positive for you.**

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