

Turning Corporate Downsizing into Prospecting Success

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Optimists in the investment business claim “Crisis breeds opportunity.”

The crisis around us is a lot easier to see than many opportunities – especially if you’re among the growing numbers of Americans who have lost their jobs.

And yet I’ve recently talked to five advisors who translated the disruption of corporate downsizing into new clients.

Here’s how they did it.

Creating a reputation: The pension specialist

In one major urban center, Advisor One branded himself “the pension specialist” and for the past year has been running radio ads on the local all-news station, encouraging people to call him before making decisions around their pensions. He’s created a dedicated website under the “pension specialist” brand,

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providing newsletters and seminars focusing on what people who are laid off and retiring need to know.

His website offers an especially broad range of useful information for retiring employees, with a particular focus on government workers.

Offering “tips and traps” workshops

Advisor Two created a 30 minute “tips and traps” workshop on the financial decisions people face when they’re terminated. He approached outplacement counselors and law firms specializing in employment law, offering to conduct his workshop at their offices for their staff. He invited HR managers in his community to attend a luncheon workshop at his office on this topic.

From this, he’s received referrals and invitations to run his workshop for a number of companies.

Approaching prospects with targeted information

Whenever a company announces cutbacks, Advisor Three identifies the employees he knows and calls them, asking if they or a colleague might be interested in some information he’s put together on how to shelter tax when receiving a termination settlement. He’s had a good response to this and has picked up some new clients as a result.

Anticipating needs with proactive contact

Advisor Four has taken this idea one step further.

Last fall, he put together a twenty page guide he called “Everything you need to know about being downsized.” He compiled information from a variety of sources, including articles from magazines and newspapers and that dealt with issues beyond finances, like managing stress and staying upbeat, tips on networking, how to tell friends and family the bad news.

He emailed this to all his clients, asking them to forward it to anyone who might find it useful; on the first page of the guide he invited anyone with questions to call him.

Finally, he put together a list of people he knew who worked for big companies, even if they hadn’t announced layoffs. He called those people and said that he was hearing lots of concern from clients about cutbacks and that in response he created this guide. He offered to send it to them, in a colleague might find it helpful at some point.



As a result, some of the people he approached have become clients and he's received referrals to co-workers of the people he contacted.

Becoming the go-to resource for company employees

The final example relates to Advisor Five, a woman in her late 20s who's a recent entrant to the business. Not only did she attract a fair number of clients from her efforts, but she's well on the way to building an initial client base by positioning herself as the go-to resource for people working for a large local company.

She did this by running a series of seminars earlier this year for employees of a firm that recently announced employee cutbacks. Unlike the first four advisors with more experience in the industry and whose target were senior managers, her focus was on mid level employees.

How did she make this successful?

Strategic alliances She recruited a lawyer and accountant to participate in these seminars. She didn't target partners at big firms, but rather sole practitioners who would be more open to investing the required time.

These weren't big seminars - her goal was to get twelve to fifteen people to attend each session. The three principals shared the cost, although these were not high-cost events - just sandwiches and pop. More important than the dollars, the lawyer and accountant contributed credibility. In exchange for borrowing that credibility, this advisor did all the heavy lifting in filling the room.

Right time and place She booked meeting rooms in a hotel across the street from the head office of the company, offering workshops one day a week for four weeks, from 12 to 1:30 and from 5:30 to 7.

Word of mouth marketing She focused on filling the room. What drove attendance the first time was that she had a friend and existing client who worked for the company send an email to people in her department, letting them know about the workshop, that she was going to attend, and that they might like to also. Note that at no point did she ask for permission from the company's head office.

Targeted content The three participants agreed to put together short talks that directly addressed the concerns of those who had just been laid off. Each presenter had 15 to 20 minutes to hit a few key points and then they opened it up for a short question and answer period. This advisor prepared by familiarizing herself with the company's pension plan and the specifics of the termination notice and buyout offer. (In this company's case, some employees were simply terminated, while others were given a choice as to whether to take a package.)



Call to action All the employees attending were given a ten page workbook. At the end, everyone was asked to complete a short evaluation in which they were asked if they wanted more information from any of the three speakers.

Effective follow-up The day after the session, the advisor followed up with everyone who attended. She asked if they had any additional questions and if they'd like to meet. If not, she thanked them for their time – and asked whether they had found the workshop worthwhile.

Most said yes, so she sent them an email about upcoming sessions that she was running – saying that since they'd said the seminar they attended was valuable, she'd be grateful if they'd spread the word about these to other people they knew at the company.

Results

These workshops created a steady stream of appointments and a number of new clients for this advisor and her partners.

Equally important, she's well on the way to becoming the "safe choice" for employees of this firm. Her clients at this firm are referring their co-workers to her.. And the more clients she has at this company, the more entrenched her reputation as the go-to advisor for people working there is becoming, to the point that she's started receiving calls from people who've heard about her from co-workers.

This advisor did everything right. She made it easy for people to attend by offering the session across the street at a convenient time. She built credibility by involving a lawyer and accountant. She spread the word from within the firm rather than trying to market from the outside, and worked to create word-of-mouth referrals. She followed up effectively after the workshops.

And last but certainly not least, she invested the time upfront to build her knowledge of the company's pension and termination offer and ensure that people attending the workshops got real value for their time.

In Summary

Each approach used a different way to attract new clients who lost their jobs, were being laid off, or were concerned about losing their jobs.

However, these five advisors had three key things in common.



They began with the determination to capitalize on the real concerns created by corporate layoffs.

They crafted an approach to position themselves based on their expertise for people with targeted problems and important and urgent decisions to make.

And finally, they put plans in place to spread the word about their expertise to prospective clients.

Whether your target market is people worried about being laid off or prospects with other concerns, these five advisors offer important lessons on what it takes to attract clients. Position yourself as offering credible solutions to prospects' hot button concerns and you too can build prospecting momentum in your practice.

** Dan Richards conducts programs to help advisors gain and retain clients and is an award winning faculty member in the MBA program at the University of Toronto. To see more of his written and video commentaries and to reach him, go to www.strategicimperatives.ca.*

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