

23

Positioning: Seeking and Securing Work

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NNo design professional would disagree with the advice of the wise soul who pointed out that the most important part of any project is getting the job: Without the job, there isn't much to fuss about. When designers set out to get the job, the work of business development can seem to involve a lot of fuss: identifying a market with growth potential; identifying a prospect within that market; getting on that prospect's long list; submitting qualifications; presenting your team in a formal interview; touring projects; proposing a scope of services and fees; negotiating the terms of the contract; and exploring why you did or did not get the commission. That's an exhaustive amount of work before the design firm even starts the project, and it may seem to a busy designer to be a huge investment of resources for an uncertain return. But designers who think of business development solely in terms of the single project miss real opportunities. Getting one job done *well* is a key to starting a good and ideally lasting association.

The design professional's goal should be not simply getting the project, but establishing a long-term relationship. This relationship is created not through marketing the project, but through marketing the client. Maybe only one project will result—some clients build only one house, one school, or one office—but the reference is forever. If the project is an award winner but the client is disgruntled with the process, you have only half-succeeded.

Marketing and business development activities are exercises in building trust. It is only when designers earn the trust of the client that they receive the project. Designers can earn the client's trust by demonstrating that they have current, relevant experience, talent, strong processes, and the ability to listen to and interpret the client's goals. And to prove that they have these assets, designers must understand and use the business development process. This chapter describes the process of developing clients, selling your services, and preparing proposals. At the core of all of these activities is a focus on a rewarding and enduring relationship with the client.