

By Russell Trahan

# REMITTED CONNECTIONS

## The Importance of Traditional Follow Up in a Non-Traditional Business World

Bryan walked into his office and flipped on the lights. It had been one month since his presentation and proposal submission to an industry-leading executive team, and that morning was to be the date of their decision on whether to retain his firm. A look to the phone—no blinking light signifying a voicemail. A scroll through his Outlook inbox—nothing. Securing this contract was to be a pivotal moment in his career, and sure to be the determining factor in his upward trajectory in his office.

The minutes turned to hours and no word, and the slight anxiety became increasingly worrisome. Bryan had covered his bases and kept in touch; just last week he engaged in some brief social media banter with the team's CFO. Simple enough to maintain an air of informality and ensure the lines of communication remained open.

His inbox dinged: it was the company's CFO.

"Bryan, we appreciate your proposal submission, but we have decided to go in another direction. We require more consistent interaction from our business partners, and while we scheduled today to finalize our decision, we had yet to hear from you in the interim. We wish you the best of luck."

The email hit him like a freight train. He had avoided a formal follow-up process in fear of seeming overeager or pressuring his prospect, but had maintained casual connections through his LinkedIn and Facebook accounts just to keep his name top-of-mind. While Bryan assumed the company would appreciate his distance while they were in the process of making their decision, it actually became the nail in his corporate coffin. They were awaiting his traditional methods of follow up, and his lack of correspondence instead conveyed that he was not the right man for the job.

In an ever-expanding digital business landscape, Bryan's story is all too familiar. Many working professionals are exchanging established means of follow up, such as phone calls and face-to-face meetings, for quick messages over social media or email, and it is impacting their business relationships and bottom-lines. They sacrifice professional courtesy in an

attempt to appear casual, and regardless of the many ways we can now communicate, when it comes to follow up, the best practices are the traditional practices.

**Social Media is for Building Business Connections—Not Maintaining Them**

Have you encountered a friend or relative that limits all contact with you to digital convenience? That one person who never fails to have a comment reserved for your timeline or feed, but you cannot recall the last time you actually spoke?

These individuals also exist in the business realm, and they've attempted to streamline their communication with an overkill-level reliance on their social media accounts. It's not just a bad business practice—it's bad overall form. Social media can prove invaluable when creating connections, but maintaining them—as is the objective when conducting follow-up on a potential deal—should always be reserved for traditional modes of correspondence. Anything less borders on lazy and unprofessional.

### Avoid the "Are We There Yet?"

Once you've curbed your inclination for social media-centric follow up, there are parameters that should be adhered to when following up with leads. The first—and most important—is to establish an agenda when touching base with your prospects, and ensuring that each subsequent call or meeting occurs under the umbrella of providing new information.

There should be a concrete reason for picking up that phone, and a distinct benefit to the individual on the other end of it.

Any parent can describe road-trip trials and tribulations, and many of them will describe the maddening, constant cries of "Are we there yet?" from the back seat. That same irritated feeling occurs with continuous follow-up calls. There is a distinct difference between being attentive and being annoying—learn it, because your potential client is already well-aware.

### Two to Tango

Bouncing off avoiding impulses to flood your prospect with phone calls, you should actually give them the freedom to lead the interactions a bit. Allow them to dictate the follow-up flow by inquiring

into their timeline and preference for the next call or meeting, and set a date.

Whether your next meeting is two weeks or two months away, your sales prospect has provided an appropriate date and time for your next meeting to occur. The onus is now on you to stick to the plan and pick-up the phone.

### Set Your Calendar and Stick to It

The genesis of the business salesperson always harkens to a time when a man in a pork-pie hat would knock on door after door after door selling vacuums—the quintessential cold-call. There is now a palpable aversion to following up with established sales leads in favor of "keeping things casual."

This only leads to one thing: missed opportunity. Let your calendar hold you accountable. Prior to the end of a meeting or call, be sure to pencil-in an appropriate time to follow up with your prospect, and stick to the date on the calendar. Keeping things casual may maintain pride, but it does not promote sales.

He was remiss with his follow up practices, and because of that, Bryan lost out on an important deal for his company, and for his professional growth. Lessons are often learned through unintended or unwanted consequences, and his silver lining exists in that going forward, Bryan will make sure to devote a large amount of energy and attention to the manner in which he follows up with prospective clients.

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