

Module 8

Advanced Prospecting Methods

Module Outline

Becoming an Expert

- Choose a Specialty
- Dedicate Yourself to Learning
- Demonstrate Your Expertise

Prospecting As an Expert

- Writing, Speaking and Edu-Marketing
 - Keys to Writing
 - Keys to Speaking
 - A Contrarian Voice

Referral Sources and Strategic Alliances

- Steps to Solid Referral Relationships and Strategic Alliances

Finding Referral Partners and Strategic Alliances

Learning Objectives

The learning objectives for this module are to:

- Discover how to truly differentiate yourself from your competition
- Learn how to become an expert in your field
- Become skilled at using speaking, writing and edu-marketing to demonstrate expertise and “attract” more prospects
- Understand how to use strategic alliances and referral sources to generate prospects

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Advanced Prospecting Methods

As a seasoned loan officer, you will find that your approach to prospecting will change over time. As you build experience working with a Bull's Eye Market, your expertise and understanding of their unique needs will grow. Consequently, you will be in a position to start to truly differentiate yourself from your competition and be seen as a tremendous resource to your prospects and clients.

Once you become perceived as an expert, you will discover the true power of Sales Magnetism. You will be in the enviable position of “attracting” prospects and clients to you. Your visibility will increase dramatically and your prospecting activities will shift when this occurs.

While this does not happen overnight, you have probably already seen in your own career or that of a mentor or senior colleague that when you reach a certain level of success, business starts coming to you. In other words, your reputation precedes you and leads to more referrals and repeat business. That is the mark of an expert or someone who is on the way to becoming one.

Think about it. People like to work with and associate with other people who are the best at what they do. If you become an expert, you will be sought out. Additionally, experts are admired and respected. Their counsel and advice is requested and valued.

Becoming an Expert

So how do you become an expert? Before that question is answered, it is important to note that expertise goes beyond competence. Most loan officers who have any experience in a particular field or with a particular market, have some level of competence. Experts, however, have a depth of understanding and insight that goes beyond content information and overall knowledge.

Some specific things you can do to increase your level of expertise include:

Choose a specialty. Expertise can be forged in a certain area of lending or financial services, with a particular market, or both. It's difficult to be a true expert in more than one area. Even if you are, most people will discredit your ability to be an expert in multiple fields, so choose one to become known for.

In order to choose correctly, listen to your gut and follow your passion. Consider what you enjoy and what gets you excited. Also, consider your past experience. What are you good at? What are you qualified to talk about with some authority? Who do you enjoy working with? Who is your Bull's Eye Market and what is the expertise that they would value? By understanding the specific needs of a market, including all the specialized nuances, you will set yourself apart from other loan officers.

Dedicate yourself to learning. Choosing an area of specialty is not enough to make you an expert. You have to commit to learning and doing what you need to do to

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become a leader in the field. This includes things like being a practitioner in the field. You can't be the best plumber if you've never used a pipe wrench. Based on research, it is estimated that it takes ten years of consistent study, application and involvement in a field to become a real expert. Don't let this dissuade you from making the effort, however. You can start now and build from your current level. You will gain more and more expertise along the way until you become a leader in your field. Strive for two to six hours of training or reading in your field every week to increase your knowledge base.

Demonstrate your expertise. You can't become a respected leader in your field of choice without being involved in the field. Many ag lenders are part-time farmers or grew up on a farm, which is a great foundation for developing practical hands-on knowledge. In addition, you can demonstrate your expertise by facilitating discussion, presenting or speaking on facets of your topic and writing about your expertise. It is through these exercises that you gain visibility and awareness and attract others to you. Speaking and writing on your topic of expertise will not only build your reputation, they will help you articulate and clarify your viewpoint. This, in turn, will lead to even greater understanding and insight. The more you can distill issues and information into salient, relevant and relatable nuggets that are easy to grasp, the more you will be sought for your expertise and wisdom.

MAGNETIC MOMENT #1: I've done a lot of speeches and written a lot of articles in my life. Do you really think it is a valuable use of a loan officer's time? Absolutely. If you want to develop true expertise, then you have to get your message to as many people as possible. Speaking and writing are by far the best ways to do that. Imagine giving a short talk on the "10 Things You Must Know Before Getting A Loan" and then having a line of people coming up to you afterwards asking if you will help them with their loans? How valuable is that?

Prospecting as an Expert

As you gain expertise and visibility, you will be in a position to leverage your credibility for even better and more effective prospecting methods. The good news is that you don't have to be a bona fide expert to start using these methods. You will find, however, that your success will increase with these methods as your expertise increases. Another strategy, as you develop your expertise, is to associate with and collaborate with other experts to increase your own expert status. For example, you can serve the role of facilitator on an issue or challenge in the industry at special meetings, conferences or seminars.

Writing, Speaking and Edu-Marketing

Think of the last time you were at an industry conference or association meeting. Was there a keynote speaker? Perhaps you listened to an industry expert share valuable insight. If the speaker was effective, audience members may have flocked to the front of the room after the speech to talk with the speaker. Why? Because the speaker was perceived as an expert and brought some value and insight to the group. What

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information can you bring to farmers? Perhaps you could provide economic updates as farmers are concerned about the state of the economy, interest rates, etc.

If you can communicate well, have valuable information to share, and can provide insights that will help a specific market or group, then speaking can be an excellent way to increase your visibility and your credibility, leading to sales opportunities.

Today more than ever, your prospects and clients are bombarded with information. At their fingertips, they have access to more data on the Internet than they could ever read, much less digest and implement. They are drowning in a sea of information, but starving for valuable insights to grow their farms or their businesses.

Like most people, they have to make countless decisions every day and it's difficult to always account for, much less assess, the impact of changing conditions, markets, technologies, regulations, competitive threats, emerging trends, etc.

To be a valuable resource, you need to be able to distill the voluminous data down to useable and meaningful information that will help them make better business decisions. If they can make better business decisions, they will improve their results. And you can be the hero to help them get there.

Your ability to be a valuable resource is tied to your investment in becoming that trusted expert. How can you help your prospects and clients? What expertise do you have or can you develop that is needed by them? And how can you provide your expertise to the right prospects?

In order to leverage your time effectively and gain more visibility for yourself and your institution, you can write and speak. While writing and speaking require different skill sets, they are both valuable for raising your profile as an expert.

The key to both is to be able to craft a message that is meaningful for your audience. That's why understanding a specific market and their issues will help you engage at a deeper level. Your advice becomes more valuable because of the insight and knowledge you can bring to them, as opposed to a more general audience.

Keys to Writing

Despite the constant bombardment of information that we all get, the written word is still very powerful. To break through all the clutter, however, it is important that your writing is very focused and targeted. In other words, it should speak directly to your Bull's Eye Market. Since there is so much information available, your clients are looking for insights that apply specifically to them. One of the keys to good writing is to tailor your message to your market.

Another key to good writing is to keep it simple. Communication, whether written or verbal, needs to be direct and uncomplicated. Consequently, make your writing style one that will be easily understood. Just like you learned with your pre-approach letter,

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avoid big words, clichés and complex sentence structure. Industry jargon can be used if it's understood by your audience and gives you some insider credibility, otherwise avoid it.

Writing can take lots of forms as a vehicle to prospect and market yourself. A simple place to start is by creating lists. You can come up with lists that would be a valuable resource to your prospects and clients. For example, *10 Things You Need To Know Before You Get A Loan*. Articles are also a natural place to start. You can write an article that answers the biggest challenges, uncovers common mistakes, reveals best practices, highlights new trends, etc.

Articles can be used as stand-alone information and shared with your database or they can be used in a newsletter or e-zine (electronic newsletter) that you or your institution sends out to prospects and clients. You can also solicit associations or groups to include one of your articles or a series of articles in their newsletter, magazines or other publications. Most groups are always looking for good content for their members or audience. Why not have it come from you?

The length of the article will vary depending on who will use it. Check with the editor of the publications you are interested in and get the specific requirements or guidelines they have for article submission. For most publications or newsletters, shorter is better – many times 250- to 750-word articles are ideal. Often, you can take a longer article and divide it into Part 1, Part 2, etc. Another important part of article writing is crafting a powerful and provoking headline. Make sure that you capture attention with a catchy title to your articles.

If you would like to position yourself as an ongoing resource for your market, you may want to consider starting a blog. A blog is a web log which includes posts or comments about your topic. To be effective with a blog, you should write digestible posts that others can subscribe to or check out from time to time. Blogs are, in general, less formal than articles. Most bloggers write posts that show their viewpoint and they will attract others who share similar viewpoints. In other words, over time they will develop a community or audience of folks who share similar approaches or ideas. If you are not familiar with blogs, simply Google (or search) for blogs on your topic area and you will be able to see the vast array of blogs that are on the Internet.

The key with blogs or writing as a way of building your expertise is to be consistent. One blog post or article does not make you an expert or allow you to build an ongoing relationship with your market. Find ways to continually bring valuable resources to your market and you will actually create a dedicated following.

Whether you're writing a blog, articles or even a book, create a voice. In other words, let your writing represent your authenticity and find ways to provide helpful insights to your prospects and clients.

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MAGNETIC MOMENT #2: Occasionally I'll get a writer's block. What is the best way to get started with writing? It is not as hard as you think. The easiest way is to begin with a list, like the "10 Things You Must Know Before Getting a Loan." These can be things you usually take the time to tell each individual when you are educating them such as having all their documentation and paperwork before they apply, not buying a car right before they want a loan, pulling their own credit report first, etc. Write a few sentences about each one and voila, you're done. Next, find a local community paper, a trade association newsletter or your institution's publication and ask if you can submit your article for consideration in it. It's that simple! If you do a good job you might even get asked to write a regular column.

Keys to Speaking

Speaking is a great way to get exposure to lots of folks at once. Whether you're speaking at an association meeting, a conference or another gathering, your message and delivery are critical to your success. Your message must be designed with your audience in mind. Who do you want to present to and what do you want them to walk away with at the end of your speech? In other words, what's your purpose? Speaking is not about providing a canned sales pitch or selling at all. It's about providing valuable insights and gaining credibility as the expert, so that your audience members want to seek you out for your advice and counsel.

Successful speakers also learn the craft of speaking and are able to engage an audience. In other words, they learn how to deliver a great speech or presentation. Taking a public speaking course, getting involved in Toastmasters or a local/state chapter of the National Speakers Association are all great places to develop your skills and knowledge of speaking. Be mindful that PowerPoint presentations are often used ineffectively by beginner speakers. While visuals can be a great enhancement, technology issues or reliance on slides can actually distract from your message and your connection with the audience.

The concept behind using seminars, teleseminars or edu-marketing to grow your business is the same behind using speaking engagements. Seminars allow you to get exposure to large groups of prospects, so they get a better sense of the value and expertise that you can provide. For your attendees, it's a low-risk way to check you out and learn something that can help them. For you, it's a great way to enhance your credibility and create interest with potential prospects.

Typically, you would invite or solicit prospects and clients to attend an event where you are hosting or presenting information. You or your institution can sponsor, co-sponsor or host an event. The format and the content can vary depending on your purpose, the market and the information provided.

Like any speaking engagement, offering these programs will pay dividends if your message is important and valuable to your audience, and if the presentation is delivered in a way that engages and interests your audience.

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Other important considerations for a successful event include selecting the proper location or venue, picking the best time for the event, picking the right length for the event, handouts, refreshments, etc. These events are great to do with your strategic alliances and referral sources, who may participate as co-sponsors or co-presenters.

In addition to a more formal speaking engagement, special seminar or educational event, podcasting is another easy way to get your voice heard by your prospects and clients. Podcasts are simply audio files that can be downloaded electronically. You can record a reading of one of your articles or discuss some topic of interest in a podcast. You could also interview other experts in the field. Downloadable audio files can then be posted or shared with your clients or prospects. To get a better understanding of podcasts and how to use them, go to www.itunes.com and search for Top Podcasts.

Of course, video clips which include the audio and visual images can be easily produced, posted, and downloaded as well. The popularity of video sites like www.YouTube.com is a testament to the power of this medium.

A Contrarian Voice

An effective strategy to help you gain more visibility is to offer a contrarian view. This is an opposing view which is not aligned with the majority of views on the subject. This can be done in both your speaking and your writing. The value of doing this is to help distinguish you from everyone else and increase your visibility in the marketplace.

One way to do this is to offer a fresh and different approach to the same-old approach or solution. When everyone else “zigs,” you “zag.” While some folks want the “tried and true,” others will be drawn to innovative or new solutions or ideas. Sometimes, the ideas or solutions are not all that different, they are just being positioned differently. If you are going to go against the tide, it’s important that you back up your position effectively. At the same time, going against the tide can help you stand out in a competitive field and give you more visibility. For example, you may write an article or give a speech on “*The Five Myths of Borrowing and How To Avoid Common Pitfalls.*” As a contrarian delivering this speech, you would then take generally accepted industry recommendations or standard advice and “poke holes in” why they may not be in your audience’s best interest.

If you adopt a contrarian approach, make sure that you do it effectively by really substantiating the reasons why. Sometimes in more rural communities or with a more conservative audience, there could be some resistance to not following standard practices or ideas.

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MAGNETIC MOMENT #3: I choked during my first speech. Do you have any suggestions for beginners? If you've written an article, the speech is easy. Just elaborate a bit on each point, add an example or a story to give it some color, and practice it. Aim for about 15-20 minutes for your first speech. A great place to get some experience speaking is at service clubs or association meetings in your area such as one of the local Rotary organizations. They are always looking for speakers on interesting topics.

Referral Sources and Strategic Alliances

To increase the quality of a contact, you need to build your credibility through existing relationships. A few sure-fire ways to accomplish this are with referral sources, strategic alliances and existing clients. For now, we will focus on developing referral sources and strategic alliances with people that can introduce you to decision-makers in your Bull's Eye Market. Building stronger relationships with existing clients will be covered in Module 10.

While referral sources and strategic alliances are similar in many respects, they are also different. Let's clarify. A referral source is someone that you can create an ongoing relationship with who will send you referrals. Usually this is in exchange for you doing the same in return. While you may get referrals from many different people, referral sources tend to be in a position to give you a steady supply of referrals.

Strategic alliances, on the other hand, tend to be a little more formalized. In fact, there may be more of a contractual agreement between the parties to determine the roles and responsibilities of each party. Often, there is some level of co-branding, co-sponsoring or co-marketing that is done to promote the strategic alliance as a resource for a certain group of prospects.

The key to finding the right people as referral source partners or strategic alliances is to ask yourself, *"Who do I know or who can I get to know that knows who I want to know?"* Or *"Who shares my bull's eye market?"* The answers to these questions can give you sources for most of your prospects. Referral prospecting is so valuable because other people can sell you much better than you can sell yourself. If you say how great you are it sounds like boasting, but when someone else sings your praises it rings with credibility. Securing qualified appointments becomes easy and your appointment ratio goes through the roof with the right referrals.

Always look out for finding and developing relationships that can open more doors for you. Of course, there is one very critical rule of thumb for making a prospecting referral relationship work; it must be mutually satisfying and beneficial to both parties. So, if you're going to expect to get great things from your prospecting sources, you must be prepared to give great things as well.

In other words, the Law of Reciprocity applies. If you do something to help me (i.e. give me a referral), you should expect something comparable in return. Different relationships will have different expectations. For example, a referral source may expect

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getting qualified referrals from you in return for giving you qualified referrals while a client may expect value-added service for sharing quality referrals.

MAGNETIC MOMENT #4: I'm still not sure I can find good referral partners. Can you give me some more ideas? Sure, this will help. Draw a circle in the center of a piece of paper. In that circle write the name of your best client. Then draw five lines coming out from that circle, like spokes on a wheel with your client as the hub. Now think of five other kinds of businesses your client might buy from such as attorneys, accountants, financial planners, etc. Once you have them written down, schedule a meeting with your client. Ask him who he works with in each of those categories. Tell him you are asking because you are looking for qualified people to refer your other clients to and you respect his judgment. If you are comfortable doing it, ask if he might introduce you to one or more of his other advisors.

Steps to Solid Referral Relationships and Strategic Alliances

Implementing a prospecting referral arrangement with someone else requires you go through a sequence of steps. Let's review them:

Step 1: Develop a strong relationship. You have to establish trust and credibility with your prospecting referral partners. You can't expect them to put their reputation on the line with their contacts if they don't know you well and don't feel 100% comfortable with you, your character and your abilities. This step may take some time and a number of interactions, but it is time well invested if you choose your relationships wisely.

Step 2: Get a commitment to take your relationship to the next level. Both parties must be equally committed to doing what it takes to make this relationship work. You must look at the expectations of both parties and see if they are compatible. For example, you and your partner may decide to commit to providing two referrals a month to one another.

Step 3: Educate your prospecting referral partner. Your partners must know who you're looking for. This means that you have to be very concise and direct. Your focus on your Bull's Eye Market is essential here. It is much easier for others to recognize opportunities for you when you are specific.

Step 4: Ask for help. Make sure that your partners know what you need. Ask the question, "Whom do you know who...?"

Step 5: Identify opportunities. Find out the contact spheres of your partners. Who are their clients, vendors, and contacts that fit your prospect profile? This is easily done by each of you bringing a list of your top 25 or 50 contacts and reviewing them with one another.

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Step 6: Prioritize activities and set goals. Make a commitment to your referral partners to work on making specific connections for each other. Set SMARTY goals and hold each other accountable to reaching them.

Step 7: Strategize on how to connect. Your partner's relationships are going to be stronger with some people who you want to meet with than with others. Figure out together what kind of introductions are needed and how they will be facilitated. An example of one successful strategy is for you to set up a lunch so you can facilitate an introduction between your contact and your referral partner. This works particularly well because you can help direct the conversation and assist in a favorable outcome.

Step 8: Implement your strategies and goals. Now is the time when the rubber meets the road. You have to do what you have agreed to do. If you hit some obstacles along the way, you will have to determine possible solutions to those obstacles and continue to move forward.

Step 9: Monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of the connections made. This requires complete candor and honesty. Give each other specific feedback on what went well and what did not work as expected with the introductions you have already facilitated. Use your evaluation time as a growing and learning exercise to improve future connections.

Problems may occur if you skip any of these steps, so be careful when choosing the right strategic alliances. Make sure that the communication is open and remains open between you and your partners. You also want to make sure that the expectations are clearly understood by all parties and that everyone is committed to making the relationship work.

MAGNETIC MOMENT #5: It seems to me that if I find a good source, such as an attorney or accountant, that I should have lots of them as referral partners. Is that a good idea? On the surface, it would seem so, but remember the Law of Reciprocity. Your referral partners are going to expect that you refer to them also and that will be difficult if you have more than one in each category. For example, suppose you have three attorneys who want to refer business to you. How are you going to return the comparable amount of business to all of them? Over time, they will stop referring to you and you'll have only a short-term relationship. You're better off finding one great partner in each category and building a strong, deep relationship with him or her.

Finding Referral Partners and Strategic Alliances

Now that you know the steps to implement to build better partnerships, how do you go about finding the right referral partners? Here are some strategies to consider:

1. **Determine good referral sources/strategic alliances.** Who else is calling on your Bull's Eye Market? What other services/products do your prospects need?

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Who do they trust? Ask your clients who they buy from that they respect and enjoy working with. If you don't know them, get your clients to introduce you.

2. **Expand your circles of contacts.** You should join and become active in associations, clubs or other networking activities. Pick those groups where you are going to maximize your investment in time and resources. You'll want to choose organizations that members of your Bull's Eye Market belong to. For example, if your Bull's Eye Market is cattlemen, then you would become active looking for the right referral relationships through your involvement in the local or state Cattlemen's' Association.
3. **Determine affinity businesses of your clients and prospects.** These are closely related relationships that your clients and prospects have. For example, what other businesses do they have relationships with - other vendors, suppliers, customers, referral sources, etc.? Determine ways to meet and build relationships with them.

With focused efforts, you can build strong strategic alliances and referral relationships. These relationships can provide ongoing sources of business to all parties involved for years to come.