



AIA Best Practices: Finding leads

Excerpted from The Architect's Handbook of Professional Practice, by Howard J. Wolff, Full-Height Advice

Summary

To get new business, you must generate leads. Current and recent clients are the best sources of leads, but you may also cultivate new opportunities through your other business and social relationships. Cold calls are another source of lead generation. Tips are included to take the dread out of cold-calling.

Sources of leads

Sources of leads are all around you. The easiest and cheapest sources of leads—and often the most fruitful—are your current and recent clients. They know you, your firm, and your capabilities. Don't be afraid to ask these questions: "What else do you have coming up that we can help with?" "Who else should I be talking to?" "May I use you as a reference?"

The other benefit of directly asking your clients about their needs is that the leads generated are usually yours and yours alone. You don't have dozens of competitors privy to the same information (as you have with leads you glean from publications, for instance).

You can also generate leads through your market research, public relations, and networking activities. For example, a large local company is reorganizing: Might there be a need for a facilities studies? Your greatest success will come from those situations in which you can cultivate leads before others are alerted to the opportunity.

A short list of potential sources

- attorneys
- bankers
- consultants
- employees
- clients
- realtors
- religious institutions

- trade associations
- vendors

Another option: cold calls

Most architects dread making cold calls. Here are some tips to make the process less painful and more productive—maybe even fun.

- Set aside a block of time each week, day, or whatever—and make the calls with your desk cleared of any other agenda.
- Recognize that you will usually have to make several calls to get to the right person. Plan on three calls.
- Even when you do not find the right person, be pleasant and accommodating. Building relationships applies to everyone in the prospective client’s organization.
- Don’t keep the person in suspense. Start right out with who you are, the firm you’re with, and why you’re calling.
- Ask whether this is a convenient time to call.
- You might design a simple call report and have it in front of you when you call. You might also have a list of “openers” and “probes” to get and keep the conversation going. A sample opener: “We’ve been reading a lot about your reorganization in the newspapers. Does this mean you are considering facilities changes?”
- Project the image of a professional consultant and problem solver rather than a salesperson. Ask open-ended questions, so the client does most of the talking and you do most of the listening.
- Remember that the objective of a cold call is generally not to get a job but rather to gather information, build a relationship, and set an appointment to have a face-to-face discussion.

The process becomes more valuable and rewarding if you keep the following in mind: Your objective is not to sell, but to help the client buy.

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This article corresponds to:

Architect's Handbook of Professional Practice, 15th edition Unit 1 – The Profession

Chapter 06 – Marketing and Business Development

Section 01 – Marketing Architectural Services