“How can I do business development from home?”

size 10½ boots

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“How can I do business development from home?”

During these challenging times it’s easy to put business development to one side.

Surely everyone has enough to worry about without you bothering them?

And, from a more practical perspective, as you can’t get out to see anyone surely you can’t do any business development anyway?

Actually, yes you can.

And business development has never been more important.

Although the working world may look very different, when we come out the other side of this the one thing that will never change is that your clients and contacts will still be the core of your practice. They’ll maintain your billings and they’ll generate the new opportunities that will help you return to where you were.

Therefore, maintaining those relationships has to be your priority.

The only problem is while we’re forced to work from home we can’t get out to see anyone, we can’t have coffee/lunch/drinks and we can’t host or attend events. This means that if you are going to protect your practice, you’ll need to tweak your tactics.

In this special report we’re going to look at the 3 business development activities we can all do from home:

- Doing more on the phone
- Doing more content
- Doing more on social media

We’ll also go through the practical steps you can take to make sure you get the maximum return from the time you invest in each.

1. Doing more on the phone

"What type of business development can I do on my phone?"

Over the last few weeks the marketing tool we've seen make the biggest difference is the phone. Although it's something we all have in our pockets, it's often overlooked because our default is almost always email. However, the phone is now the most efficient and cost-effective way to maintain some sort of 'face time'.

In general terms there are 2 types of BD you can do on the phone:

1. Professional

Your clients are rightly worried at the moment. Their worlds are volatile and their futures are unpredictable. However, like you they are desperate to return to some sort of normality and will need your support and your advice to make that happen.

You can play an invaluable role in that process. By taking the time to discuss these plans with your clients, you will be able to add enormous value by providing a different perspective, sharing relevant insight and best practice and helping them set their priorities (and you'll no doubt be involved when those priorities are put into practice).

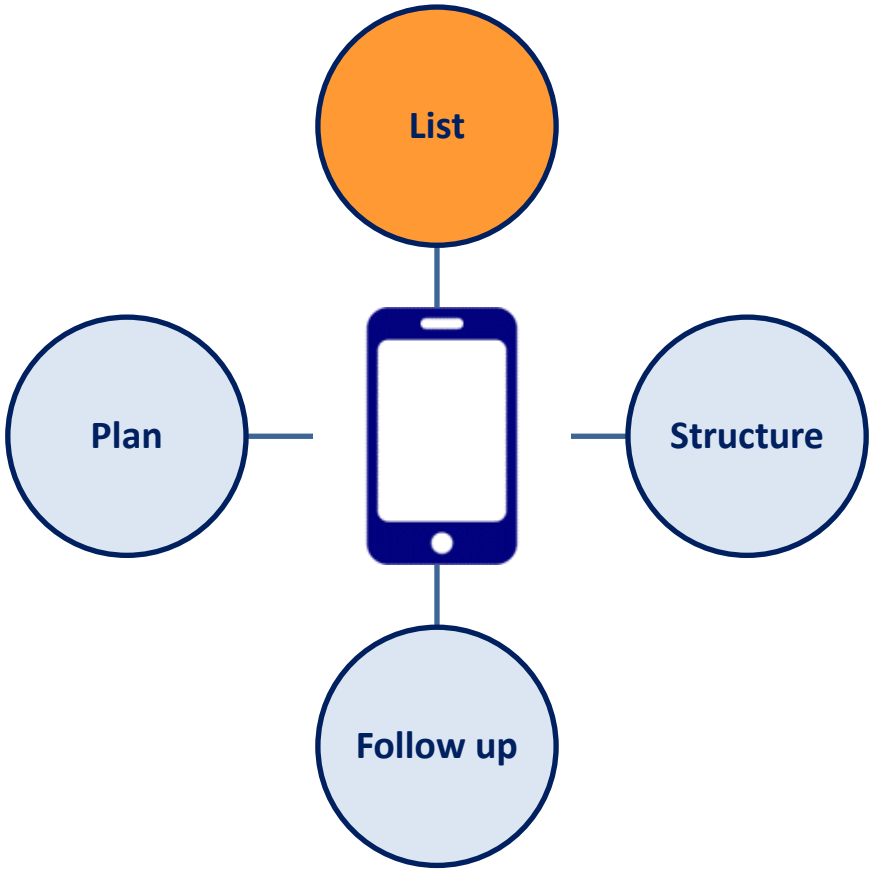
And if you're also having similar calls with your professional contacts, you may even uncover some new opportunities which will help relieve short-term billing pressures.

2. Personal

You know your main clients and contacts well so why not just call them to see how things are going? It may be that you end up talking about something totally unrelated to work but who cares? The goodwill you'll engender just by being there will strengthen your working relationship and give you the perfect place to pick up once business resumes in a more recognisable context.

In our own business we've ended up swapping Spotify playlists with clients, joining in with quizzes and even playing darts via Zoom! Are there any business benefits? Maybe very few but it has definitely helped us maintain our most important relationships.

1. Doing more on the phone



As with all things in business development, getting the best results from your phone requires a process and we'd suggest that process is made up of 4 steps:

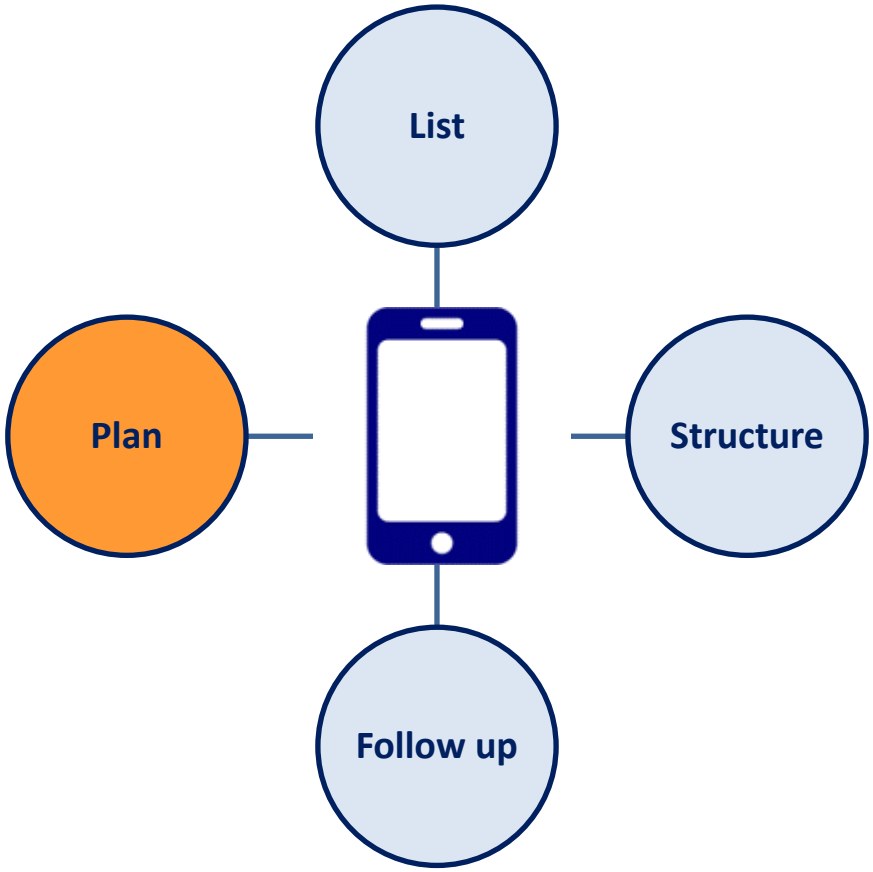
1. List

Working through a list makes everything easier. You'll know what you need to do, what you've already done and what to do next.

That's why the first step has to be to put your list together and here are some of the criteria we'd suggest you consider:

- Who has instructed you, referred work or introduced you to a potential opportunity over the last 12 months?
- Who do you know but either haven't seen for a while or think there may be value in getting to know better?
- Who do you actually like and enjoy speaking to?

1. Doing more on the phone



2. Plan

Before you call anyone on your list, decide what you want from the call. Knowing where you want to end up will help you direct the call and make sure it ends with a concrete follow up step.

The first thing to do is work out your reason for calling. It's always better to have something stronger than "I just fancied catching up" in your back pocket. Try to find an article you can share or a question you can ask and include that in the email you send to set the call up.

With regards to planning the structure of the call, we like the 'ODE' model (and it works for any type of meeting, not just a phone call):

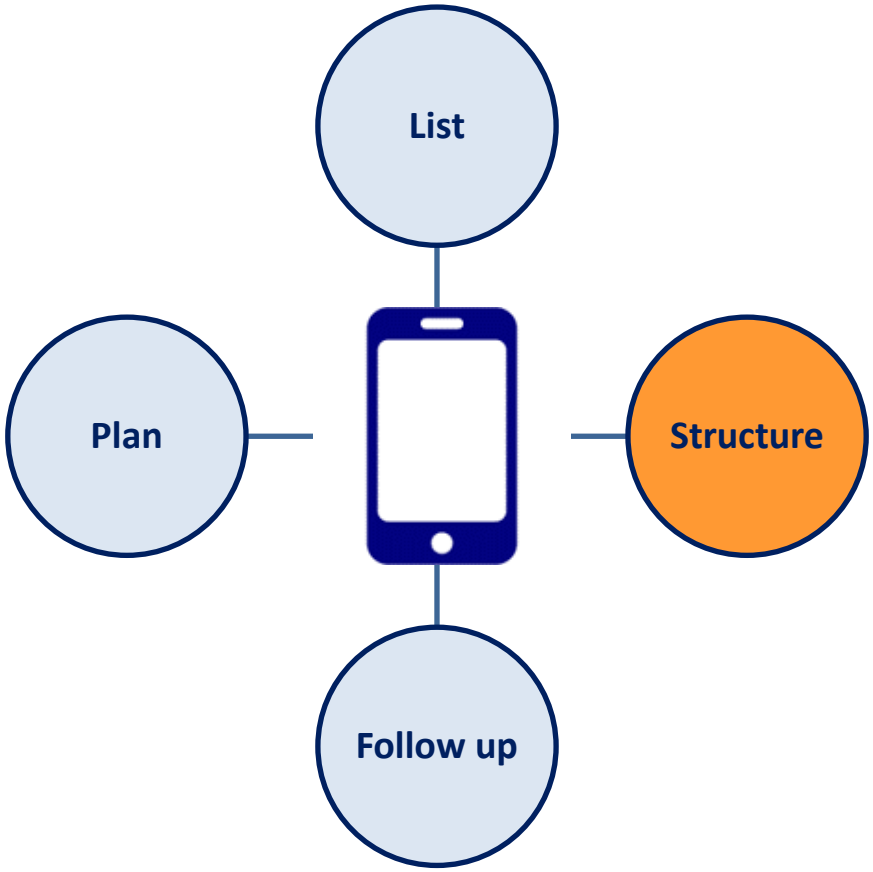
O stands for the optimum outcome (e.g. an instruction)

D stands for the desired outcome (e.g. agreeing to a follow up video call involving a few more people from each side)

E for essential (e.g. you've caught up and reminded them you're still out there and thinking of them)

And lastly, play to your client/contact's preferences. If you know they're a morning person, ask for a slot in the morning. If they prefer Facetime, suggest Facetime. The more relaxed your contact is, the more you'll get out of the call.

1. Doing more on the phone



3. Structure

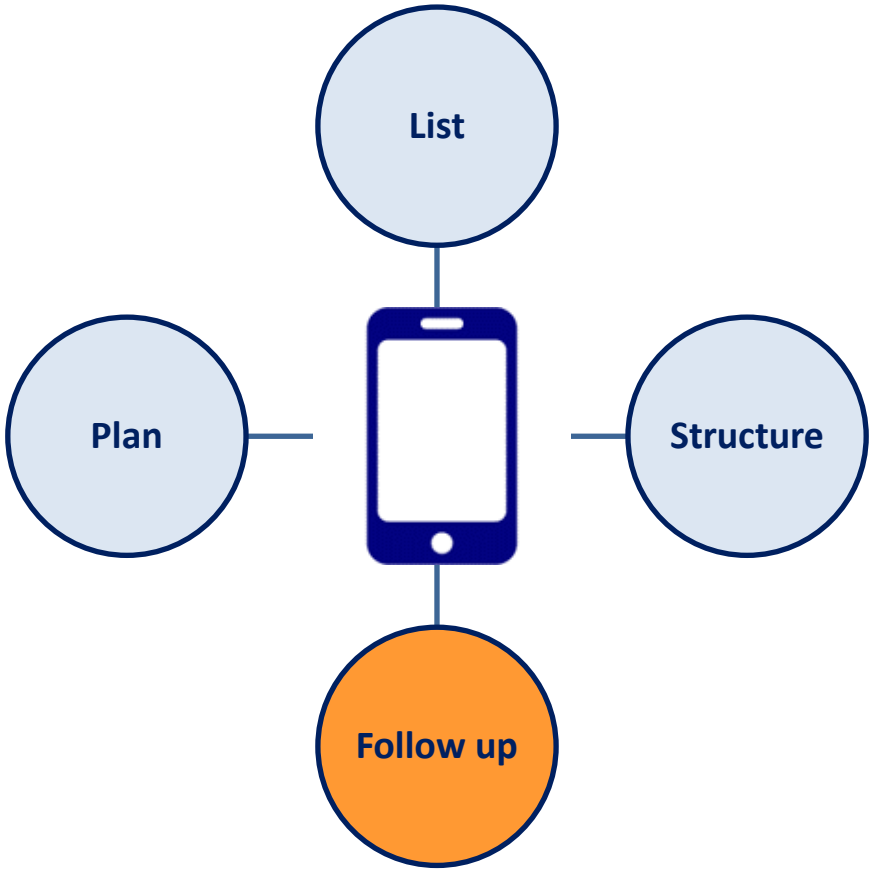
In terms of the call itself there are a few key pointers to bear in mind:

- This is about chatting not selling. Overtly trying to sell something (or pumping your contact for introductions) will turn them off and undoubtedly do more harm than good.
- The best conversations involve you doing 30% of the talking and 70% of the listening. This will vary form person to person but bear it in mind – the closer you are to achieving this ratio, the easier the follow up will be (and we'll come back to that in the next section).
- Always finish by agreeing next steps and when you'll speak again.

And, from a physical point of view there are several things you can do during the call to improve your delivery:

- Standing up puts less pressure on your diaphragm and puts your head in a more elevated position. Both will impact positively on your voice making you sound clearer and more confident.
- Using your hands will amplify the messages you're trying to convey. It doesn't matter that the other person can't actually see you (unless you're on a video call) - they'll hear it in your voice!
- Energy, enthusiasm and a positive tone of voice injects even more confidence into any conversation.

1. Doing more on the phone



4. Follow up

One phone call in isolation won't deliver results. Each call is a single step in a longer term process so having a reason to follow up and keep nudging each conversation forward is crucial.

Telephone calls are no different to face-to-face meetings. There always has to be a follow up step, even if it's only a quick email summarising what's been agreed and who needs to do what by when. The good news is if you listen properly during each call, you will hear the follow up step.

To make sure that happens we'd suggest you get into the habit of using secondary questions during your conversations.

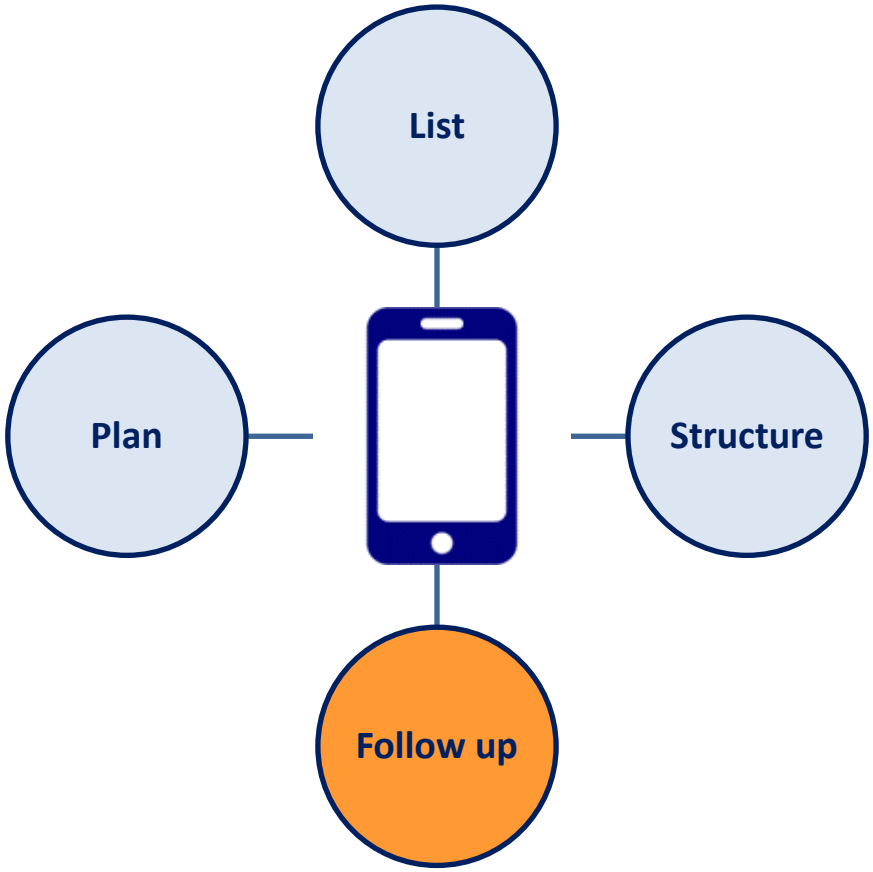
For example, if the person you're speaking to says "it's very difficult to do business at the moment", ask why. Once you have their answer, ask a few more questions:

"What would make it easier for you?"

"What can I do to help?"

This is when you'll hear what to do next and that might be …

1. Doing more on the phone



- They want you to jot down a few bullet points on how to tackle a specific issue in an email.
- They may want you to share an article, a blog or a report you mentioned.
- They want an email introduction to someone who might be able to help with a specific issue they're facing.

And remember, the follow up needn't be (and seldom is) anything to do with business. They may just want you to email over a link to an App, a Spotify playlist or a holiday resort website.

So there is absolutely no doubt as to what will happen next, when you finish the call confirm what you're going to do next and when you're going to do it.

It is then down to you to do that by the agreed date.

We can't stress how important this is. If you don't deliver, you risk undoing the goodwill your call should have generated.

1. Doing more on the phone

"What other business development could I do on my phone?"

Your phone can do much more than make calls. Here are a few more phone-based BD ideas we've seen work really well over the last few weeks:

WhatsApp

WhatsApp is no longer a novelty; it's now firmly accepted in business circles so why not set up some new groups of colleagues, clients and contacts who share professional or personal interests? It'll not only give you an excuse to stay in touch, it'll also give you an opportunity to make a few new introductions which will reflect well on you.

Share

The lockdown has generated endless jokes, memes and videos but, for obvious reasons, you need to know your contacts very well indeed if you're thinking about sharing these!

A much safer option is to share music. While we're working from home most of us are listening to music and now we're a few weeks in, we could probably do with some new stuff. If you know a client or contact likes their music, why not share a few tips, playlists or potential new sources?

Run a quiz

Online quizzes have gained in popularity over the last couple of weeks – especially when they're run on a Friday afternoon – and given how many free online platforms are available, it's really easy to put a quiz together and promote it via social media straight from your phone.

1. Doing more on the phone

"What other business development could I do on my phone?"

Take a video

As they say a picture is worth a thousand words and it's repeatedly proven that people really would prefer to watch you for a minute than plough through a few hundred words covering the same topic.

Again there are loads of apps you can download to your phone to help you put a video together but based on what we're seeing on LinkedIn, it looks like the video function on an iPhone is more than fit for purpose.

Record a podcast

While you have a few more minutes in the day why not record yourself talking about an issue and package it as a podcast? Don't worry about having access to professional recording equipment, we record our CoffeeCast using the voice memo function on an iPhone (although admittedly it does then need to be topped and tailed on Audacity).

However, podcasts seem to work better if there's a few of you in the discussion so if you want to give podcasting a go, Zoom could be a better option.

Run your social

Apps like Hootsuite allow you to tee up the following day's social posts from your phone while you're watching TV or having a sit down in the garden in the evening.

Similarly using the various social media apps from your phone rather than from your desktop makes it quicker and easier to have a scroll through and post, like and share whenever you have a few free minutes.

2. Doing more content

"What business development can I do with content?"

At the moment people are going to be looking for answers to the very specific challenges they're facing and the chances are, they'll start their search online. This means that if you are going to position yourself as a potential source for those answers, you need to be producing a regular flow of content.

A successful content marketing strategy has to be a conveyer belt; you need to keep the blogs and articles coming. With a trickle of new content the chances of you hitting the right person with the right subject at the right time is pretty much zero.

However, your content will only be read if it adds value. Every piece you write needs to address your audience's needs and provide advice they can use to improve their/their business' current position.

If you're in any doubt as to whether your latest idea will add value, why not pitch it against our RSVP checklist to make sure the topic and angle you're considering is:

Relevant (to your audience)
Strategic (it'll help your audience take the next step they need to)
Valuable (it'll tell them something they don't know, something you know will help them)
Practical (it'll tell them exactly what to do next … even if that's to call you for more information!)

And once you have your new pieces of content, you need to do everything you can to promote them. We can't second guess when your audience will be looking at their email, LinkedIn or Twitter and if they are, whether they'll have the time to click on the links. This means you need to put out every link on every channel a few times.

In terms of the types of content you can produce, we split it into 4:

- Articles for your website/marketing
- Articles for referrers
- Podcasts & webinars
- Editorial for the trade or local press

We'll look at all 4 in more detail in this part of the report.

2. Doing more content

Although content has a huge part to play at the moment, you'll undoubtedly have noticed it's a somewhat competitive space. Many firms are publishing new content daily. This has saturated the market (and the search engines) making it very difficult to be heard.

To combat this we'd suggest 2 things:

Avoid 'covidwashing'

Covidwashing is the practice of shoe-horning a mention of the virus into every headline. At the start of May there were more than 3 billion blogs indexed with a COVID related headline which gives you an idea of the scale of that competition. Try and write more practical pieces based on the issues you know your clients and prospective clients are currently facing.

Experiment with new formats

Instead of just blogging, try top tips or 'listicles' ('x things to do when …') and mix up short form FAQ type pieces with longer form articles. Better still, chase external publishing opportunities to supplement your self-published content (we'll come back to that).

In terms of where to find inspiration here are a few proven sources of new content ideas:

A recent client question

For us this is the best option. Think about a particularly tricky question a client has asked you recently, write down the question (that's now your title), then answer it in two paragraphs (that's your blog). Because you'll already know the answer, it'll be quick to write and because your clients are asking that question, it'll play better in the search engines and generate more enquiries.

The news

The reason for using what's in the news is simply that if it's in the news, it's in the public eye. This means people will be searching online for more information so if you're 'appropriating' these headlines, there is a far greater chance that they'll stumble on your piece.

However, there's only one story in the news at the moment and there's no need to re-report that. Instead, pick out the aspects of the current crisis that are most relevant to your clients and make some practical suggestions that will help your readers minimise or manage that particular issue.

2. Doing more content

Everyday life

Has anything happened to you that you could relate to your practice? Have you heard any stories from family or friends that are vaguely relevant to what you do for clients?

Your last technical update

As a solicitor or an accountant you have to keep up with your CPD. Is there anything in the last update that your clients, contacts and targets could benefit from?

You may need to dumb down the source material a bit as your blog is meant for an audience outside your profession but, by using Tenandahalf's CAR structure, you can extract the main point and provide the Context, tell your reader how it will affect them and explain the Action they'll need to take to get the Result they want.

Search engine searching

When you search on any of the key words associated with your practice, Google now handily gives you a list of all of the main questions being asked about those topics. All of these can easily be turned into a blog or an FAQ. And because you know this is exactly what people are searching, the finished piece stands a much better chance of reaching the maximum number of readers.

2. Doing more content

Like you the other professional service firms you work with regularly will also have newsletters, websites and other marketing platforms. Offering to write for those will:

1. Allow you to reach a new but relevant audience.
2. Give you another reason to get in touch with a contact and once that conversation starts, who knows where it may lead.
3. Garner some goodwill and provide you with a stepping stone to explore more ways to co-operate as normality starts to return .
4. Cut a corner for you because if they publish your piece, the next logical step would be to ask them to write for yours!

2. Doing more content

In the first section we talked about alternative ways to repackage your content. Aside from the written options, you may also want to consider webinars and podcasts.

With seminars currently out of commission, more and more firms are running webinars. However as there are so many on offer, your need to make sure yours stand out.

Firstly you need to choose your topics well. People want to learn so be prepared to go niche and dig deep when you do.

Then choose your format. Instead of just talking over slides, think about running interactive Q&As or panel sessions for clients, contacts and targets working in the same sectors or areas. This is really easy to organise using platforms like Zoom and Teams.

Better still, this type of webinar also ticks another BD box – 'virtual networking' events. Your guests will be able to talk to each other and, if there's common ground, carry on their conversations offline which again will reflect well on you.

Podcasts are also proving popular but again your title and topic need to be a bit different if you're going to catch the eye. Your delivery will need to be slick and here are a few tips that may help with that:

Choose the right tech

This will be pivotal to the success of your podcast! We'd always recommend using a digital audio recorder but, given current restrictions, we've found the record function on Zoom is more than fit for purpose.

Choose a co-host

Conversations are repeatedly proven to be more engaging and more effective than monologues so choose someone you have a good rapport with to sit in with you. Co-hosting also makes the whole process a lot less daunting as you can give each other a bit of mutual support.

Prepare, prepare, prepare

Before you do anything, create a structure for your podcast. Pick a topic, list out what you want to say then split who'll say what on a piece of paper so you can use it as a prompt during recording. And if you're going to have a guest, share your questions in advance – the better prepared your guest is, the better the podcast will be.

2. Doing more content

Limit the length

Once you have your plan, you'll know how long the podcast should be. Stick to those timings, don't be tempted to waffle or extend it for the sake of it.

Sound enthusiastic

Your podcast is supposed to give you a way of trying to get new people to start new conversations with you because they liked what they heard. If you're monotone and a bit flat, that's not going to happen so be prepared to inject a bit of enthusiasm.

Tell, do, repeat

As you would with traditional presentation, tell your audience what you're going to cover, cover it and then end by repeating what you've covered. One way to tackle the last stage without over engineering it would be to say "so what are the key points to take away …?" then list them out.

It's about your subject, not you!

Don't spend a lot of time telling personal anecdotes or showing off what you know over and above the topic at hand in micro-detail; stick to the topic at hand and keep the conversation moving.

Avoid yes/no questions

If you want to provide real value you need to ask your co-host or guest questions they can answer meaningfully; don't lead them into blind alleys. Use prefixes like "Tell us about…," "What do you think about …?" and "Give us examples of…"

Post-production

Boosting the sound quality and adding an intro and/or outro will all add a bit of gloss to the finished article. Audacity is good (and free) but a quick Google search will show you all of the viable freeware options.

Don't be afraid to do it over

The beauty of digital recording is it's free so if you don't like it, do it again (or do some bits again and edit them in).

Promote it

Once you have your finished file you need to get it out into your universe or it's not worth doing! There are loads of different podcast platforms which will help you reach a new audience and give you the links you'll need to promote it on social media.

2. Doing more content

Research titles/editors

As we do have a little more time in the day at the moment, take the time to research the publications your clients are most likely to read and the websites they are most likely to go to for information.

For commercially focused practices, this only requires a very quick Google search on 'magazines for [relevant sector] in the UK'. For private client practices, you could look up either specialist personal finance publications or the most prominent local papers, magazines and websites.

And when you find the right titles, jot down the editor's name and email address as they will be your first point of contact.

Find an angle (RSVP)

As with all content marketing, your idea has to be of value to the publication or website's readers. It has to teach them something they didn't know but something they can use to improve their lives or their business. We'd suggest the decision making process is two-fold:

1. Pick a hot topic you know is worrying your clients

2. Reassess it in terms of our RSVP model

Be prepared to pitch

Once you have your angle and your editor's contact details, drop them an email. This email should outline the issue you've identified, explain why their readers will be interested in finding out more and end by offering to write that article for them.

Be prepared to try again

Your initial approach may have been missed for a hundred different reasons but no response doesn't mean no interest. If you don't hear back immediately, wait a week and resend the email with a polite note to confirm your original email was received and reconfirming your enthusiasm to write the article.

And try again

It may be third, fourth or even fifth time lucky but given the potential prize, it's worth it! And if 3 emails go unanswered we'd suggest you pick the phone up.

2. Doing more content

Promote the links via social media

Make sure you promote the links to your article via all of your social media channels and – as with your 'firm' content – put it out several times at different times of the day and ask your colleagues to like it and share it to boost your audience.

Add it to your website

All publications have different rules for republishing articles but if you ask your editor what their policy is, you will be able to promote the original version of your article on your website. It'll most likely be that you can reproduce the first couple of paragraphs with a link back to the publisher's website but as Google loves a backlink that is actually a big marketing win.

Newsletter and e-marketing

Make sure you add a link (or better still a link behind a jpeg of the magazine's cover or websites' homepage) to your next e-marketing piece. Being associated with an external publication will only add to your credibility.

'Saw this and thought of you'

Email the headline and link to your article to your relevant clients and contacts with a personal note saying "I recently had this published and thought it may be useful for you …"

Stay in touch

Your piece has been published but that publication or website hasn't stopped! They'll still need more content for future editions so every couple of months go back to them with a new idea. And use that email chain or that phone call to position yourself (or a colleague) as someone to invite to host a webinar or guest on a podcast.

3. Doing more on social media

"What business development can I do on LinkedIn?"

Social Media - and LinkedIn in particular – not only offers a quick, easy and cost-effective way to stay visible to your clients and contacts but, used correctly, it can also bring you to the attention of a wider audience. This will help you start some brand new conversations while more traditional marketing activities are on hold.

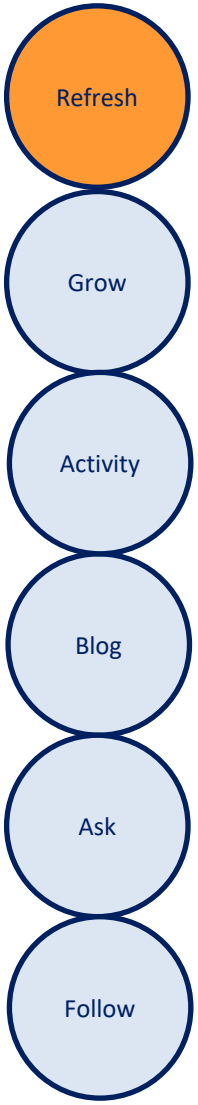
Better still, with a bit of focus and a few short cuts, keeping your social media up to date shouldn't take more than a few minutes a day.

In terms of what you ned to do to get the most out of LinkedIn, we'd suggest you have 6 objectives:

1. Refreshing your profile
2. Growing your network
3. Ensuring regular activity
4. Self-publish LinkedIn blogs
5. Ask your connections for new recommendations
6. Following your clients/contacts' news and activity so you stay up to date and always have a reason to get in touch

We'll explore each in more detail in this part of the report.

3. Doing more on social media



Your profile is the first thing people see when they find you so it needs to be clear, accurate and easy on the eye. Here are some tips that will help you spruce up your profile:

Check how you look

No one wants to see your holiday snaps or you in your favourite rugby shirt. You don't need to be in a suit and tie, but you do need to look like you're at work.

People buy people

Your LinkedIn profile and posts are your shop window and provide the opportunity to connect with likeminded people so don't be afraid to show a little bit of yourself.

Highlight your specialisms

Include the niches you work in (whether they are technical or sector-based) because people use LinkedIn to find specific professionals with specific skills … nobody searches for a generalist and nobody's impressed when they find one!

Stay up to date

Far too many LinkedIn profiles are out of date and you don't want your clients, colleagues and contacts to think that you are out of touch with current events.

Help visitors see your worth immediately

People make judgements very quickly and often with very little data so your profile's summary needs to be directly relevant to your clientbase and your target market.

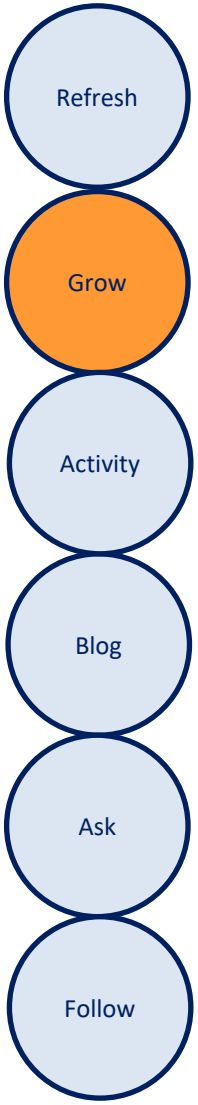
Will your visitors want to read on?

Make it easy for them by breaking down your content into bite-sized jargon-free chunks.

What next?

Even the best LinkedIn profile won't do much for you if it's too hard to get in touch. Make sure you include your email address, your firm's URL and your main switchboard number.

3. Doing more on social media



I'm not sure if to LinkIn is a verb yet but it should be. It also needs to conjugate in the present tense rather than the future tense so here are a few tips that will help you start growing your network today:

Connect with everyone

The connections you LinkIn with are the backbone of a successful LinkedIn account. Connect with all of your clients, colleagues and contacts, with everyone you went to University with, with everyone you've worked with in the past and with everyone you've met at events.

Don't be too British!

Invite everyone you meet to connect (unless there's a good reason not to) immediately after you meet them. You never know who they know, when they might be a useful intermediary or where they'll eventually end up.

Colleagues

Don't forget the 'Colleagues' feature; it will find all the other people you've worked with during your career, contacts who could well have ended up in-house at some new attractive target companies.

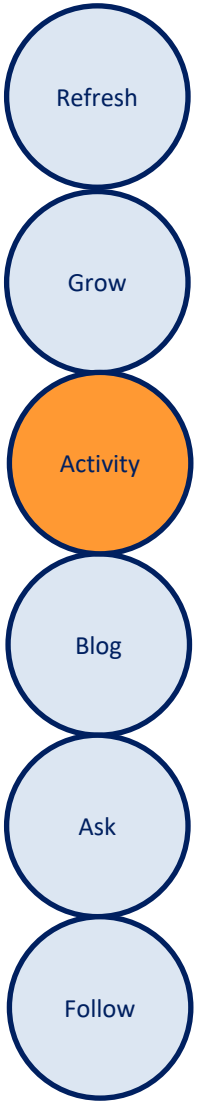
Finding new connections

Looking more widely, it's always helpful if you have a picture of exactly who you want to connect with and ultimately work with. Once you have that picture you can search your connections' connections and ask them for an introduction if you see anyone you'd like to know.

Personalise

And however you find a potential new contact, always personalise your invitations. It will increase the likelihood of them accepting your request.

3. Doing more on social media



Your profile will do very little if you're not using it regularly. The good news is it only takes 5 minutes a day; all you need to do is like, share and comment on other people's posts and post a few updates of your own. Here are some different types of updates you can use:

Your/your firm's content

This is the most obvious option. If you or your colleagues write something for your website (or for anyone else's website), share the link. To make your content work, you need to drive traffic to it and sharing each link is the first step.

News from the sectors you work in

If you focus on specific industry sectors, keep up to date with the latest news from the relevant trade publications. Again, many of the headlines and links they publish will make good posts.

Something from your day

If anything interesting has happened to you during the working day, why not post it? Sometimes it's these more unexpected/offhand posts that elicit the best response.

Something from your inbox

Has a contact, a client or any other source sent you something you found useful, interesting or valuable? Use it as a post! If it was useful to you, it'll be useful to some of your connections too.

Something you had to look up

If you were asked a tricky question that you had to find an answer to, why not share it?

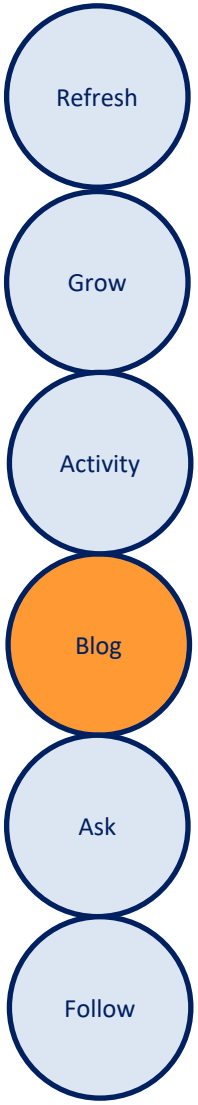
Re-share your contacts' updates

If one of your connections shares something you like, re-share it with a note saying something like 'this caught my eye and I thought it may of interest to my connections …' By sharing, you'll trigger the law of reciprocity. The author will either reply to say thanks or share something of yours.

Something a bit lighter

Your posts don't always have to be strictly business-related. We're definitely not advocating a quick video of you doing shots or arm-wrestling the dog but if you want to share a song that popped up on Spotify, your new personal best for 10k or a photo of you topping a ton on the dartboard, do it.

3. Doing more on social media



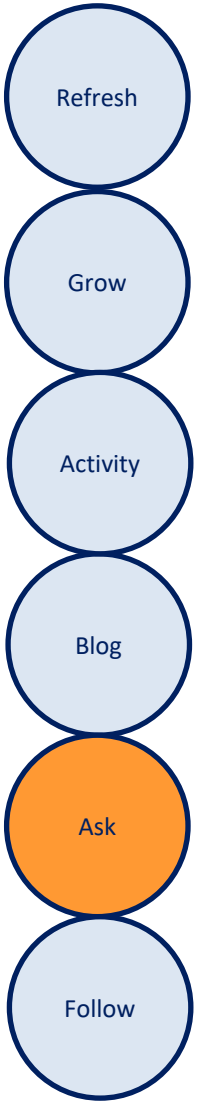
LinkedIn allows you to self-publish new content in full view of all your connections.

At Tenandahalf we're never sure whether short blogs posted in the update box or full form articles posted via the 'write an article' feature work best. It seems to be a different answer every week (not to mention heavily influenced by the headline and picture you use) so our advice is always to do a bit of both.

The benefit of posting short blogs as updates is people can see them as they're scrolling through without having to click into another part of the site (although the character restrictions do force you to keep short pretty short).

The benefits of 'write an article' are that all of your connections are automatically told you've published your piece and because you've published it, it's visible to everyone on LinkedIn rather than just your connections.

3. Doing more on social media



Recommendations are a really effective way to bring your profile to life.

In the same way as a testimonial adds weight to your brochures and pitch documents, praise from someone the reader recognises immediately makes your profile more credible than even the most beautifully written headline, summary and experience boxes.

It couldn't be easier to ask a connection for a recommendation:

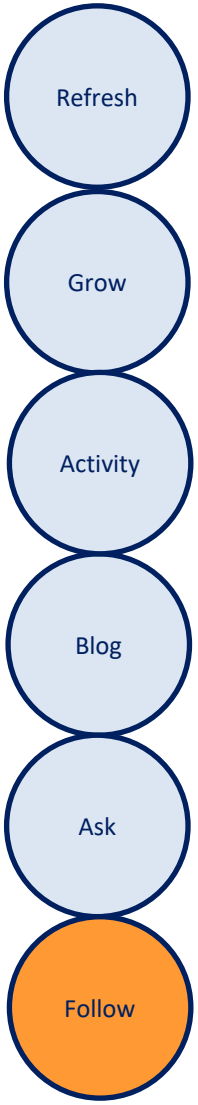
- Click on the 'Me' icon at the top of your LinkedIn homepage
- Select 'View profile'
- Scroll down to the Recommendations section and click 'Ask to be recommended'
- Type the name of the connection you'd like to ask for a recommendation in the 'Who do you want to ask?' field and select their name from the dropdown
- Confirm your Relationship and the position you held when you knew them click 'Next'
- Add a personalised message and click 'Send'

But if you feel a bit shy, don't worry. There's another way! If you write a recommendation for a client, contact or colleague, they will usually automatically return the favour.

And if you do ask, I can't remember a single case where a request has been refused … as long as your underlying relationship is genuine.

Once you do start to build up your recommendations, you will need to remember to keep them up to date. The last thing you want is glowing praise for something you did ten years ago or worse, something you haven't done for the last 10 years.

3. Doing more on social media



LinkedIn is a great way of finding out what your clients are up to.

Company websites tend to be quite corporate and will be policed by the marketing team but LinkedIn allows your connections to provide a more subjective view of what's going on and this type of update (whether it's personal or professional) could give you your 'in'.

If you do see something interesting, it provides a very easy reason to get in touch. All you need to do is drop them a line saying:

"I noticed your recent announcement and it reminded me we haven't spoken for a while …."

Or if you see something that's been posted by one of your connection's competitors or targets, you can send it over as a 'saw this and thought of you'.

And you can also use LinkedIn before a phone call to make sure you're absolutely up to date when you speak. Not only will this extra insight make the conversation easier, it'll also save you from the potential embarrassment of being told about something major you didn't know but should've done.

“How can I do business development from home?”

If you need any help doing business development from home, you will find more practical tips, ideas and suggestions at www.howtodobusinessdevelopmentfromhome.com and www.tenandahalf.co.uk.

If you have any more specific questions on the different activities covered by this special report (or about anything else related to marketing and business development) please email us at info@tenandahalf.co.uk.

If you would like to book our free 30 minute ‘taster’ webinar on the different ways to do BD from home, please send an email to info@tenandahalf.co.uk with the subject line ‘BDFH webinar’.

And if you’d like to keep up with our latest Top 10½ Tips, blogs and videos search #Bdfromhome on Twitter and LinkedIn.

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