

Making Your Case to Prospects

By Dan Richards
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In early August, I got a call from an investor in Toronto, asking if I could recommend an advisor. This was in response to my weekly column on the financial pages of *The Globe and Mail*, Canada's leading national newspaper.

In talking about her situation, this woman explained that she and her husband were both in their mid thirties with one child, owned a house in midtown Toronto worth about \$1 million on which they were aggressively paying down the mortgage, both had good jobs and had saved about \$500,000 – so not huge clients, but ones that would be a fit for many advisors.



After spending a bit of time trying to understand exactly what she wanted, I suggested that I identify three advisors that might be appropriate for her needs, and she could talk to them and make a decision on whether one of those three was a fit for her.

Three advisors who took a pass

I emailed six advisors in Toronto who I thought might be candidates. At some point, all had approached me about the possibility of getting introductions to new clients.

In each case, I provided some background on this client and asked if they'd like to have their names put forward – understanding that they would be one of three advisors who I'd be recommending.

In one case, I got an out of office email response that this advisor was away until September 7 and that on urgent matters I should contact his assistant. (Remember this was early August.)

In a second case, the advisor got back the same day, thanking me but saying that her minimum asset level for new clients is \$1 million – but that she'd be happy to be considered in the future for prospective clients who had at least \$1 million.

A couple of days later I got an email back from a third advisor saying that if I wanted to put his name forward and recommend him, that he'd be happy to talk to this client but that he



had no interest in being one of three advisors and having to participate in a “beauty contest,” as he put it.

Putting your best foot forward

I asked each of the three remaining advisors for an overview with some basic background, summarizing their approach and the benefits to clients of working with them, with the view to forwarding this to the prospective client so that she and her husband could have some background on the advisors before contacting them.

I got virtually the identical response from all three advisors.

In every case, the answer was that they didn’t have a summary that could be forwarded to a potential client – instead they sent me links to various documents.

One advisor included an article she’d written, another included an article that had been written on him. A couple included an overview of their team. Two sent links to a summary of their process. And one included an overview of what clients could expect.

I sent each email to the prospective client exactly as it was sent to me – I simply forwarded on the information that I was provided.

Communicating your case to prospects

Let’s be clear – no information package, no matter how compelling, is going to win you a client.

But it can predispose someone to work with you – and if poorly done can reduce the chances of success (and in some cases may eliminate you from consideration entirely.)

I have four takeaways from this experience.

First, none of the three advisors seemed to have an information package that could be readily emailed to prospective clients. So, my first conclusion is that if acquiring new clients is one of your business objectives, you need to have an effective information package assembled and close at hand.

Second, as part of that package, advisors need to have a one-page cover sheet that summarizes background on them and their firm and that provides a summary of the other documents that are included in the package.

Third, advisors need to ensure that their information package looks professional.



That obviously means no typos (one info package for an advisor I saw recently quoted the Oracle of Omaha but misspelled his name).

Beyond that, all of the elements of the package should have a consistent graphic identity. When I looked at the background information that these advisors sent me, in two out of three cases there was huge divergence in the look of the different elements that they had forwarded – different colors and type styles and sizes.

Finally and most important, advisors need to make the contents of this information package as concrete, specific and differentiating as possible.

When thinking about the reason to work with you, prospective clients won't be impressed by generalities – rather you need to provide a tangible, fact-based rationale for why someone should give you their business.

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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