
Ideal client profile reduces dead-end leads

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If you're beating your head against the wall trying to sell your product or service, you may be trying to scale the wrong wall. But how do you find the right wall - the prospect that is most likely to become a major customer?

"Start by creating your ideal client profile," advises Seattle-based corporate sales professional Andrea Sittig-Rolf. "You'll be amazed at the new level of responsiveness that comes from identifying and working only with prospects who match the profile."

The ideal client profile, or ICP, can help businesses clean up the sales pipeline, focus on real opportunities and make the most of network opportunities. It also is valuable in accessing new markets, creating partnerships and forming strategic alliances.

Prospecting for prospects

Speaking to the Three Rivers Entrepreneur Network, Sittig-Rolf defined an ideal client profile as "the criteria or characteristics that make up your perfect customer." To develop your ICP, begin by examining your best clients. Why is each company so great? How is your product used and what value does it contribute? Describe the industry, size, number of employees and locations, annual revenue, clients and marketing approach.

Identify the title of your contact at the company and any trigger events that led to a need for your services. For instance, did the client move, expand, downsize, introduce or improve a product or receive a new contract?

Next, collect insights directly from those top customers. Conduct a short survey via face-to-face meeting, phone call or web inquiry. Always ask open-ended questions, such as: How did you hear of us? What other criteria or firms did you consider? Why did you select us?

"You may think you know why customers buy from you, but you may be making false assumptions or missing solid selling points of your product," Sittig-Rolf said. Combine the survey results with your customer review to create a short list of criteria that describe your ideal client. Pursue only prospects that meet your ICP.

Leverage the results

Leverage the survey information to expand market penetration by applying your ICP checklist to the competitors of a key client. Use the track record achieved with your client as validation when approaching those new targets.