

# 10.5

# BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT TOOLS FOR SELLER-DOERS

**Scott D. Butcher, FSMPS, CPSM**



Scott D. Butcher, FSMPS, CPSM  
Vice President / CMO  
JDB Engineering, Inc.  
3687 Concord Road  
York, Pennsylvania 17402  
717.434.1543  
[sbutcher@jdbe.com](mailto:sbutcher@jdbe.com)  
[www.jdbengineering.com](http://www.jdbengineering.com)



jdb engineering, inc.

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## 10.5 Business Development Tools for Seller-Doers

Seller-doer, doer-seller, closer-doer, rainmaker ... all terms used to reference a technical professional (architect, engineer, scientist, construction manager, etc.) tasked with bringing in business to his or her firm. We know why this model is important: clients are increasingly demanding it. We know who is typically involved: SMPS/SMPS Foundation research found that the most common titles for "seller-doers" are principal, partner, CEO, vice president, president, project executive, project manager, and lead designer.

So we know the "why" and we know the "who."

But what about the "what" and "how"? As in, what tools can seller-doers use to make new contacts, gain new opportunities, and land new business for their firms – and how can they use these tools?

The tools for seller-doers are no different than the tools for dedicated business developers. However, seller-doers, by their education and experience, are positioned to use some of the tools differently than their sales-focused counterparts.

Here's a quick overview of the effective tools that seller-doers could and should be using. Note that very few people will use all of these tools; rather, each person needs to decide which tool, or combination of tools, makes the most sense for them.



"Seller-Doers are technical staff who are also responsible for billable hours and, to some degree, for securing contracts or projects for their respective firms, either through repeat clients or fostering relationships with new clients."

- *Society for Marketing Professional Services / SMPS Foundation Sell. Do. Win Business. How A/E/C Firms are Using Staff to Win More Work*

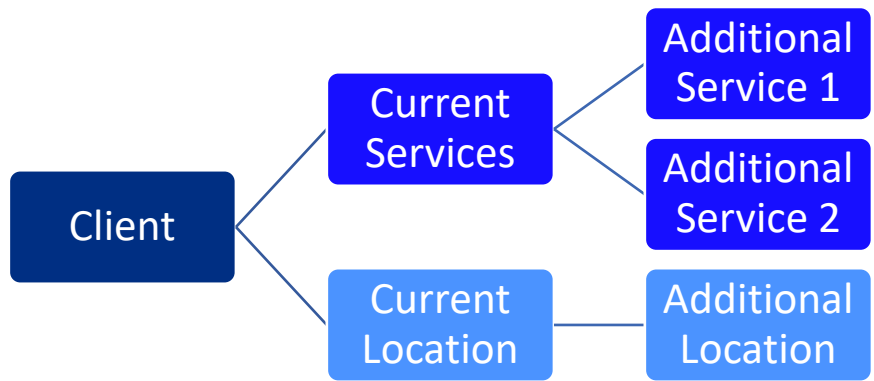
## Account Mining

Most A/E/C firms find that the Pareto Principal is alive and well when it comes to the ratio of repeat business to new business. Surveys have demonstrated again and again that most firms get approximately 80% of their work from repeat clients, and 20% of their business from new clients. So seller-doers are often the “front lines” when it comes to generating repeat work. But seller-doers need to think in broad terms and look beyond the current project(s) they have with a given client.



Take Acme Corporation. What services are you currently providing? Are there services that your firm offers, but Acme Corporate hasn't yet hired you for? This is cross-selling. Likewise, does Acme Corporation have multiple locations or divisions which aren't working with you right now? If so, you have an opportunity to more deeply penetrate the account.

You'll be hard-pressed to maintain that 80% volume if you only rely on the same contacts at your existing clients. Meet new people. Meet your client contacts' counterparts at other divisions/facilities. You are already pre-approved to work with them, so take advantage of it. And remember, the easiest sale to make is an existing service to an existing client (conversely, the most difficult sale is a new service to a new client).



# Networking

Many people avoid networking like it is a bad thing. Some are scared of it. Others believe it is beneath them. And yet, the business world is still very much about relationships and who you know. Unfortunately, most seller-doers don't know enough people. Do you? If not, why not get in front of prospective clients on neutral turf?

Think about where your clients congregate. What are their professional associations? What trade shows and conferences do they attend? If you work in the higher education market, perhaps your clients and prospects can be found at APPA or SCUP. If you work in the healthcare market, ASHE probably makes more sense. And if you chase government work, you'll find prospects at APWA (municipal government) and SAME (military). And if you don't know what these abbreviations stand for, you have work to do!

There are many organizations and conferences that need to be on your radar. Don't start too big. Look for local chapters or regional conferences and trade shows. Joining a specific organization is not enough. You must attend the meetings and (gasp!) engage in conversations. However, attending meetings is often not enough, either, so get involved: join a committee, serve on the board. This will allow relationships to grow organically, and not require you to "sell" (four-letter word); in fact, selling could get you kicked out of these organizations!



“...the business world is still very much about relationships and who you know.”

### Email

Yes, it often seems that email is the bane of all of our existences. And yet, email continues to be an effective business development tool, as long as you are targeted. Mass “hire me” eblasts often serve the opposite effect and get you blacklisted. But a single email written to a specific prospect can be effective, if you have something worth sharing. “I’m writing today to introduce you to ABC Design and see if you have any projects coming up” will not – I repeat, NOT – get it done. We all get dozens of these a day. We’re all so attuned to this crap that we instinctively know which emails they are, and automatically hit the delete key without ever reading them.

However, if you have something of interest, something of value, then you may very well get a response. Never sell, only offer value. The value could come from a piece of content that your firm has published (research, white paper, blog post). Perhaps you’ve gained some client intelligence, and know that you can help solve their problem – even if they don’t yet realize they have a problem. “I just finished reading an article in *College Newsletter* about how University XYZ is seeing record enrollment. My son received his BS from University XYZ, and I know from countless visits to your campus that the dorms haven’t been updated in quite a while. Are you looking to renovate and expand your housing options? My firm, ABC Design, recently published a report about the latest student housing trends for colleges and universities. It covers everything from room configurations to aesthetics to amenities and technology. I’m attaching a copy for your review. I’d be happy to bring our lead researcher and meet with you and anyone in facilities or administration that would be interested in learning more about our findings.”

Something like this positions you as adding value, and doesn’t require any selling. Sure, the recipient understands that you’d like to design the student housing, but they also understand that you have some unique insight that could benefit them. And that differentiates you from the pack, and serves as the perfect door opener.



# Social Media

It continues to amaze me how *bass ackwards* some firms can be when it comes to social media. There are still A/E/C firms that prohibit social media use at work. I know marketing professionals in this industry that are either prohibited from maintaining company social media accounts, or must do so on their own personal time. The social media ship left the port a long time ago...

Today, social media is a major part of most peoples' lives. And yes, many decision-makers are active on social media – so much so that a new approach to business development – known as social selling – has become prevalent. At an absolute minimum, you should have an active presence on LinkedIn, which is the B2B social media site. Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, YouTube – these are just a few other outlets, but LinkedIn is the baseline.

Your clients and prospects are checking you out. They are Googling you and looking at your LinkedIn profile. And guess what – if you don't have a LinkedIn profile, they know that you are an old-school, low-tech kind of firm. At least that's the perception that you create. So make sure you, your other seller-doers, and your company all have a robust presence on LinkedIn. Complete your bio. Connect with people you know. Join and participate in group discussions. Share updates, particularly if they could be of value to your clients and prospects (think industry news, trends, new products, etc.). When the time is right, reach out to connect with a prospect you'd like to get in front of, but once again, think "value." Why would they want to connect with you? What value could you bring to them? Make that value message part of your introduction.

Although this shouldn't need to be stated, please avoid lightning-rod subjects like politics and religion. Just as social media can create new opportunities and build your personal brand, it can also destroy relationships and negatively impact your reputation.



# Writing

Whether writing for a company newsletter, writing a blog, or authoring an article for publication (or white paper, ebook, or book), you'll find that you gain a certain level of credibility when you write. And when you write content worth reading, your personal brand will be enhanced, and prospects will want to connect with you.

There are companies out there building and expanding their practices based solely on thought leadership, so this approach certainly works. Write for your company blog – or write your own blogs on LinkedIn. Guest blog on other sites. Write articles for print and electronic magazines. Write an op-ed for your local newspaper or business journal.

Writing positions you as a Subject Matter Expert (SME) or thought leader. Be sure to provide value in whatever you write. Your clients – and prospects – are really not interested in reading you bragging about your latest project or how awesome your firm is. However, lessons learned, challenges solved, or new products used on your last project make for interesting content. Keep your writing light, tight, conversational, and useful. And keep it coming regularly to build an audience – which in turn will open new doors for potential business.





# Public Speaking

Why do so many people fear public speaking? I suppose for some it is just too intimidating to stand in front of a bunch of strangers and be responsible for giving a presentation that runs anywhere from 15 minutes to 90 minutes, or more. That's a lot of air to fill! And for others, it is perhaps the fear of looking stupid, saying the wrong thing, or becoming tongue-tied. Believe me, all public speakers have "presentation nightmare" stories ... some by our own doing, some by factors beyond our control! But that's no reason to fear public speaking.

The reality is that public speakers are viewed as Subject Matter Experts (SME) and thought leaders. When you present in front of an audience, you are able to shine and demonstrate your knowledge and talents. At the end of the day, buyers of A/E/C services hire people, not companies. So they are "buying" you more than the firm where you work. It's absolutely critical for you to understand that you are the "product," the company brand.

Speaking opportunities are everywhere. There are community groups like Rotary and Sertoma clubs. These are a great place to hone your presentation skills. Perhaps you can talk about a project you are working on, and promote it for your client (with permission, of course). An architect could talk about local architectural history while a civil engineer could discuss the state of crumbling infrastructure locally. And do you know what? Service clubs are filled with decision-makers that may want to hire you.

But you need to think broader – think local professional societies and, ultimately, client organizations. Are there local IFMA, AFE, ASHE, COAA, SCUP, APPA, APPA, ULI, NAIOP, SAME, etc. chapters? Can you get in front of them? That's a great place to expand your network and meet new prospects and – once again – you are positioning yourself as an expert, and reaching a lot more people at once than you ever could with a phone call.

Once you are comfortable speaking locally, look at regional or even national conferences and trade shows. Where do your clients congregate? Check out the conference websites. Look for



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calls for presenters. Some conferences are easy to get into, while others are extremely competitive. And don't forget about your professional societies. Even though they may be filled with your competitors, some owners may attend the conferences, and you may find new teaming partners. Presentation opportunities are everywhere. Does your local business journal host a commercial real estate forum? If you chase that market, you should aim to present there. And why not create educational presentations and deliver lunch-and-learn programs for clients and prospective clients? It's a great way to get your foot in the door in a non-invasive, non-selling way.

Ideas on Where to Speak	
ABC	DBIA
ACEC	IEEE
ACI	IES
AFE	IFMA
AGC	NAIOP
AIA	NAWIC
APPA	NCSEA
APWA	NSPE
ASCE	PCEA
ASHE	PMI
ASHRAE	Rotary Club
ASID	SAME
ASLA	SCUP
BOMA	SDA
Business Journal Event	Sertoma Club
Chamber of Commerce	SMPS
CMAA	ULI
COAA	USGBC
CSI	And many more...

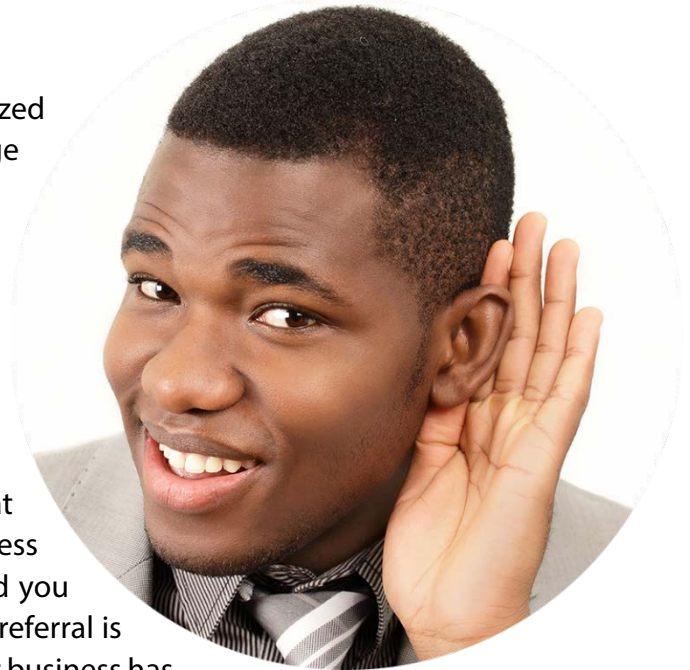
### Referrals

Referrals are hugely impactful, and highly underutilized by A/E/C professionals. Research from Hinge Marketing indicates that the top way owners find new design and construction firms is through referrals, with almost 27% of respondents in one of their research studies indicating that referrals is their top lead source. (Public speaking was second.)

Referrals come multiple ways. In the classic sense, a referral is when a client, vendor, or other close contact refers or recommends you to a prospect that could use your services. You've done this countless times. Your neighbors have their roof replaced, and you ask them who they hired to do it. "Word of mouth" referral is perhaps the oldest form of marketing. Likewise, your business has most likely benefited from a call out of the blue because a client or vendor recommended you. Interestingly, other research conducted by Hinge Marketing found that 69% of owners would happily refer or recommend a firm they've worked with, but 72% of them hadn't been asked!

Of course, in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, there's another type of referral, and that comes from someone who hasn't used your services. Perhaps they heard you speak, read your blog, or follow you on LinkedIn. They've personally experienced your expertise, and when given the chance to recommend an A/E/C firm, they automatically think of you. So a steady stream of content can not only lead to direct opportunities, but can create additional referrals along the way.

Because seller-doers are in regular contact with their clients / owners / buyers, seller-doers are on the front lines of gaining referrals. But the first step is to **ask!**



“Word of Mouth’ referral is perhaps the oldest form of marketing.”

### Direct Mail

Mark Twain is often quoted as quipping, “The reports of my death are greatly exaggerated,” although the quote itself has been exaggerated through the years. However, the quote can also apply to direct mail; that is, old-fashioned snail mail. Media has been tolling the death bell for traditional direct mail for more than a decade, and yet it is still alive and well. And, as it happens, underutilized. A recent Zweig Group study found that the top performing firms still use direct mail. My firm, JDB Engineering, does a lot of work with industrial companies, and I’ve found that many clients and prospects are very poor email users. They often don’t open direct emails, much less e-blasts. But they do check their “snail” mail. And hey, in this day and age, when we receive a postcard or newsletter (or holiday card) in our physical mailbox, it can be somewhat of a novelty – or at least attention-getting.

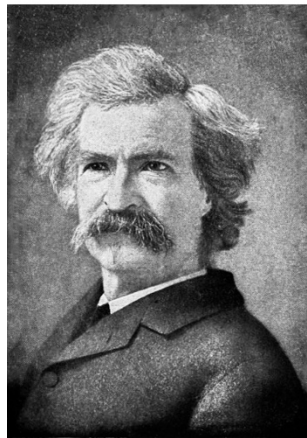
So don’t underestimate the power of old-fashioned direct mail. Once upon a time, mailboxes were filled with clutter – direct mailers, newsletters, magazines, catalogs, prospecting letters, and more. But today, that isn’t often the case. So one way to break through the clutter is to utilize simple postcards to share a value message. Only a quarter (-ish) of email marketing gets viewed (opened). If only a quarter of direct mail recipients look at your message, you’ll be as effective as email, and will certainly be reaching some people who didn’t open any of the email marketing content you sent them. Multiple marketing channels always make sense.

For seller-doers, the call to action should involve you. Perhaps it is to call you for more information or a free consultation. Perhaps the call to action is to visit your website to read a blog or download an ebook or white paper. What’s in it for the recipient? Why would they call you? Make sure you contact information is listed on every direct mailing.

There used to be a generally understood “rule” that it takes at least seven touches to get a response or generate name recognition. So a person needed to see an advertisement on television seven times before they became aware of the product or service



being promoted. Or you needed to make at least seven calls to get through to the person on the other side. Or you needed to get your name in front of a prospect at least seven times with a direct mailer before they knew who you were. Today, with thousands of messages reaching all of us daily, the rule of seven seems somewhat quaint! So persistency and consistency is the key. If you choose to use direct mail, make sure you are sending content out monthly, or at least quarterly. A/E/C business development is often a game of timing: most buyers don't have regular, on-going needs for an architect, engineer, contractor, or specialty consultant. Therefore, by pushing out a steady stream of messages, you're playing the timing game, hoping that when the prospect has a need, your message will arrive in front of them. But you are also building name recognition and brand awareness (your personal brand and the company brand).



Reports of  
direct mail's  
death have  
been greatly  
exaggerated!

### Publicity

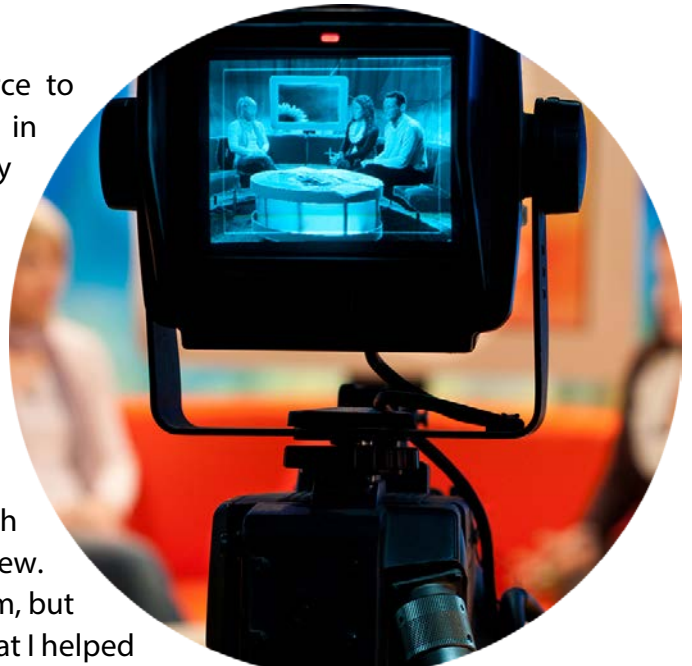
Another effective tool for seller-doers falls under the public relations realm. Getting quoted in a newspaper, business journal, or trade magazine helps establish you as an expert. There is instant credibility that comes from being quoted in an article – or even on a podcast or television broadcast.

This tool, however, is tricky, because you have very limited control. With many of the other tools, you have some element of control. You can write and send an email. You can write a blog – or author an article to send to a journal or magazine for potential publication. You can pick up the phone to make a call, and you can host a webinar featuring you as a speaker – or submit abstracts to present at a conference, although there's no guarantee you will be selected.

With publicity, you are relying on an outside source to control your destiny. Furthermore, if you succeed in getting interviewed, you never know how accurately you will be quoted, and how much of your interview will actually get published. I've spent 45 minutes on the phone with a reporter, and had a one-sentence quote result from the conversation!

The first step in the publicity process is to make yourself available for reporters. Let them know that you are an expert on a certain topic – or topics – and offer to help them. I've often found that reporters reach out to me for recommendations about who to interview. There's no short-term direct benefit for me and my firm, but in the long-term I know the reporter will remember that I helped them, and reach out to me for an interview at some point.

Often, if you write a blog or article, or give a presentation, media may find you. However, waiting for your telephone to ring is not a strategy for publicity any more than it is an effective strategy for business development. Identify the publications that cover your markets – and your clients' markets. Determine what kind of content they publish, and who writes it. We've all had the situation where we've read an article in which a competitor was quoted and thought, "Well why didn't they contact me?" Make a list of those topics where you are able to provide value, and



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include your credentials. Then reach out to the editors and reporters that make the most sense, and share your availability to be a resource. Sometimes they will call you for information only. Sometime they will contact you for recommendations about sources. And yet other times you will be their primary source, and be the one getting interviewed.



### Warm Calling

Yes, sometimes you still have to pick up the phone, as much as most people hate it. What's funny is that a lot of design and construction professionals I know have no problem picking up the phone when it is project-related. They'll call the client, potential vendors, local government officials, consultants, subcontractors, or anyone else necessary in the pursuit of a successful project. Sometimes they know the people they are calling, other times they've never previously spoken. And yet these same, skilled phone conversers cower at the thought of calling someone they don't know if it is done in the context of business development!

Sure, if the prospect calls them, it is an easy conversation. But when the roles are reversed, the stress levels go high! However, at the end of the day, no matter how many emails you send, social media posts you make, blogs you write, or quotes you give to media, there must still be conversation. Few projects are won without robust two-way communication.

Ultimately, you'll want the conversation to be face-to-face, beyond a superficial conversation in a networking environment. This is where the warm call comes in.

Ask an existing client if he or she can provide the names of any counterparts at other companies. The call instantly becomes warm: "Hello, John, my name is Scott Butcher, and I've been working with Jane Doe at Acme Products. She suggested that we connect. I understand that..." (Ideally, Jane would have primed the pumps by first talking to John, emailing him, or doing a social media introduction. But this is not always the case.)

If you give a presentation somewhere, get the attendance list, and follow-up. "Hi John. This is Scott Butcher, I wanted to thank you for attending my program about Building Information Modeling, and ask if you would be willing to share some feedback with me."

Remember the old adage that people hate to be sold, but they love to buy. So don't sell on the phone. Don't push your company,





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products, or services on them. Just have a conversation. Learn about them and their needs. Provide information and value. Establish yourself as a resource.

By all means, if you know that they have a need for your services right now, talk about it. But don't sell. If they are looking to build in a municipality where your civil engineering firm has worked, share some of the processes or pitfalls they need to be aware of. If they are building a hotel and you are a mechanical firm, share with them the value of a VRF system for that type of project. If you sense that schedule is critical, tell them about your firm's approach to modular construction on a recent project, and how that helped get your client into their facility 20% faster than traditional methods would have allowed.


But don't say, "Do you need an architect? Oh, you have a firm you normally use? Okay. Thanks. Bye." (How many times does that exact conversation occur around the country every day?)

Sometimes you might not easily have that "point of warmth," like you met them at a networking event, they commented on your blog, or a client suggested you call them. So dig deeper. Check them out on LinkedIn or Twitter, if they are active. Learn about them. Look for points of commonality – shared contacts, hobbies, organizations, colleges, interests, etc. Certainly if you identify someone you know who knows them, talk with the mutual connection. Learn about the prospect. See if you can get an introduction – or at least some intelligence that will help turn a cold call into a warm call.

And this leads us to our "0.5" tool...



**"Few projects are won without robust two-way communication."**



# Research

None of these tools work without research. You can't give a presentation without doing research. You can't write a blog or an article without doing research. You can't make a warm call without research.

Although research by itself is not a specific business development "tool" per se, it is the foundation for almost all successful business development. Account mining requires research. What services could you be offering? Who else in the client's organization should you know? Are there other locations where you could be working? That's all research. When you ask a client who they recommend you call, you are doing research.

Every seller-doer needs to be doing research weekly. In firms with dedicated business developers, or marketing staff, some of the research is often done by others. But that does not absolve you of your responsibility to conduct research. A thought leader (or Subject Matter Expert) without research is not a thought leader. You need to be knowledgeable, not just about your profession but about your clients' industries. You need to understand trends and new products. You need to understand project delivery approaches to determine what makes the most sense for your clients and prospects. You need to have a network of consultant and vendors.

This is all research.

Likewise, knowing which markets to target, where to find prospects, the primary contacts and their phone/email, background information on the prospects, etc. That's all research, too.

Seller-doers who understand the value of research succeed.

A friend of mine who coaches seller-doers shared with me the "7 P's": Proper Prior Preparation Prevents Piss Poor Performance. I love it!

Research can be time-consuming, and with all your other responsibilities, it will be difficult to find time. So make time. A lot



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of my research is done at home, in the evenings, on my iPad. Usually I'm sitting in my recliner, my son and wife are watching something on TV, and I'm conducting research. Find an approach that makes sense for you and your schedule.

### Ideas on Where to Research

A/E/C Media	FMI
A/E/C Websites	Government Budgets
ABC	Hoover's
AGC	Internet
AIA	LinkedIn
Books of Lists	Local Newspapers
Business Journals	National Newspapers
Business Media	Professional Societies
Client Organizations	PSMJ
Construction Dive	SMPS / SMPS Foundation
Design Futures Council	Trade Journals
Dodge Data & Analytics	Twitter
Dun & Bradstreet	US Bureau of Labor Statistics
Facebook	US Census Bureau
	YouTube

### Putting it Together

Few seller-doers use every tool available. It's just too time-consuming, and face it, most of us are naturals at some tools, and not so much at other tools. So find the tools that you are comfortable using. Focus on them. In the future, you may add more tools. Some of it happens organically – like if you write articles/blogs, often times you'll be contacted to give a presentation. And if you give a presentation, occasionally media may reach out to you to pick your brain or interview you.

Scheduling time is critical. Too many seller-doers believe that they can backfill their schedules with sales activities. They'll schedule their project workload for the week, and plan to "fill in the gaps" with business development. But does that ever really happen? Almost never. So when you schedule your workweek, put in dedicated time for BD. What is your chargeability goal? Can you schedule an hour a day, or is it one hour two days a week? What can you do at the office during normal work hours, and what needs to be afterhours?

Account mining, networking, email, social media, writing, public speaking, referrals, direct mail, publicity, and warm calling are all sales tools at your disposal. And they are really non-threatening tools, either to you or your clients/prospects.

One of the most common reasons that the seller-doer model fails is that people spend too much time *doing* and not enough time *selling*. Well, at least that is what many seller-doers want us to believe. But there's always time available if you make a concerted effort. And these tools fortunately do not require a lot of time.

Social media activities could only require 10-15 minutes a day. Networking events are often only once a month – or maybe twice. Email prospecting is so targeted that it doesn't take much time or effort if you know who you are after and what value message you want to share. Referral conversations may only take a few minutes. Sure, everything requires some commitment of time. But time is money: and if you want to make more of the latter, you need to dedicate more of the former.

Rely on those around you. If your firm has dedicated business developers, use them as a resource. Recent SMPS research has

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revealed that many BD professionals (BD directors, managers, representatives) are evolving their roles to become coaches and trainers to seller-doers. Some are helping with research. Marketers are providing content and marketing messages to seller-doers. In the A/E/C industry, business development is typically a team-based sport, so play your position and trust in your team.

And if you don't have internal resources, look outside to learn. Attend an SMPS business development training program. Read *Professional Services Management Journal*. Find books on related topics and devour them. There are countless books available for most of the tools outlined in this blog.

If you don't know where to start, begin with what I believe is the bible for professional services seller-doers: *Rainmaking* by the late Ford Harding. He covers many of these tools. And even though the book is somewhat out of date with relation to modern tools like social media, the advice is timeless. And although this is a bit self-serving, my book *Reputation Design+Build: Creating Winning Personal Brands for Engineering, Design and Construction Professionals* covers all these tools, plus some others, in more depth. I believe that personal branding is one of the single most impactful approaches for seller-doers to build business, thus the book. Also check out the free resources from Hinge Marketing. They conduct a ton of research, and regularly publish their findings with sound business advice. For Seller-Doer knowledge, start here:

[SMPS Business Development for the A/E/C Industries Workshop](#)

[SMPS Seller-Doer Symposium at Build Business](#)

[Professional Services Management Journal](#)

[Hinge Marketing – Research Institute](#)

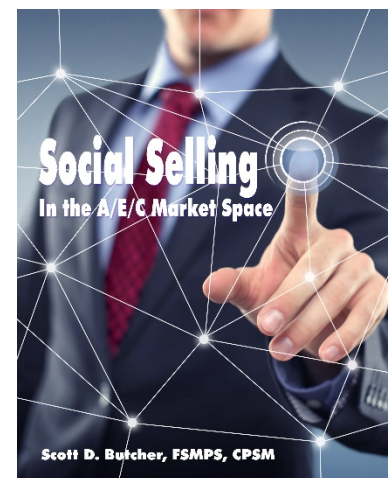
[SMPS/SMPS Foundation Sell. Do. Win Business. How A/E/C Firms are Using Staff to Win More Work](#)

[SMPS Foundation – A/E/C Business Development – The Decade Ahead](#)

[Reputation Design+Build](#)



Scott D. Butcher, FSMPS, CPSM is vice president/CMO of JDB Engineering, Inc. and affiliate companies. A Certified Professional Services Marketer, he is also a Fellow of the Society for Marketing Professional Services, where he serves on the national board of directors. He is the author of a dozen books, as well as several dozen articles for industry publications. In addition to authoring the Marketropolis blog for ENR.com, Scott is also a regular contributor to PSMJ publications.



For information on how to use social media as a business development tool, download Scott Butcher's free ebook, *Social Selling in the A/E/C Market Space*.