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## Starting from Scratch

by Barry Koren, AIA, PhD



**Lenny has never-done any** marketing. He smiles shyly at even the thought of being a marketer. But as fate would have it, despite his years of engineering experience, right now there is no billable work for him.

Yet he's lucked out -- rather than laying him off, his firm is giving him the opportunity to do marketing to bring in some additional work.

**And also as fate would have it, he has me to help guide him.** The first question I ask Lenny is whether he wants to use a computer or paper. He opts for a computer, having recently bought one for his home. One of the partners suggests that Lenny can use the 386 that is now languishing in a corner. It's an antique in comparison with the computers being sold by mass merchandisers like Office Depot, but I'm thankful we have it.

Lenny and I carry the machine to his workspace and within 20 minutes, we've turned it on and get to the C-prompt, meaning that

we're in good old "DOS." None of that new-fangled Windows software for us.

**The next step is to install software** that will help us manage all the information that we'll gather from prospects. Our choice is the DOS version of a program called Act! This version of Act! doesn't compare with the Windows version, which in turn isn't as good as the Windows 95 version, but it's a hell of a lot better than using paper. It will run on a computer that has a 40-megabyte hard drive. And it will do a great job in helping Lenny stay organized.

**Our next step is to develop a faxable leaflet, preferably one page.** The leaflet describes only essential information about the firm and is comparable to a one-page resume, but describes the firm rather than Lenny. I will put together the leaflet and will refine it as we find out more about the needs of our prospect and the firm's potential for meeting them.

**The next step is to make lists of organizations to contact.** Lenny, two of the partners, and I brainstorm about the groups that should be included in our lists. We began with the groups who would hire engineers to do the type of work that Lenny has to offer. Then we add all the people with whom Lenny has had business connections. We add government agencies and trade associations.

**Next, we prioritize.** There were a lot of people that Lenny knew well but who did not have

much of a possibility for pending work, so, for now, we lowered their priority. Lenny will look at the list of groups that we had brainstormed about to further assess priorities.

**When Lenny finishes prioritizing the groups, we'll get lists of organizations that are within each group.** We can get lists of organizations from the Yellow Pages and from directories that the reference librarian can direct us to. We can buy lists from services that sell them as well as from trade associations.

**Another approach that I've been using recently is to use an electronic phone directory manufactured by Pro CD.**

What I like about this program is that I can specify the SIC (Standard Industrial Classification) code. The SIC code allows me to specify for any location in the country the industrial categories for which I want listings. I can choose such diverse categories as "Airports, Flying Fields, & Airport Terminal Services," "Natural Gas Distribution," "Overhead Traveling Cranes, Hoists, and Monorails Systems," and "Lessors of Railroad Property."

I can also specify a distance from the office (e.g., 200 miles) and it will list the businesses that meet these SIC and distance criteria. I will end up with far too many listings, but can then tag the particular ones that I want and export them directly and easily into my Act! (for Windows 95) database. That means that once I've finished tagging the entries I

want, it only takes me about five minutes to get them entered into my Act! database. I get the firm names, addresses, and phone numbers and I'm ready to hit the phones.

**The next step is to make calls.** Lenny and I plan to jointly make calls, perhaps a half-dozen. He'll be on one extension and I'll be on another. Initially, I'll do most of the talking and he'll do most of the listening. After each call, we'll talk about what happened and maybe role-play a key part of the call, like the first 60 seconds.

The calls certainly don't need to be perfect. They merely need to be personable and information seeking, much like the thousands of business calls that Lenny has made in his career. As we make calls, we'll gradually shift the balance with Lenny taking over more of the lead in the phone conversation. This will happen naturally as Lenny gets the feel of applying to marketing the information-seeking and problem-solving skills that he already has. After each call, we'll continue to assess what happened and fine-tune our efforts.

I anticipate that my interpretations of what happened in a particular call will be more positive than Lenny's. He might initially focus on Henry (the prospect) having said that he doesn't have any engineering work for us, whereas I would focus on Henry being open and willing to tell us about the facilities that he is responsible for. Lenny might focus on having to make a good impression. I would shift the focus to having met Henry and having him share with us something about his situation. Lenny might focus on how difficult it is to reach Henry; I would focus on how much valuable information

we were able to get from him in a three-minute conversation when we did finally get to talk with him.

After each call, we'll decide on the next action -- perhaps faxing our leaflet and scheduling our next call back to Henry, or someone to whom he has referred us.

There will be follow-up after follow-up with all the warm possibilities. For large projects, even the most promising possibility will probably take a half-dozen contacts before anything serious happens.

And now I have a question for you. Has there been a situation in your firm that is similar to Lenny's? I am very interested to know how your experiences compare. Please let me know if you have any stories, news, or marketing tips that you want to share. Also, I welcome questions about specific situations.

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