

AEC.BD

Building Business Development Success in a Post-Pandemic World

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AEC

Overarching term for the Built Environment, including Architecture, Engineering, Construction, Environmental, Specialty Consultants, and related firms.

A comprehensive study to explore the strategies employed by AEC firms in driving revenue growth.

. BD

Business Development, or the process of identifying clients and opportunities, developing relationships, and securing profitable work for the firm. (SMPS.org)

By engaging a diverse array of participants across various AEC firm types, sizes, and geographies, SMPS Foundation and Stambaugh Ness discovered insights into the evolving world of business development, contributing to a future where diversity of thought and practice propels the industry-forward.

About SMPS Foundation

The mission of the SMPS Foundation is to deliver intelligence and insights for growth professionals and leaders to help them navigate trends, change, and business evolution in a highly competitive marketplace.

*Transform today.
Create tomorrow.*



The SMPS Foundation is a not-for-profit 501(c)(3) organization established by the Society for Marketing Professional Services (SMPS) to deliver intelligence and insights.

SMPS is a diverse community of marketing and business development professionals working together to move the A/E/C industries forward.

SMPS believes in **Business Transformed Through Marketing Leadership**. In fact, today's most dynamic and successful A/E/C firms have realized the important balance between sellers and doers, between marketing and business development, and have used this important distinction to their advantage.

Through networking, educational opportunities, and industry leading research, SMPS members gain a competitive advantage in positioning their firms successfully in the marketplace.

SMPS is the only organization dedicated to creating business opportunities in the A/E/C industry. Members are able to tap into our powerful network to form partnerships, secure business referrals, and benchmark their firm's performance.

Visit [SMPS.org](https://www.smps.org) to learn more.



About Stambaugh Ness

COLLABORATIVE. FORWARD-THINKING. FUTURE-READY.



Stambaugh Ness is a multi-discipline, professional services firm serving clients nationally with a strategic focus on the architecture and engineering, professional services, and construction and real estate industries. With Stambaugh Ness, clients have access to a diverse menu of services, including business consulting, compliance, government contract services, strategic tax solutions, technology and cyber risk advisory, data solutions, Microsoft solutions, Deltek ERP software, strategic growth, workforce and talent solutions, outsourced accounting, ownership transition, and mergers and acquisitions.

Gain direct access to high-level AEC industry expertise and growth driven solutions that position your firm for the future.

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BD and Marketing Strategy
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Seller-Doer Training
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knowledge
delivered with
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for the AEC
industry.*

Introduction

How are architecture, engineering, construction (AEC) and related firms approaching business development? The Society for Marketing Professional Services (SMPS) and SMPS Foundation asked that question in 2015, and launched a first-ever industry survey delving deep into how companies are using dedicated business developers and seller-doers. This research built upon the work of Scott D. Butcher, FSMPS, CPSM and William R. Long, PE, LEED AP, FSMPS, originally collected for the SMPS **Marketer** February 2014 article, “The Seller-Doer Model: Is it Really Taking Hold – and Is It Working?”

Fast-forward to 2024, and a lot has changed. Since the original findings were published in the 2016 release, **Sell. Do. Win Business. A Report on How AEC Firms are Using Staff to Win More Work**, there have been major disruptions impacting business development.

In the 2010s, the oldest members of the Baby Boomer generation began turning 65 and leaving the industry. This trend has accelerated, and in 2024 the United States population reached “Peak 65,” with more than 11,000 Baby Boomers turning 65 every single day. Whether they actually retire at 65 or sometime thereafter, the AEC industry is seeing an exodus of experienced staff like never before. This includes firm leaders, seller-doers, and dedicated business developers, along with senior technical staff with deep resumes of experience. This trend is also impacting the

client side, with long-time client decision-makers and client champions heading toward the exits.

Baby Boomers – those born between 1946 and 1964 – represented the largest generation in the workforce for decades. They handed that torch to Generation X members (born between 1965 and 1980) for an extremely short period of time between 2013 and 2015, according to Pew Research Center. By 2016, Millennials had taken over as the largest generation in the workforce, and they will hold this position for several decades because Generation Z, the newest generation in the workforce, is smaller.

89%

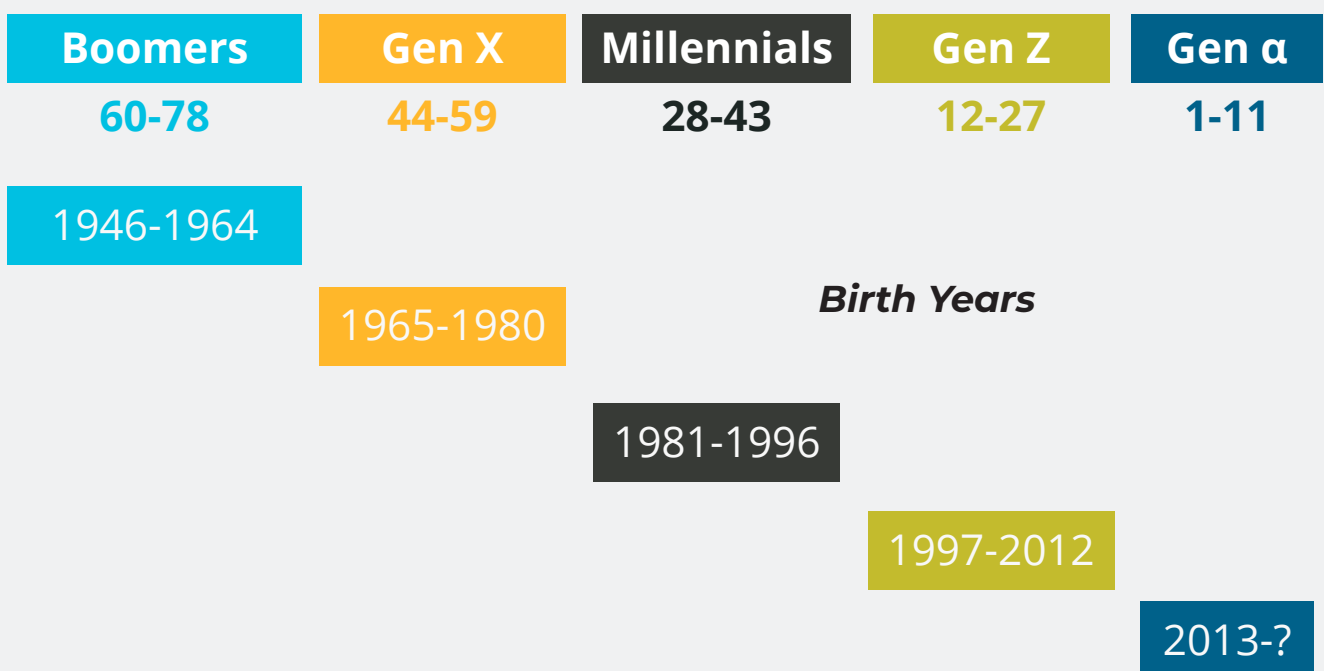
of AEC Firms Use
Seller-Doers.

Millennials were born between 1981 and 1996, with the Gen Z cohort spanning 1997 to 2012.

This generational change is extremely disruptive, and because Gen X is a smaller generation than the one before and after, it has resulted in Millennials being fast-tracked into more senior roles to accommodate the outgoing Boomers. Millennials are often viewed as being digital natives – growing up with ever-present technology and being very comfortable with it, unlike prior generations that had to adapt to it. Digital natives approach business and communication far differently than prior generations. In fact, Gartner's ***Future of Sales*** Report predicted that 80% of business-to-business (B2B) sales interactions would occur via digital channels by 2025. Furthermore, the research found that 33% of all buyers and 44% of Millennials desire a "seller-free experience." (Source: "Gartner Says 80% of B2B Sales Interactions Between Suppliers and Buyers Will Occur in Digital Channels by 2025")

The proliferation of digital tools that were in their infancy or didn't even exist in 2015 has been a huge disruptor to the business development and marketing process. What's a business developer or seller-doer to do when they can't meet in person with potential clients – or even existing ones? There's an oft-quoted statistic that 70% of a B2B buyer's decision-making process is already complete before sales (or business development) staff is even contacted. Although certainly not accurate for AEC, it does demonstrate the changing buyer behaviors that we must contend with in our industry. Buyers are increasingly incorporating business-to-consumer (B2C) approaches when making B2B decisions. When we buy a new car, refrigerator, or television, we often ask friends and family members what they think of their (fill in the blank) product, check out websites to research alternatives, read customer reviews, and more. While referrals have always been an important component of our industry, many referrals come from

Age in 2024



individuals who haven't even worked with our firms, but rather were exposed to us in another way: they heard us speak, attended a webinar, read our blog, followed us on social media, or connected with us through some other outreach. And this is how potential buyers are doing their research as well.

This has been another significant change and positive disruption to the built environment. Like other industries, business development and marketing have converged – although in too many AEC firms they are still siloed. Firms employing thought leadership are seeing inbound leads from blogs, videos, social media posts, and webinars, as well as more traditional thought leadership approaches like conference and society presentations or articles in client publications. Marketing efforts are increasingly enabling sales opportunities for design and construction firms, and those firms that aren't employing these approaches are falling behind.

Another major disruption worth noting is, of course, the global pandemic, which impacted every person and every business in early 2020. In some states, AEC firms were deemed “non-essential.” The economy experienced a massive, albeit brief, retraction. Business development efforts also hit a brick wall, and it took many years to fully recover (and some markets are still recovering). Suddenly, there were no client organization meetings to attend, no conferences to sponsor, no prospects to meet with. Networking – which had been identified in the SMPS **Marketing 2022** research as the most important marketing and business development tactic when the report was released in 2019 – was suddenly non-existent. Clients and prospects were remote and even if we could track them down, they were too busy to meet with business developers and seller-doers. Projects went on hold or were outright cancelled.

Although it seemed the sky was falling for the first few months, the industry quickly rebounded – but came back much differently, impacting how firms approached business development. Even for clients and prospects back at work, policies prohibited non-employees from entering facilities. Hybrid working (part-time in-office, part-time remote) increasingly became the norm. Some conferences and trade shows were cancelled or went remote for two years. Client organizations and professional societies went virtual before moving to a model that includes both in-person and virtual.

The tools used today for business development largely came of age during the “pandemic years.” Like it or not, Zoom and Teams are essential tools for business development. The predicted death of email was greatly exaggerated and, to this day, remains a critical component of business development. We still need to have phone conversations, although it is more difficult than ever to actually have the person on the other end pick up the phone when we call.

Changing generations. Evolving buying behaviors. New digital tools. And a changed business world due to the pandemic. The world is much different today than it was when ***Sell. Do. Win Business.*** was first published.

So, if we revisit the initial question that SMPS/ SMPS Foundation asked in 2015 – how are AEC and related firms approaching business development? – the answer in 2024 may look much different. As a result, Stambaugh Ness and the SMPS Foundation set out to collaborate to address this very important question, which is relevant to the future of every firm operating in the built environment.

Business Development Models

The AEC industry has traditionally looked at three primary models for business development: Rainmaker, Dedicated Business Developer, and Seller-Doer.

This is a simple way of viewing things, but not an accurate reflection of how firms are approaching business development. Through extensive business development model research as well as consulting with scores of companies, seven different models employed by AEC firms have been identified. Although the smallest of firms in our industry may only employ one of these models, most firms use a combination of several models. These models are defined as:

1

Rainmaker

One individual – often a firm executive or founder – brings in the majority of the firm's work.

2

Principal Business Developer

A firm principal, partner, or vice president is responsible for managing the firm's business development activities and usually has their own business development accountability.

3

Market Champion

The firm is divided into groups or studios, perhaps by market sector, service line, or geographic region, and the head of each group is responsible for developing business for their team.

4

Seller-Doer

The most traditional definition is someone responsible for bringing in work and then doing that work, balancing selling and doing. This includes project managers, project executives, and discipline leads.



Business Development Models

Find deeper insights about the AEC Business Development Models in Scott Butcher's free on-demand program available from the [Stambaugh Ness Skills and Performance Institute](#).

5

Dedicated Business Developer

A position solely focused on generating opportunities and bringing in work for the company, often focused on new clients.

6

Marketer-Business Developer

A combined position where a person has both marketing and business development responsibilities.

7

Marketer

A person who may be involved with sales enablement, helping to drive leads and opportunities, or they are heavily engaged with pursuits but mostly behind-the-scenes, like identifying a governmental project opportunity, leading the go/no-go decision, and driving the proposal or qualification submission development.

Note that the Rainmaker, Principal Business Developer, and Market Champion may all be seller-doers with billable targets and project responsibilities. They tend to be more heavily focused on business development than project work, whereas the more traditional seller-doer – perhaps a project manager or discipline lead – typically spends more time in project delivery, billing time to clients.



Which business development models are preferred – or will be in the coming years?

Survey participants were asked which models they anticipated using over the next three years. Rainmaker proved the least common, which should come as no surprise to industry watchers.



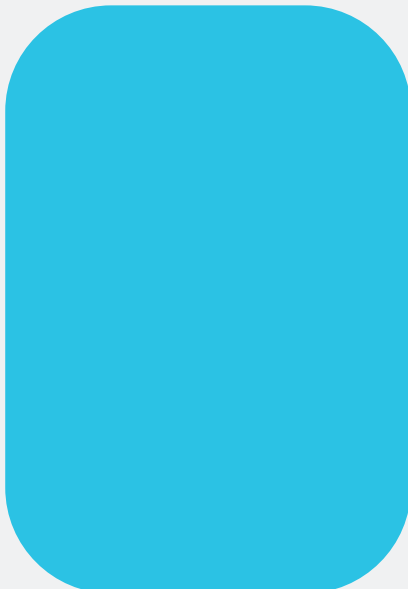
Definitions

Business Developers

Business Developers are dedicated employees who secure contracts or projects for their respective firms, either through repeat clients or fostering relationships with new clients. The majority of AEC business developers do not come from technical backgrounds (e.g., engineering, architecture, or construction management degrees and past positions). However, some technical staff do move into full-time business development roles.

Seller-Doers

Seller-doers are staff members responsible for billable hours and, to some extent, securing contracts or projects for their respective firms through repeat clients or fostering relationships with new clients. Seller-doers are often referred to as “technical staff” to differentiate from administrative staff responsible for the non-billable components of a firm. Some companies refer to seller-doers as doer-sellers or closer-doers, although seller-doer is the more widely accepted term. It is a role, not a title.





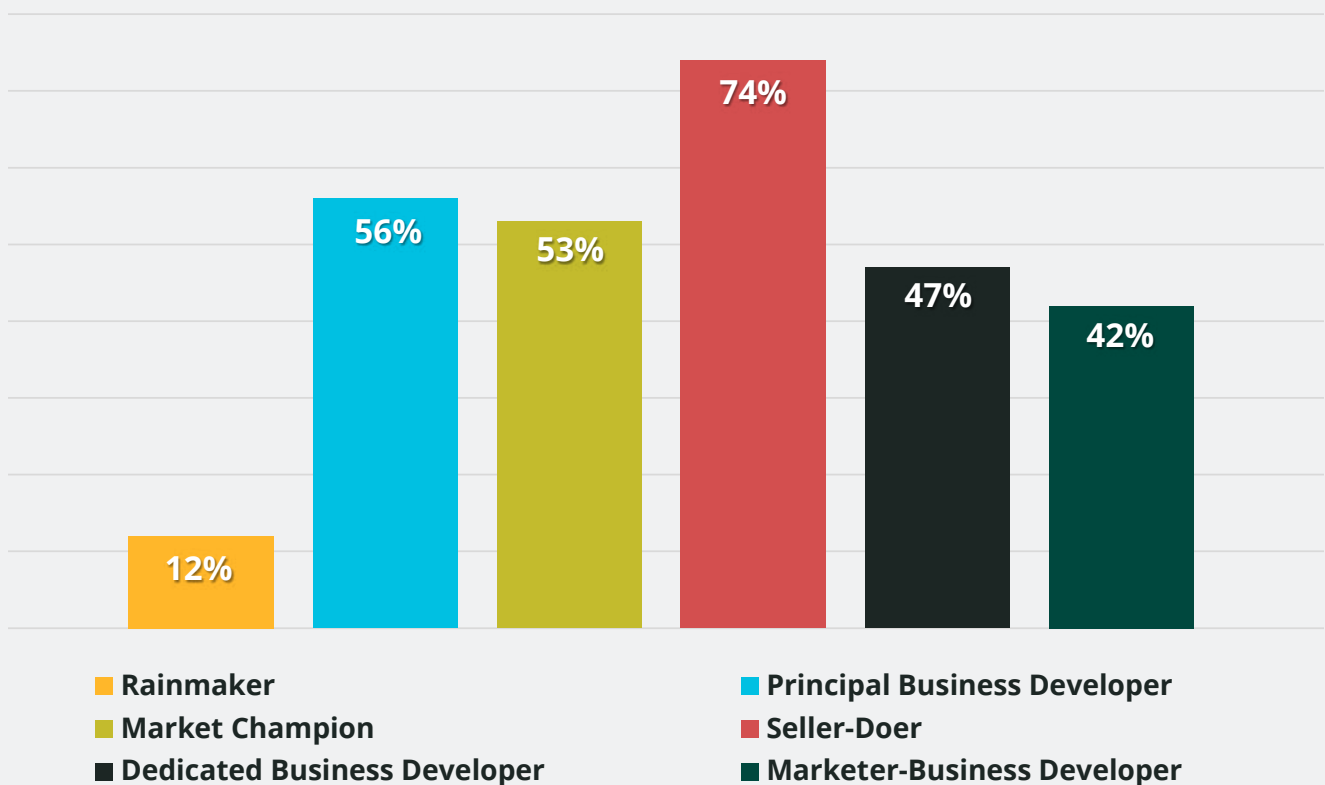
Many AEC firms were founded by members of the Silent Generation or Baby Boomers. They may have been the original Rainmakers for their firms as firm founders, but they have retired, are soon retiring, or their firms have grown too large to leverage the Rainmaker model. Still, 12% of respondents identified the Rainmaker model as one they plan to use.

The most common model is that of the Seller-Doer, with almost 75% of firms identifying this model specifically. Keep in mind that the Principal Business Developer and Market Champion are often Seller-Doers as well, and more than half of survey participants identified that they anticipate using those models in the coming years, with 56%

identifying Principal Business Developers and 53% selecting Market Champion.

As for Dedicated Business Developer, or positions solely focused on generating work, 47% of responding firms plan to use this model. The combination role of Marketer-Business Developer is also relatively popular, with 42% of firms currently employing it or looking to use it in the coming years. This may be a call to action for marketing and business development professionals in the industry who are specializing in either marketing or business development, and need to be cross-trained as firms increasingly seek this combination role, perhaps for efficiency.

Preferred Business Development Models





Business Development and Marketing Staff

Approximately 78% of the respondents to the survey have at least one dedicated business developer on staff. More than half of firms indicated that they employ four or fewer dedicated business developers, by far the most common range.

In the 2015 research, we asked if firms were planning any changes in the number of business developers – increasing, decreasing, or keeping the same. A surprising 47% of firms indicated that they were planning to increase the number of dedicated business developers on staff, with 53% of construction firms, 52% of engineering firms, and 38% of architecture firms all planning to increase their business development ranks.

But did they actually do this?

The 2024 research found that, indeed, 56% of firms increased the number of dedicated business developers on staff. Only 9% reduced the count of business developers, while 30% maintained the same number. Overall, this resulted in a net increase of 47% of firms, a significant boost to the industry's business development ranks.

TOP RESPONSIBILITIES OF FULL-TIME BUSINESS DEVELOPERS

- Setting up appointments with potential clients
- Participating in client meetings
- Managing client relationships
- Participating in client organizations
- Attending trade shows

What do business developers actually do?

According to survey participants, the top activity of full-time business developers is a tie between setting up appointments with potential clients and participating in client meetings, with 72% of respondents identifying these as responsibilities. Close behind at 71% is managing client relationships, which demonstrates that the role of a business developer has evolved, and they are now instrumental in maintaining a positive client experience. Approximately 63% of business developers participate in client organizations, while 61% attend trade shows.

Marketing Staff

A simple differentiation between marketing and business development is to consider marketing as “one-to-many” and business development as “one-to-one.” At the top of the funnel, marketers build brand, generate name recognition, know the market, and even generate leads. They are largely focused on understanding the target audience, then ensuring the firm is in front of that audience.

However, one of the unique quirks of the AEC industry is that firms often don't focus enough on top-of-funnel marketing, and instead use the staff to support business development at the bottom of the funnel, developing proposals as well as presentations to win work, like shortlist interviews. Even though largely performed by marketing staff, these functions are really a sales/business development function.

Business development professionals and seller-doers cannot operate in a vacuum, and AEC firms understand the critical roles that marketers play in bringing in work at the various levels of the funnel. Furthermore, as BD professionals and seller-doers increasingly employ different tools like webinars, blogs, and social media – as well as more traditional articles and conference presentations – the role of marketing becomes even more vital as they are enabling those tasked directly with bringing in work.

As part of the **AEC.BD** research, we were curious about the actual marketing roles present in AEC firms. Perhaps unsurprisingly, Marketing Coordinator was the most frequent position, with 74% of firms having this position on staff. Marketing Manager was the second most



Blueprints 3.0

Curious about the necessary qualifications and responsibilities of marketing positions in the AEC industry? Check out [Blueprints 3.0](#), available on [SMPS.org](#).

common position, with 54% of firms having this role. The Marketing Director role was present in 47% of firms. Slightly under a quarter of firms, 22%, have Chief Marketing Officers or Marketing Executives, showing the growing prominence of this role within the industry.

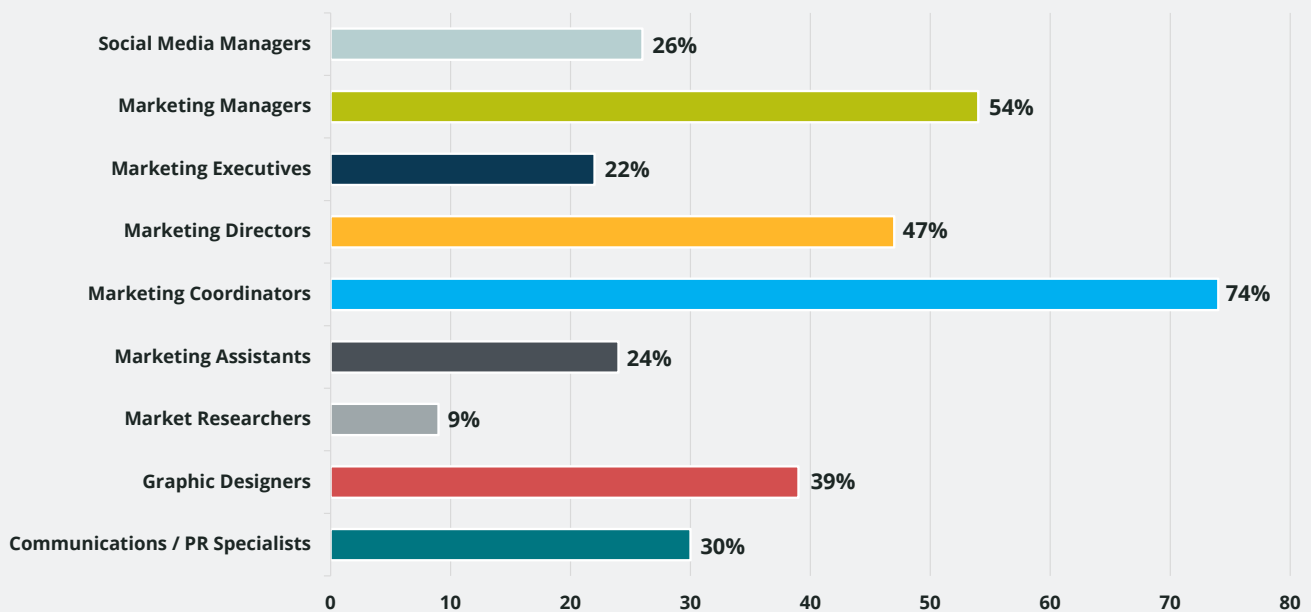
There are many other important roles, and some are newer positions. For instance, while 30% of participating firms employ communications and public relations staff, 26% have social media managers – a position that barely existed when the initial *Sell. Do. Win Business.* research was released. And almost 40% of participating firms now have graphic designers on staff. Other firms are bringing in video producers or copy editors to drive thought leadership development.

LESS THAN

4%

of survey respondents reported no marketing staff.

AEC Firms with Marketing Positions



Seller-Doers

When the **Sell. Do. Win Business.** research was collected in 2015, one of the surprising findings was how prevalent the seller-doer model was across firms serving the built environment. Almost three-quarters of AEC firms indicated that they used seller-doers for business development. Furthermore, a net of 33% of firms had increased the use of seller-doers, with a net of 49% of all participating firms anticipating increased use of seller-doers in the coming years. Clearly, the seller-doer model was very common.

The new data tells us that this prevalence is continuing in 2024. Today, 89% of firms report using seller-doers for business development. A net of 47% of responding firms indicated that they have added seller-doers over the past five years, while 42% of seller-doers are spending more time in business development compared to five years ago.

But why is this happening? The challenges of the model are well-known, and typically include a lack of time to dedicate to business development, or the lack of relevant training, skills, and even sales acumen. These are strong arguments against the model, and yet it continues to grow in popularity.

We asked 89% of survey respondents using seller-doers to identify the main reasons for using it. The top reason cited by 70% of participants was client expectations to meet with the individuals who would be working on their projects. This is one of the primary reasons that we have been seeing firms embrace the seller-doer model. Just as the AEC industry continues to face a talent shortage – recent Stambaugh Ness research found that 77% of firms are having trouble finding staff – the trend holds true on the client side as well. Declining birth rates, declining college enrollments, and declining labor force participation are all culprits here, but the end result is that our clients are understaffed and simply don't have the time for multiple meetings with potential AEC providers as they vet which firm to hire.

When clients meet with someone working to develop business – whether a full-time business developer, rainmaker, market champion, principal business developer, or traditional seller-doer – they have a problem that needs solving, and questions to ask. They don't want to meet with people who cannot help them or answer their questions. So consultative selling, or technical-led business development, is essential to these firms to best serve their clients.

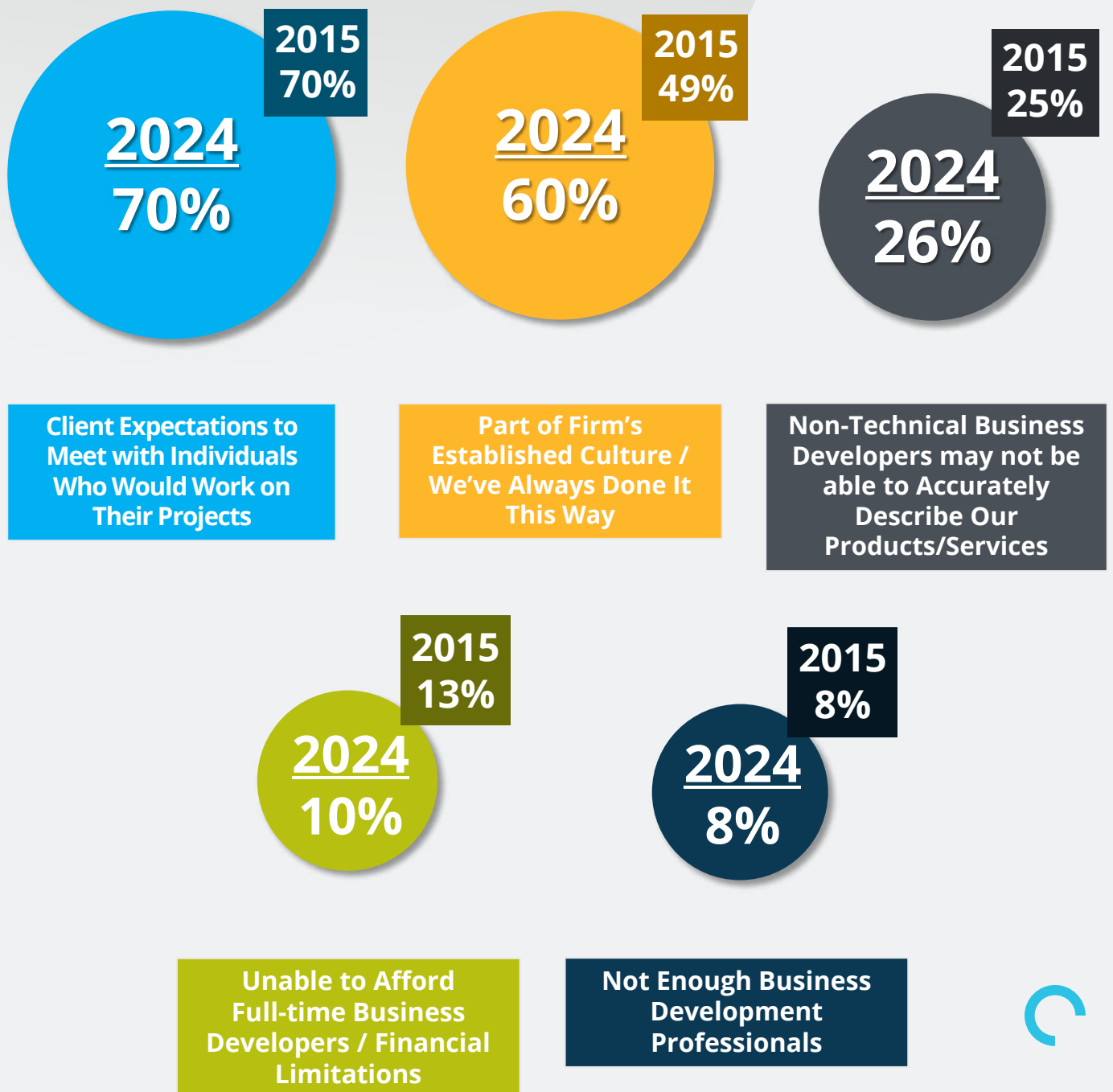
70% of participants cited client expectations to meet with individuals working on their projects as the top reason to use seller-doers.



The second most common reason for using seller-doers, identified by 60% of firms, was that the seller-doer model is just part of their established culture, and they've always done it that way. At a distant third, but still significant, 26% of respondents were concerned that

nontechnical business developers may not be able to describe the firm's offerings accurately. Approximately 10% of firms can't afford business developers, and only 8% felt there were not enough qualified business developers available.

Reasons AEC Firms Use Seller-Doers



Firms Using Dedicated Business Developers & Seller-Doers

Type of Firm	Use Business Developers	Use Seller-Doers
Architecture	67%	88%
Architecture / Engineering	76%	94%
Construction	94%	80%
Engineering / Environmental	75%	92%
Specialty Consultant / Other	79%	91%

Size of Firm	Use Business Developers	Use Seller-Doers
1-9 Employees	62%	90%
10-24 Employees	65%	81%
25-99 Employees	65%	86%
100-499 Employees	83%	93%
500+ Employees	98%	90%

Region of Firm	Use Business Developers	Use Seller-Doers
Local	58%	82%
Regional	74%	87%
U.S. National	84%	91%
International (U.S. & Beyond)	88%	94%

Market of Firm	Use Business Developers	Use Seller-Doers
Commercial / Retail	79%	90%
Educational	79%	89%
Energy	78%	93%
Environmental	86%	93%
Federal Government	84%	92%
Healthcare	83%	91%
Industrial / Manufacturing	86%	93%
Residential	76%	89%
State-Local Government	80%	91%
Transportation	78%	93%
Water / Wastewater	81%	94%

Seller-Doer Positions

So who, exactly, are the seller-doers in an AEC firm? Participants were asked to select the positions in their company with business development responsibilities.

The most common role or title was Principal/Owner/Partner, with 66% of firms identifying this as a position with business development responsibilities – the exact same percentage as the 2015 research. Project Executive/Project Manager was the next most common title, with 61% of firms using this position for business development, up from 58% in the prior report. CEO/President was identified by 49% of participants, showing growth in BD responsibilities over the 2015 research,

which identified 43% of individuals in these roles as having business development responsibilities. Vice President/Other C-Suite was the next most common, jumping from fifth to fourth. Today, 43% of those in this role have BD responsibilities; last time it was 36%. The fifth most common role is that of Lead Designer/Engineer/Architect/Consultant/Scientist coming in at 42%, which is not much of a change from 41% in the previous study.

Most Common Positions with Business Development Responsibilities



Seller-Doer Business Development Time

How much time do seller-doers spend doing business development?

The answer is all over the board, and unique to every firm. The data provides some useful guidance when trying to determine how firms are budgeting BD time for seller-doers. We asked participants to provide ranges, and the most commonly cited responses help us to understand how these positions are being used.

For the CEO or President role, 10 to 25% of time spent in business development was the most common answer, with 30% of respondents identifying this range. However, 25% spend less than 10% of their time while almost another quarter (22%) spend between 26% and 50% of their time in business development.

For those in the Principal / Owner / Partner role, 10% to 25% of time focused on business development was the most common response and identified by 40% of survey participants. The second most common response was 26% to 50%, highlighting that those staff members in these roles tend to have significant BD responsibilities. Only 13% of firms indicated that those in the role spend less than 10% of their time in BD.

Vice Presidents and other C-Suite staff also have the 10 to 25% range as the most common, with 31%, and another 24% of firms selected the 26% to 50% range. Notably, 15% of staff in these roles spend at least half or more of their time involved with business development.

Market Leaders and Market Champions also spend a good bit of time focused on bringing in work, with almost a quarter in the 10% to 25% time range, with the same amount spending more than half their time in business development.

There's been a belief among some in the industry that project managers only spend 5% of their time involved with BD, and the data demonstrates that 28% of Project Executives and Project Managers do in fact spend less than 10% of their time focused on driving new work. However, a significant 42% spend 10% to 25% of their time engaged in BD, with another 15% spending between 26% and 50% of their time in this area.

For those seller-doers focused on generating more work from their existing clients, time spent in BD may be limited. For those with responsibilities for bringing in opportunities with new clients, a significant amount of time may be required.

Position	<10%	10-25%	26-50%	51-75%	>75%	Unsure
Chief Executive Officer / President	25%	30%	22%	9%	4%	8%
Principal / Owner / Partner	13%	40%	24%	9%	4%	9%
Vice President / Other C-Suite	19%	31%	24%	10%	5%	11%
Market Leader / Champion	15%	24%	23%	16%	8%	14%
Project Executive / Project Manager	28%	42%	15%	4%	2%	9%
Lead Designer / Engineer / Architect / Consultant / Scientist	42%	33%	11%	2%	1%	11%
Project Superintendent	54%	15%	1%	1%	1%	28%
Estimator	48%	12%	8%	4%	2%	25%
Other Director / Manager / Coordinator	27%	24%	21%	7%	10%	11%

Note that row totals may not sum to 100 based upon rounding.

Most Frequent

Second Most Frequent



Percent of Technical Staff with Business Development Responsibilities

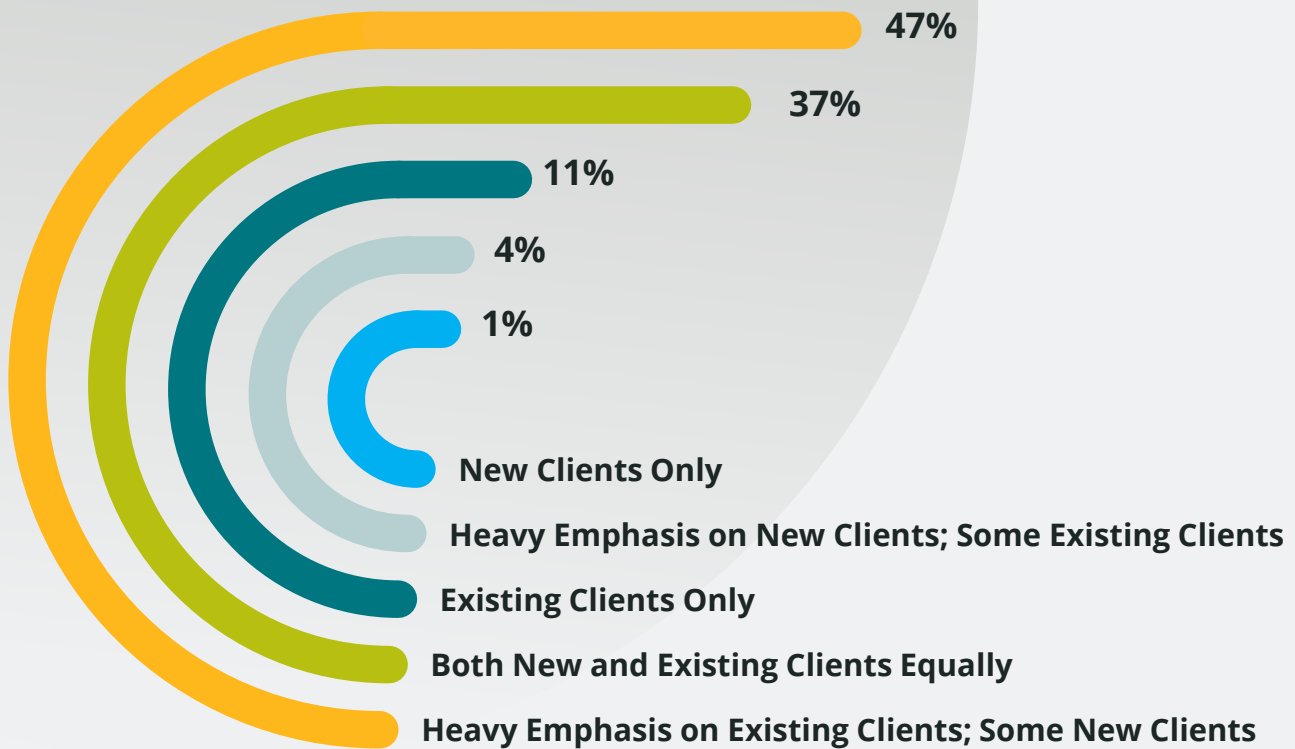
Type of Firm	<25%	25-50%	51-75%	>75%	Unsure
Architecture	71%	24%	2%	0%	2%
Architecture / Engineering	58%	26%	6%	6%	3%
Construction	70%	30%	0%	0%	0%
Engineering / Environmental	59%	26%	9%	3%	2%
Specialty Consultant / Other	36%	23%	23%	14%	5%

Size of Firm	<25%	25-50%	51-75%	>75%	Unsure
1-9 Employees	30%	10%	40%	10%	10%
10-24 Employees	63%	31%	6%	0%	0%
25-99 Employees	72%	21%	4%	1%	1%
100-499 Employees	70%	24%	5%	1%	0%
500+ Employees	37%	39%	8%	10%	6%

Region of Firm	<25%	25-50%	51-75%	>75%	Unsure
Local	71%	29%	0%	0%	0%
Regional	68%	23%	5%	2%	2%
U.S. National	57%	24%	9%	6%	4%
International (U.S. & Beyond)	43%	37%	14%	6%	0%

Market of Firm	<25%	25-50%	51-75%	>75%	Unsure
Commercial / Retail	58%	29%	9%	3%	1%
Educational	60%	29%	7%	4%	1%
Energy	51%	25%	12%	9%	3%
Environmental	55%	27%	5%	9%	4%
Federal Government	51%	30%	10%	6%	3%
Healthcare	60%	28%	7%	5%	1%
Industrial / Manufacturing	59%	27%	9%	4%	1%
Residential	64%	23%	5%	7%	1%
State-Local Government	62%	26%	7%	4%	2%
Transportation	54%	28%	8%	8%	2%
Water / Wastewater	56%	23%	10%	7%	3%

Seller-Doer Focus Areas



Another aspect of the seller-doer model that is critical to understand is where they focus their time with regards to existing clients and new clients, and determine if anything has changed since 2015.

The **AEC.BD** research found that 11% of seller-doers only focus on existing clients when it comes to their business development activities. This is up from 4% in 2015. Conversely, just 1% of seller-doers are only involved with new clients, a slight increase over the 0% in the prior research. For the majority, however, there is some blend between the two.

The seller-doer model has generally been understood to emphasize existing client

relationships, which the research partially verifies. The new research found that 47% of seller-doers maintain a heavy emphasis on their existing clients, with some new client business development responsibilities. This is slightly down from 51% in 2015. Another 37% of seller-doers equally balance their business development time between existing and new clients, compared with 39% in the last study.

That leaves only 4% of seller-doers who spend more time pursuing new clients than they spend tending to existing clients, relatively unchanged from the 5% with a heavier emphasis in new clients in the **Sell. Do. Win Business.** survey results.

Seller-Doer Responsibilities

As Henry Ford famously quoted, “Nothing happens until somebody sells something.” How are seller-doers handling the “selling” part of their role?

Not surprisingly, almost all seller-doers participate in client meetings, with 96% of survey respondents indicating this is a responsibility of seller-doers in their firm. The second most common responsibility is managing client relationships, performed by 87% of seller-doers. Participating in shortlist presentations to clients is a responsibility for 83% of seller-doers while 70% write proposals. Client association involvement is a common expectation for seller-doers, with 68% participating in the organizations and 66% presenting to them.

TOP RESPONSIBILITIES OF SELLER-DOERS

- Participating in Client Meetings
- Managing Client Relationships
- Participating in Client Shortlist Presentations
- Writing Proposals
- Participating in Client Organizations

Seller-Doers also set up appointments with potential clients (59%) and attend trade shows (58%), which when coupled with the most common responsibilities demonstrates their involvement with new business development while driving more work from existing clients.

Top Responsibilities of Full-Time Business Developers & Seller-Doers



Goals and Incentives

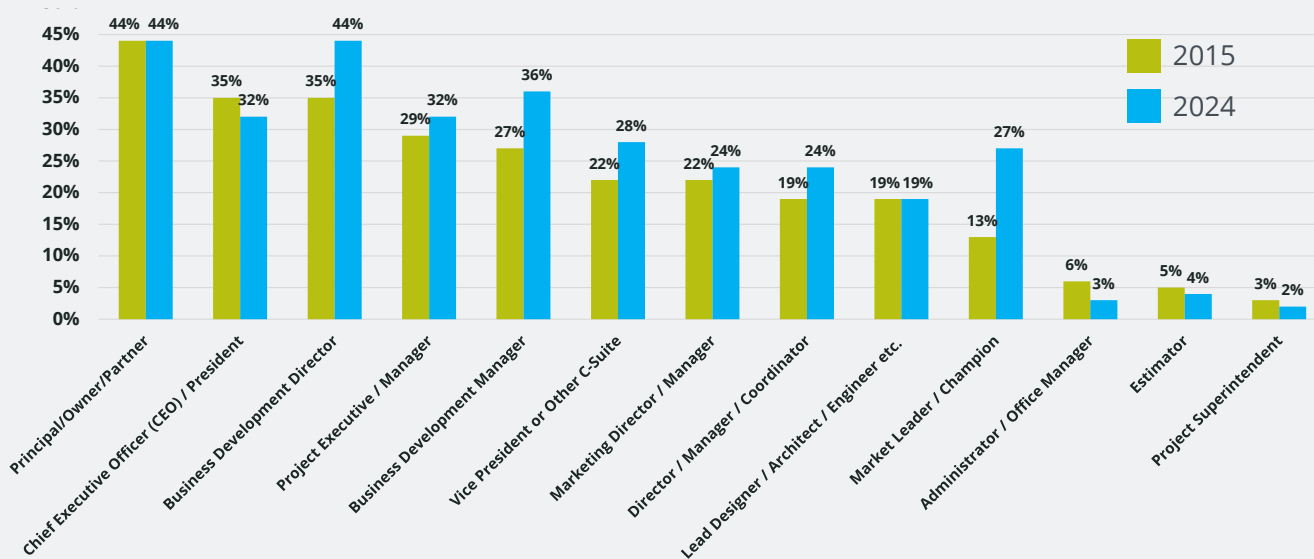
While many AEC firms develop goals for certain employees with business development responsibilities, there are no hard and fast rules in this area.

When firms have goals, they are most likely to be for full-time business development staff, firm leaders, or project executives/managers.

Our research found that the most common roles with defined goals are the Business Development Director and Principal/Owner/Partner, each with 44% of survey participants indicating that their company has goals in place for these positions.

Business Development Managers are the next most common positions with goals, coming in at 36% of firms in the survey. Roughly one-third (32%) of Project Executives and Project Managers have BD goals. CEOs and Presidents also scored 32%, with Vice Presidents and other C-Suite Executives at 28%. Market Leaders or Champions also frequently have goals, with 27% of participants indicating that this role has goals in their firm.

AEC Firm Positions with Goals: 2015 vs 2024



Business Development Goals for Repeat and New Clients

If there's one specific business development goal tracked more than any other, it is Dollar Value of Projects Won. More than half of firms with defined goals use this metric for pursuing repeat clients, with almost 40% of firms using this goal for new clients.

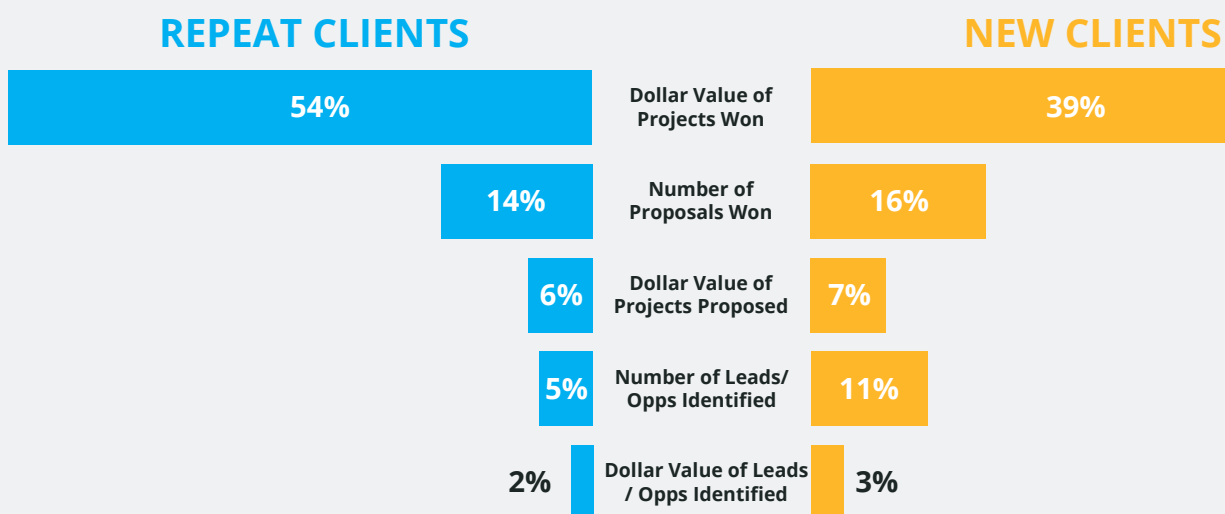
Number of Proposals Won is a goal used by 14% of firms for repeat clients and 16% for new clients. Dollar Value of Projects Proposed is the third most common goal established for repeat client work, yet only 6% of firms use this goal. On the new client side, Number of Leads/Opportunities Identified ranked third with 11% of firms using this goal.

Anecdotally, some companies have shifted to team-based goals, where a specific service

If there's one specific business development goal tracked more than any other, it is Dollar Value of Projects Won.

group, market sector team, or office location has a goal. No specific individual is singled out, and success or failure against goal is determined by team performance. A team goal has the benefit of promoting greater collaboration, because employees may be seeking to maximize personal credit for work brought in if they are being evaluated individually. Conversely, when there are no goals for individual business developers or seller-doers, they may be less motivated to aggressively pursue work

Top Individual Goals for Repeat Clients Vs. New Clients



Incentives

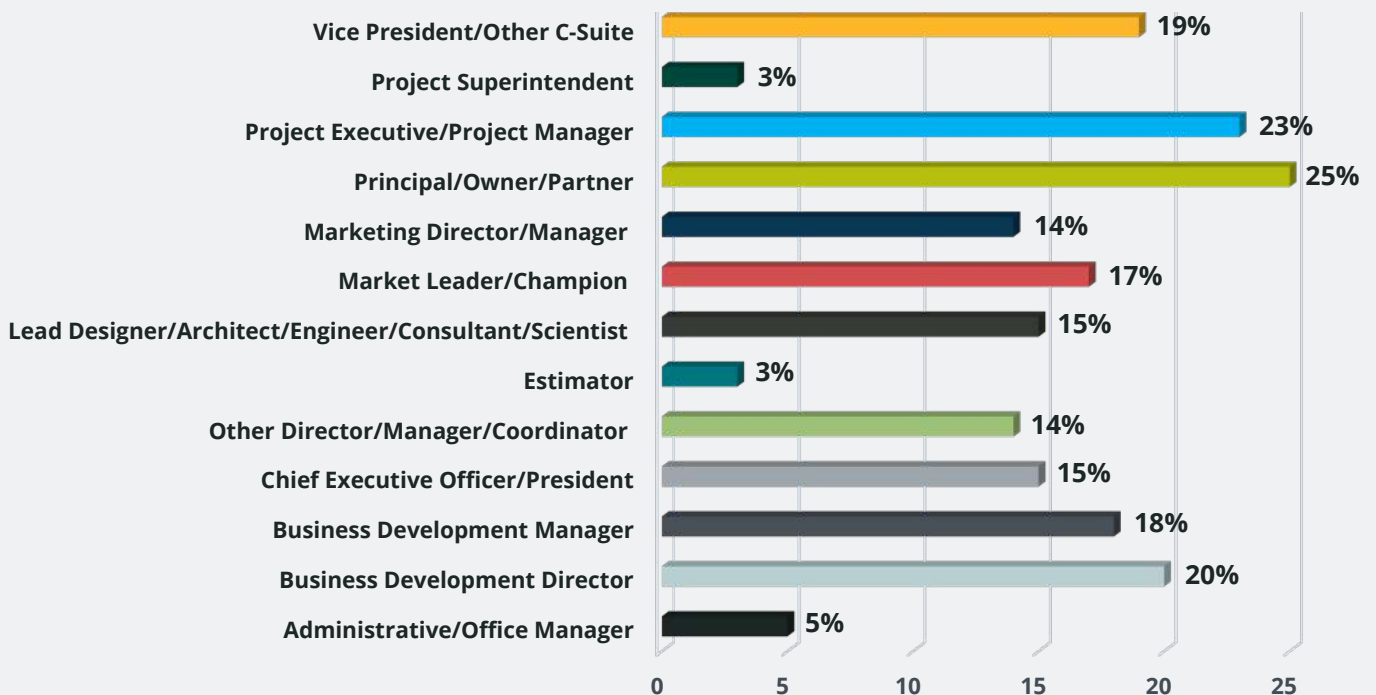
One area where the AEC industry may lag behind other industries is business development incentives. In fact, almost 70% of seller-doers are not eligible for financial incentives for bringing in new opportunities or projects.

For firms that offer incentives, the eligible positions vary greatly from company to company. The most common role with incentives is Principal/Owner/Partner, followed closely by Project Executive/Project Manager and Business Development Director. These are the only three roles identified by at least 20% of survey respondents.

70%

of seller-doers are not eligible for financial incentives for bringing in new projects.

Positions Eligible for Incentives



Training

With 89% of AEC firms using seller-doers to some extent, training is more important than it has ever been.

Fortunately, 63% of survey respondents indicated that their firm is providing some type of training to their seller-doers. Of course, this also means that 37% of companies are not. For those that are providing some type of training, slightly more than half rely on internal resources, whether an individual or a department. This is the most common training model at AEC firms. Use of both internal and external trainers – bringing in an outside trainer or organization, or sending people to third-party training – is employed by slightly

more than one-third of companies, making it the second most common approach.

The vast majority of seller-doers have no background in business development, and many don't have the necessary soft skills to succeed. It is up to their companies to ensure they are getting the skills and tools they need to drive successful outcomes.

When using internal trainers, leveraging the knowledge base of full-time business developers is the most common approach, followed by having principals deliver the training and then the marketing department.

37%

of companies do not provide training for seller-doers.



This relates to a trend that the SMPS Foundation first noted in the book *A/E/C Business Development – The Decade Ahead*, which was released in 2013. This trend has somewhat changed the job responsibilities of business developers and, to a lesser extent, marketers. Many AEC companies have recognized the subject matter expertise they already have in-house, and have been relying on full-time BD professionals or marketing staff to provide training to seller-doers. This can be more traditional classroom-style training as well as one-on-one coaching or shadowing. As the **AEC.BD** survey data clearly reveals, firms are not eliminating business developers – they have

increased the number of business developers, and are continuing to do so. However, as the seller-doer model has also grown, so has the need to more effectively on-board newer seller-doers into the “selling” part of their jobs.

When firms hire external business development trainers, the preferred method identified by 42% of survey respondents is to employ consultants, followed by sending staff to professional associations or industry organizations, which was identified by 36% of participants. The third most common approach is using specific education or training vendors, an approach used by 20% of respondents.

Use of External Business Development Trainers



Training Topics

For those AEC firms providing training, what are the topics of focus? We asked survey participants to provide information to help us better understand the training content. The most common topic was Developing Presentations/Public Speaking, followed by Networking Best Practices and Writing Proposals.

As doers evolve into seller-doer roles, they must often present in front of clients. It could be a one-on-one meeting sitting across a table, or standing in front of a selection committee interviewing for a project. Being confident and comfortable in these scenarios is certainly important to the success of any seller-doer. Furthermore, when it comes to

networking, getting out in front of a bunch of strangers at an event can be intimidating and unnatural for a lot of technical-oriented professionals. After all, as children we were warned to not talk to strangers. The proposal writing training is most likely related to a company's standard processes, pulling together proposals including fee and scope development, project approaches, schedules, etc.

Starting Conversations was the fourth most common topic, and once again it relates to a critical skillset necessary for any seller-doer to succeed. Rounding out the top five was Developing Presentations – before one can deliver a presentation, it must first be

Firms Offering Training on Identified Topics



developed. While many companies have marketing and business development professionals they can rely on to assist, the client and project-specific content most likely must come from the seller-doer.

While it is important to understand which topics are the most common for training seller-doers, it is also necessary to learn if there are any gaps in the training. For our survey, we asked participants about preferred future training topics to determine if there were certain areas rising to the surface in importance, or if the order of importance more or less remained the same.

In reviewing the results, it is apparent that there is a new critical topic, and that is

Starting Conversations. Although it ranked fourth with the current topics, it rose to first for future topics. Developing Capture Plans also entered the top five. Not only did the order change – for example, Developing Presentations dropped from fifth to ninth – but there is a general interest in providing more training across the board, with every single topic growing in importance from the percentage of participants identifying it as a current topic to a preferred future topic.

Whether providing training in-house, bringing in an external consultant or trainer, or sending staff to a third-party educational program, these findings provide useful guidance on areas of importance for seller-doers.



Every listed topic is growing in importance when comparing current versus future training.

Training Formats

We next asked survey participants to outline the specific formats used for training. Again, using business development and marketing staff was very common across participant firms.

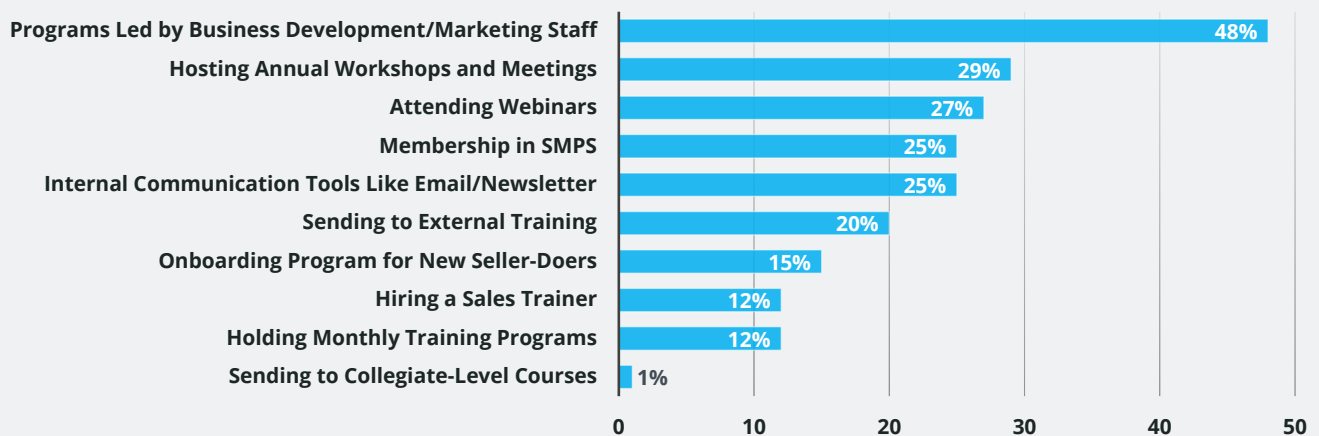
Hosting annual workshops or meetings for seller-doers was the second most common tactic, identified by almost 30% of respondents. Webinars proved similarly popular, followed by membership in SMPS, which was selected by a quarter of participants.

The lesson here is that there is no right way to train seller-doers; however, as with any training, once-and-done is rarely successful. Rather, training must be both intentional and consistent. In adult learning, there is a model that posits that 10% of learning comes from educational events,

20% from engaging with others, and 70% from job-related experiences. Therefore, it is critical to ensure that any training provided to seller-doers is not just traditional lecture, but entails robust discussions, activities, and experiential components. A business developer taking a seller-doer to a prospect meeting or networking event can be highly effective in their development.

Participants were also queried on preferences when working with outside consultants or training providers. Bringing in external trainers to conduct training in-house was by far the preferred method, ahead of small group coaching, online courses, and webinars.

Preferred Business Development Training Formats



Seller-Doer Challenges and Opportunities

Although the challenges of the seller-doer model are generally well-known – lack of time, acumen, and training – we wanted to hear from survey participants in their own words.

Comments often centered on available time and general skillset, and we received a wide range of challenges including feedback about lack of interest or willingness, turnover at senior levels of the company, lack of goals and incentives, and general lack of technical talent forcing seller-doers to focus on doing. Here are some of the comments we received:

- *“Maximizing time and resource efficiency.”*
- *“Siloed selling within a multi-discipline firm.”*
- *“...the age-old challenge of time management – seller-doers are usually busy ‘selling’ until they have enough to do, and then the doing overtakes the selling until the well runs dry.”*
- *“Having a broad enough understanding of company-wide goals and services to sell both their specialty and think holistically about how to bring all the firm’s offerings forward.”*
- *“Friction with business development.”*
- *“Creating the seller mindset.”*
- *“Not all seller-doers are cut out for business development – they don’t have the personality nor experience or desire.”*
- *“Top 3: too busy working on current projects, lack of soft skills training, unwilling to attend evening events.”*
- *“Most of them prefer to be technical and have limited interaction with clients and potential clients; it is incredibly difficult to get them out networking.”*
- *“Time constraints with current project work and client needs, lack of interest in putting themselves out there to find new clients.”*
- *“Business development specialists may not be as knowledgeable about the technical aspects whereas the folks who are focused on those things are; the challenge is blending the two knowledge basis.”*

- *"Often they are very busy with projects and unavailable to participate in trade shows and general marketing."*
- *"Overwhelming them with too much work and not enough time to do BD."*
- *"They want to not sell. Ineffective training that doesn't change the behavior to lend itself to selling in addition to doing; also think there are no incentives or expectations of time to devote to it."*
- *"We have a company full of introverts who are also extremely busy managing projects."*
- *"Insufficient engineering manpower to handle engineering and BD responsibilities."*
- *"They don't make BD an ongoing part of their routine – it comes up monthly right before their regular meeting with BD/Marketing."*
- *"Accountability – we are currently looking at our accountability culture around BD. Every seller-doer has market/personal sales goals, but beyond maybe a smaller year-end bonus, there's nothing concrete tied to them, and meeting sales goals is only a small piece of the bonus formula."*
- *"Success with existing clients draws energy from getting new acquires."*
- *"Some personalities are not naturally inclined to develop relationships."*
- *"Mindset for training – project managers are not open to new ideas."*
- *"Cross selling our company's variety of disciplines. Lack of engagement due to not understanding that this might be the one chance to connect with this potential client."*
- *"Principals retiring leaves fewer BDs. Onboarding new employees to the history of the company and getting to know clients."*
- *"We have unclear expectations for them. So they don't know what they are supposed to do and also don't want to do whatever it is, so they do nothing."*
- *"BD is not a high expectation so we are not as targeted with business development as we should be. We sometimes make random contacts and try to pursue them as clients when we haven't fully vetted them."*
- *"Very few of our 'doers' take the role of selling seriously."*
- *"With a few owners facing retirement in the next 5 years, I'm not sure how we will expect future leaders to automatically know how to bring in new business."*
- *"Seller-doers don't have skills developed to build trust quickly and move identification of leads to positioning to opportunities and close."*

We likewise asked survey participants about how to make business development more effective in their firms. Here is a sample of their comments:

- *"More in-house training and follow-up."*
- *"Encouraging more seller-doers and time management to do so."*
- *"Restructure – our firm's organization is too flat and BD/market leaders lack the authority to assign pursuits to specific regions or offices."*
- *"Allocate additional dedicated resources as business needs arise."*
- *"Additional training, and identify those individuals who seem to have a natural talent for BD."*
- *"Better training; clear expectations and goals."*
- *"Hire dedicated BD people."*
- *"Teach the seller-doers what their responsibilities are."*
- *"Have selling time added to the schedule vs. 'adding at the end'."*
- *"Better vetting of candidates."*
- *"Greater communication and strategy between principals and business development."*
- *"Create better defined goals and action points."*
- *"Develop a BD Seller-Doer Team with clear roles, responsibilities, measurables, and processes."*
- *"Small group mentoring."*
- *"More support staff, more training, setting reasonable expectations."*
- *"Train young engineers – get them comfortable talking to people."*
- *"Use Ideal Client Profiles to prioritize the opportunities our teams chase."*
- *"More staff for marketing production."*
- *"Regular training and process to support best practices."*
- *"Collaboration across functional groups to identify common themes and develop strategies and solutions."*
- *"Develop on-demand training, mentorship, and grow from within, better."*
- *"Have a CRM database manager to ensure content is updated/maintained."*
- *"Stronger cultural commitment backed with resources."*
- *"More strategic planning."*
- *"Help them judge their workload and instruct them how to conduct BD activities within the course of their billable activities."*
- *"Lay out goals more clearly."*
- *"Provide more opportunities for the business development professionals to be more involved with the client and learn the technical side of the business rather than doing proposals."*



- *A more structured system on what events we should attend; more emphasis on our experts speaking at programs and writing papers to show we are experts."*

Finally, we asked for specific advice to those firms looking to expand the seller-doer model. A sampling of recommendations includes:

- *"Incentivize your managers and hold accountable for A/Rs."*
- *"Leverage mix of in-house and external training to give seller-doer and BD staff a well-rounded perspective."*
- *"It is a unique skill set and just because the individual has as strong technical side does not automatically translate to the right individual to be leading face of your organization directly to clients."*
- *"Determine how you'll create/maintain alignment among your seller-doers on priorities, best practices, etc. If you can level-set those expectations prior to expansion, as you grow your seller-doer team, you'll do so more sustainably."*
- *"You must have the right people in the right seats. If your seller-doer cannot establish and manage relationships, connect and cross-sell, you will be less effective."*
- *"Be prepared for pushback from the doers – they are focused on current projects."*
- *"Train your staff and choose the people who have the right personality, not just the PM who gets all their work done and has happy clients."*
- *"Not everyone can do it. Establish other leadership roles that people can also contribute to. Openly admit it's a skill and some people need to be trained or may not want to do it. We're not all cut from the same cloth."*
- *"Firms need to ensure that they hire an excellent business development director."*
- *"Have a strong BD leader in place to support and train these team members. Create accountability programs that reward the efforts of the team and celebrate individual and team contributions while building everyone up. Don't make it a competition but do incentivize and support based on individual needs and drivers."*
- *"Use available training. Make a written plan and stick to it. Give each seller-doer a project win goal. Provide adequate incentives. No punishment for any missed goal."*



- *“Pair natural business development people with technical people when out in the community meeting with people.”*
- *“Beware – it’s hard to scale.”*
- *“Invest in developing proper KPIs and training to support your staff. Make it a culture investment.”*
- *“Training is great but sometimes you just have to get out there and do it. Once you get the first meeting, it’ll be off to the races. Don’t get discouraged if it takes time to get the first meeting set or hear back. People are busy!”*
- *“Limit the focus to specific niche, geography, or client type. Expect results to take longer, do not overburden them or burn them out.”*
- *“Account for the time BD takes.”*
- *“Ongoing and sustained training is a must. Must explicitly outline that it is a requirement of a certain professional level to do BD, and measure that.”*
- *“Training and communication, with an extra dose of patience.”*
- *“Make sure the person has the inclination as well as the skills to be a seller-doer; not everyone is a good fit.”*
- *“Consider how you are continually building up the next generation of seller-doers and ensure that people who land in management/seller-doer roles want to be there.”*
- *“Have clearly stated expectations for this position.”*
- *“Onboarding is key. Set the culture early. Provide training. Right seat individuals who will be best at selling and let their utilization goals evolve accordingly.”*
- *“Identify personalities that best match the client.”*
- *“Set a focus framework for those seller-doers and then measure and hold accountable those individuals for the items listed in their responsibilities.”*
- *“Encourage younger staff to engage in business development early at their own peer level, because they will all grow together.”*
- *“Build younger team member confidence in what they are doing; develop training programs with integrated small wins so participants can witness their own growth and capabilities; job shadow – introduce emerging professionals to setting where they can gain exposure and forge relationships with clients.*
- *“Build a strong bench of junior level staff to support the senior seller-doers as they get to industry events and meet with clients in a non-technical setting.”*
- *“Bring the right people in your organization out with you to events and client meetings for more interaction.”*



- *"Set the team up with talking points so that they are not caught unprepared. Practice sharing company strengths and confidence. Know what the company does and why we do it the way we do."*
- *"...a clear communication of responsibilities and let the seller-doer have room for expanding responsibilities to increase sales."*
- *"It has to be a culture and it takes time. Don't ask people who aren't comfortable with direct networking/sales to do it."*
- *"Encourage a seller-doer model from Day 1 as part of every employee's orientation."*



Across these three questions
we received more than
450 comments and ideas
from survey participants.



The Future of Business Development & Seller-Doer Model

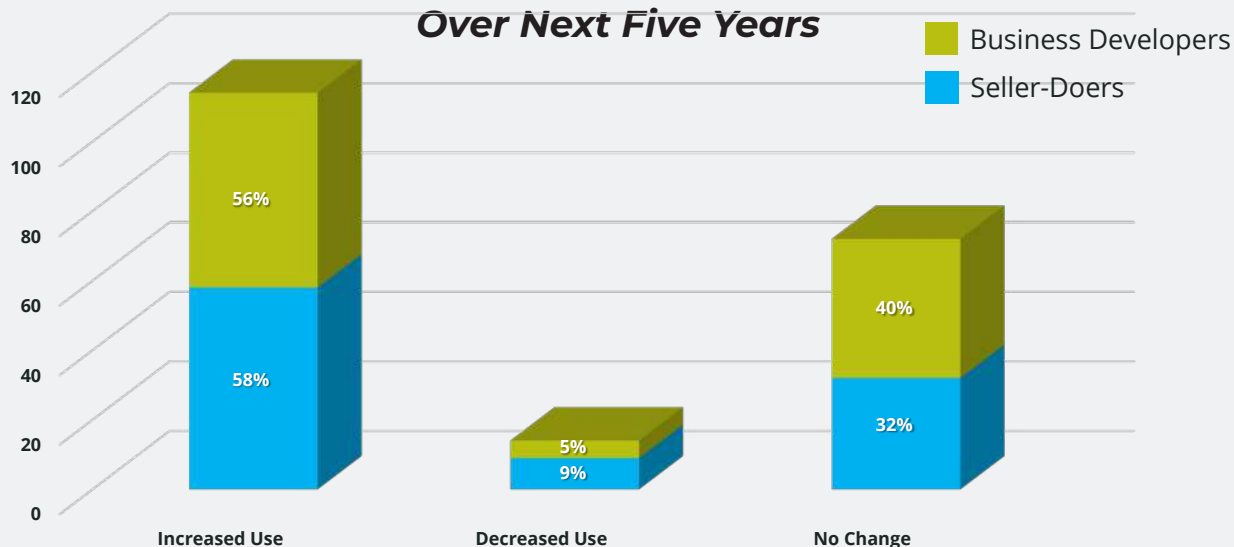
When the **Sell. Do. Win Business.** research was collected in 2015, it became apparent that AEC firms were looking to expand their use of both dedicated business developers as well as seller-doers. Firms largely reported that they had increasingly been using both, and projected that the trend would continue.

The **AEC.BD** research confirms that the projections were accurate. Furthermore, survey participants told us that both roles will continue to expand in their firms in the coming years. This is an indication of changing job requirements, the current competitive environment, and firm turnover as Baby Boomers enter retirement.

When asked about the use of seller-doers over the next five years, a net of 49% of firms indicated that they will increase the number of staff members in this role. Likewise, a net of 51% of respondents indicated that their firms would increase the use of full-time business developers.

With so much actual and anticipated growth in the use of seller-doers and dedicated business developers, we were curious if survey participants saw their companies evolving to a firmwide business development culture. In general, the answer was no. Although 20% of participants thought their firms would create a BD culture, a resounding 61% did not. Everyone else was unsure.

Projected Changes in Use of Business Developers and Seller-Doers Over Next Five Years





Net % of Firms Planning to Increase Use of Business Developers & Seller-Doers

Type of Firm	Increase Business Developers	Increase Seller-Doers
Architecture	33%	55%
Architecture / Engineering	67%	43%
Construction	64%	54%
Engineering / Environmental	45%	52%
Specialty Consultant / Other	64%	29%

Size of Firm	Increase Business Developers	Increase Seller-Doers
1-9 Employees	29%	57%
10-24 Employees	54%	23%
25-99 Employees	46%	67%
100-499 Employees	47%	48%
500+ Employees	73%	31%

Region of Firm	Increase Business Developers	Increase Seller-Doers
Local	53%	46%
Regional	43%	56%
U.S. National	55%	62%
International (U.S. & Beyond)	66%	8%

Market of Firm	Increase Business Developers	Increase Seller-Doers
Commercial / Retail	54%	49%
Educational	51%	52%
Energy	53%	43%
Environmental	66%	37%
Federal Government	55%	42%
Healthcare	59%	46%
Industrial / Manufacturing	63%	43%
Residential	44%	46%
State-Local Government	54%	51%
Transportation	48%	41%
Water / Wastewater	49%	51%

Net percent derived at by taking % of firms planning to increase - % of firms planning to decrease.





Critical Seller-Doer Skills for Future Success

How will seller-doers succeed in the future? Business development has changed greatly over the past few decades, and the rate of change seems to be accelerating, based upon the major disruptors outlined in the introduction to **AEC.BD**.

We wanted to understand those critical skills that seller-doers need to possess to be successful in their roles. Survey participants were asked to evaluate 12 skills to determine which were the most important moving forward.

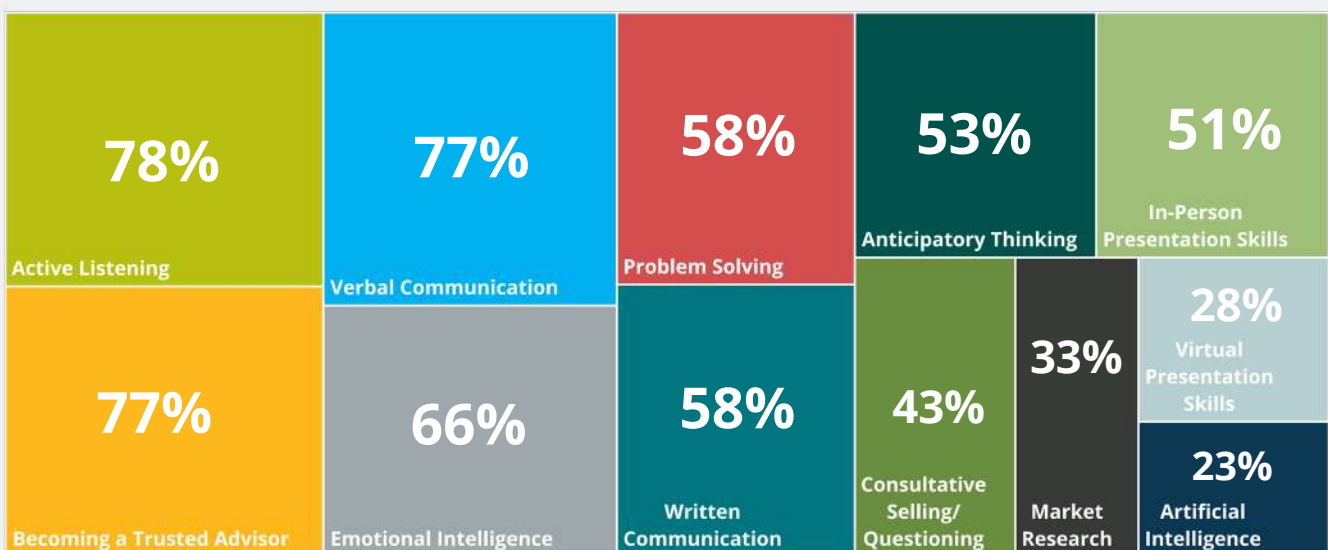
Active Listening, Becoming a Trusted Advisor, and Verbal Communication were the top identified skills, with more than three-quarters of respondents identifying them as critical skills. Next up was Emotional Intelligence, which is something that wasn't even on many people's radars in prior decades. Two-thirds of respondents identified this as a critical skill.

Problem Solving and Written Communication also ranked highly, with 58% of participants identifying those skills as important. Anticipatory Thinking and In-Person Presentation Skills were also identified by more than half of respondents.

Combined with the survey data around training, this information paints a picture to help firms better understand both the skills and the tools required for seller-doer success. For those firms that are being strategic and intentional with their approach to the seller-doer model, this content provides a roadmap for developing seller-doers. And for those who choose to ignore it, the odds of seller-doer success will significantly decline.

Active Listening, Becoming a Trusted Advisor, and Verbal Communication were the top identified future skills.

Critical Future Skills



Popular Seller-Doer Tools of the Future

With the many disruptions that have happened in recent years, a resulting positive has been the breadth of business development tools and approaches available to seller-doers and dedicated business developers. Gone are the days when firms would tell people to go cold call; in fact, there are few scenarios anymore where true cold calling is actually required – although our research did find that 40% of full-time business developers and 15% of seller-doers do some form of cold calling.

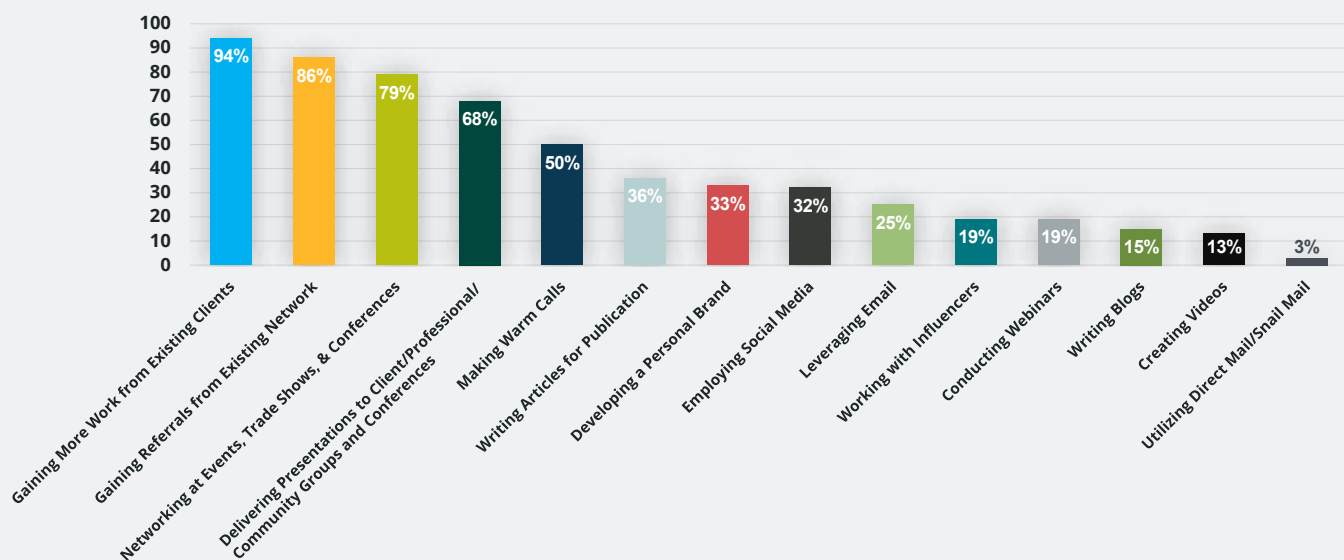
Rather, many of today's tools can generate inbound leads, which are typically higher value opportunities because the prospective client has essentially pre-qualified themselves as being in the market for the specific service,

and has already vetted through potential providers. Furthermore, these tools can prove highly successful with existing clients, helping to drive cross-selling and deepen relationships so you are never out of sight, out of mind.

The key is to play to people's strengths. Allowing seller-doers to focus on tools and techniques that align with their skills and comfort level will improve the odds that they will actually engage in business development and not just view it as a necessary evil.

So what are these tools? How will seller-doers be approaching business development in the coming years?

Preferred Seller-Doer Techniques



The top tool identified by participants should be no surprise: Gaining More Work from Existing Clients. If there is a low-hanging fruit for AEC seller-doers, it is going deeper and wider with existing clients. This could be providing additional services, working at additional locations, or collaborating with other client decision makers or project managers. Known as account mining, this is generally a tool that firms across the spectrum report opportunities for improvement. Intentional Key Account Management and Capture Planning can elevate success in this area.

Gaining Referrals from Existing Network was identified as the second most common technique, but it is important to note the wording here: “Existing Network” not “Existing Clients.” A significant percentage of referrals today come from individuals that firms may not have specifically worked with directly. Referrals can certainly come from current and past clients, but can also come from vendors, social media contacts, professional society members, webinar attendees, presentation audience members, article readers, and more. The key for seller-doers is to make sure they are visible, sharing subject matter expertise to drive referrals.

Networking is a tried-and-true technique that still has a lot of validity, and it ranked third among survey participants. The SMPS **Marketing 2022** research report found that when conducted in 2019, Networking was viewed as the most important marketing and business development approach, and at that period in time was projected to be the second most important in 2022, behind only creating intentional client experience. Networking requires more than just showing up – there must be intentional strategy and

often a commitment of time and energy if the networking venue is a client organization, professional society, or community group. This means serving on committees or even the board of directors. For seller-doers using this tool, it is certainly wise to monitor the generational change that is taking place, and the trend of reduced involvement or participation from younger professionals – a trend that is impacting all types of organizations across the country right now.

Beyond these top tools are a host of others, with Delivering Presentations and Making Warm Calls both identified by at least 50% of respondents. Of course, the tools that scored under 50% can be pretty powerful, too. Article Writing, Personal Branding, and Social Media were all identified by roughly one-third or more of survey participants. When one of every three seller-doers is using a specific tool, it is certainly worth exploring.

Although Conducting Webinars (19%) and Writing Blogs (15%) were not high on the list, seller-doers using these tools are seeing many inbound leads. At Stambaugh Ness, for instance, blogs promote webinars, and webinars drive the inbound lead engine. And like AEC firms, Stambaugh Ness offers professional services. The key is both quality and consistency, as a once-and-done webinar may have very limited success. They also both may have the benefit of improving Search Engine Optimization – driving traffic to the company website – and creating an ever-expanding network of potential referrers.

The tools used by seller-doers are continuing to evolve, and as digital natives increasingly move into decision-making roles firms will need to regularly evaluate approaches to making contacts and generating opportunities.

Future Seller-Doer Time In Business Development

One of the age-old questions regarding seller-doers is how much of their overall time should be spent conducting business development, versus other project, operations, and management responsibilities.

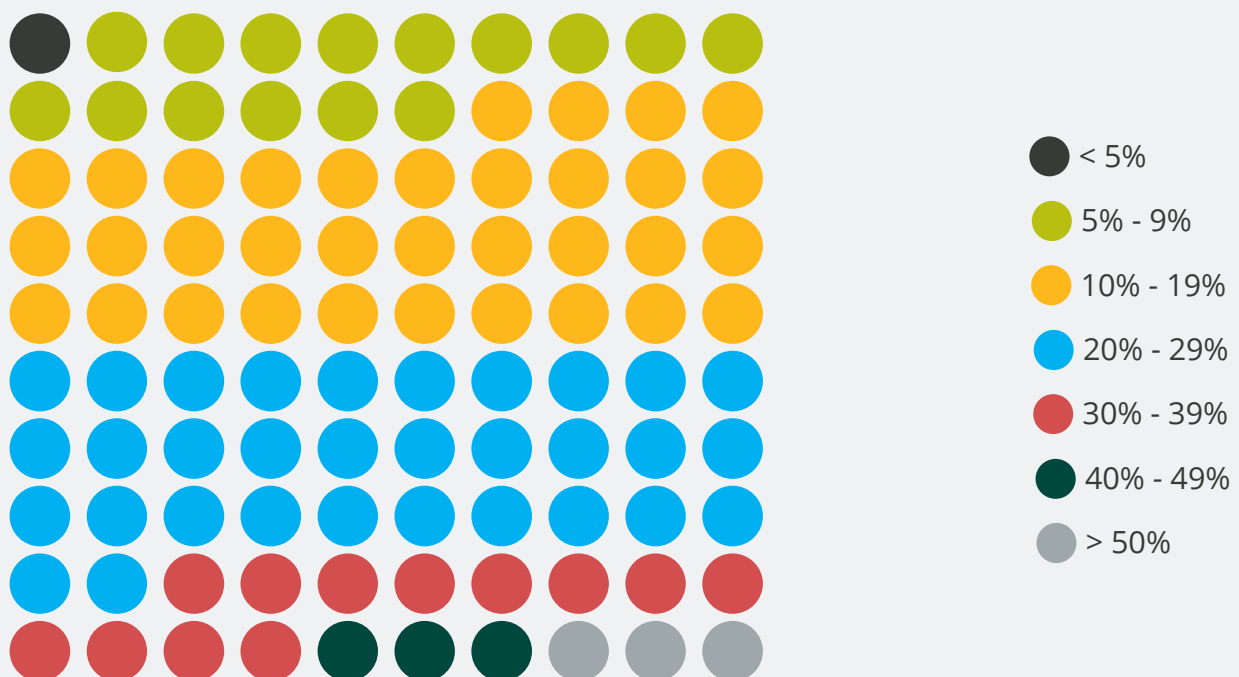
Survey participants were asked what the ideal future would look like in terms of how much time their firm's seller-doers should spend engaged in business development compared with total available time.

The most common response was 10-19% of time, with more than one-third of respondents selecting this range. Almost another third selected the 20-29% range, which was the second most frequent response. Fifteen percent selected 5-9% with twelve

percent preferring an even more robust involvement of 30-39% of time spent in BD.

One of the major challenges that AEC firms will face in this area is the ongoing talent shortage in the industry. Firms already struggle with seller-doers spending too much time "doing," and not enough time "selling." With a declining incoming talent pipeline (for example, enrollment in engineering schools has declined by 9% over the past six years), a lack of mid-career professionals ready to move into more senior roles, and an exodus of retiring talent, the seller-doer role may continue to get squeezed. Firms intend for those professionals in this role to increase business development activities, but they may continue to be overwhelmed by project responsibilities.

Future Seller-Doer Time in Business Development



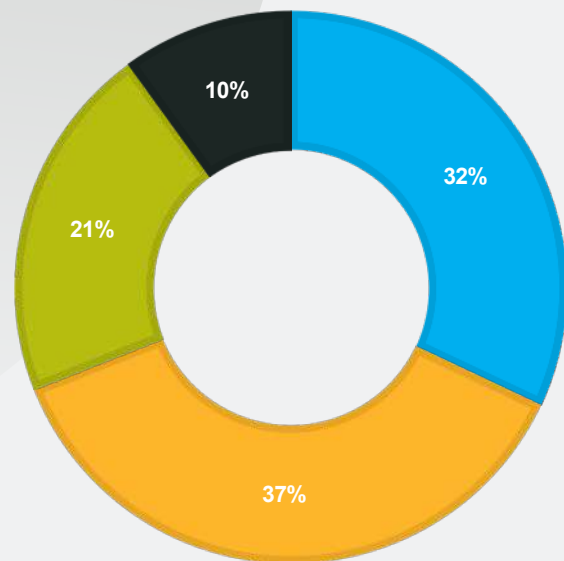
Firm Demographics

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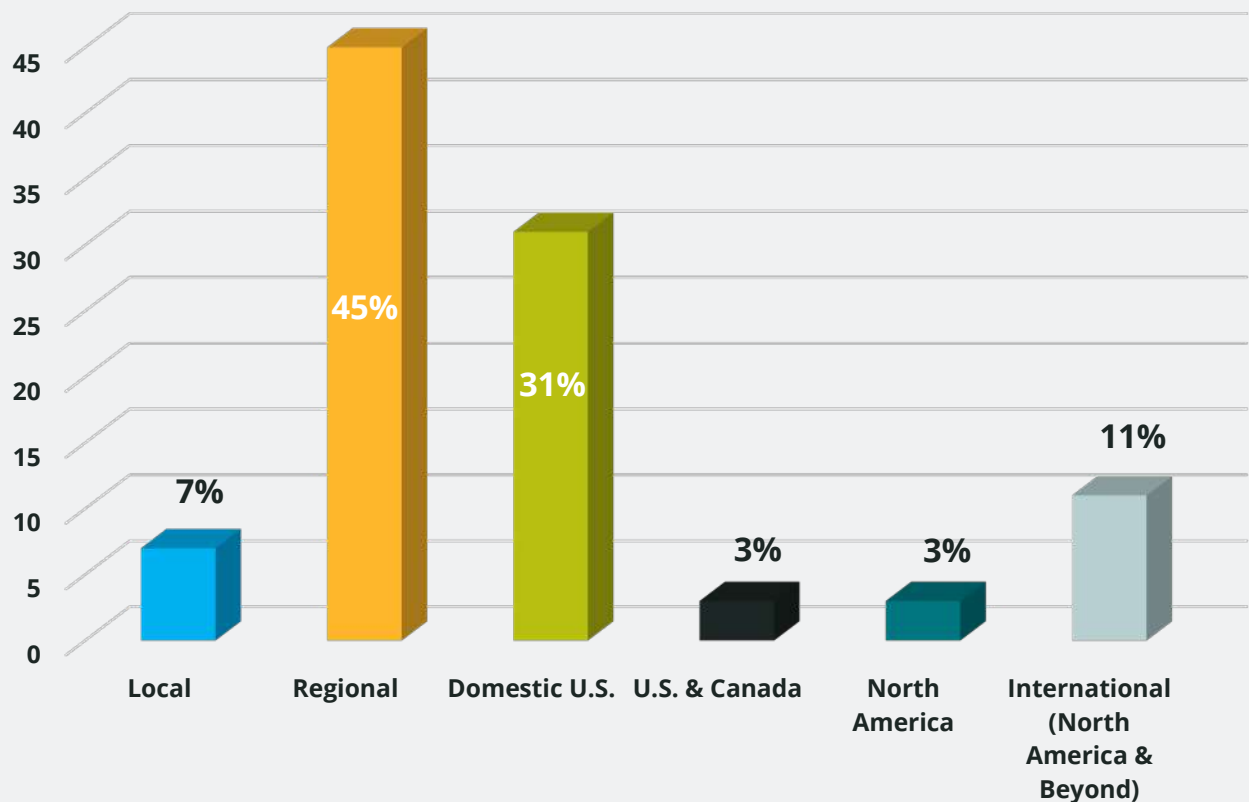
Survey Participants

Type of Firm

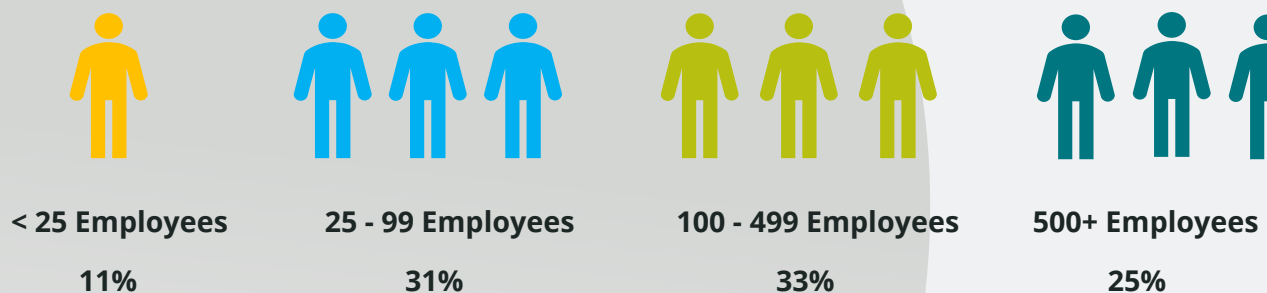
- Architecture, Architecture/Engineering
- Engineering, Environmental/Engineering
- Construction Manager, Design-Build, General Contractor
- Specialty Consultant, Other



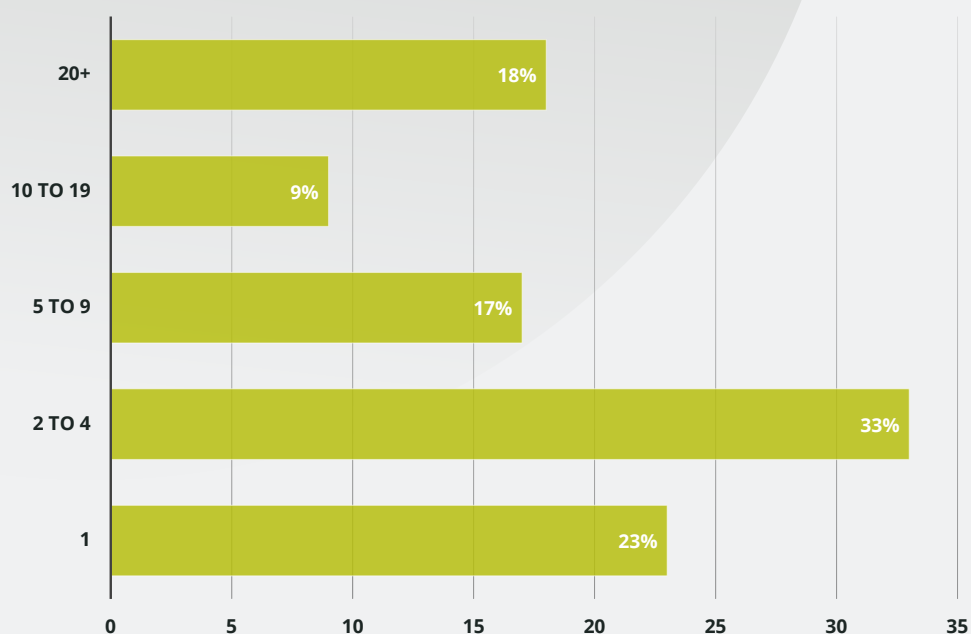
Geographic Scope of Company



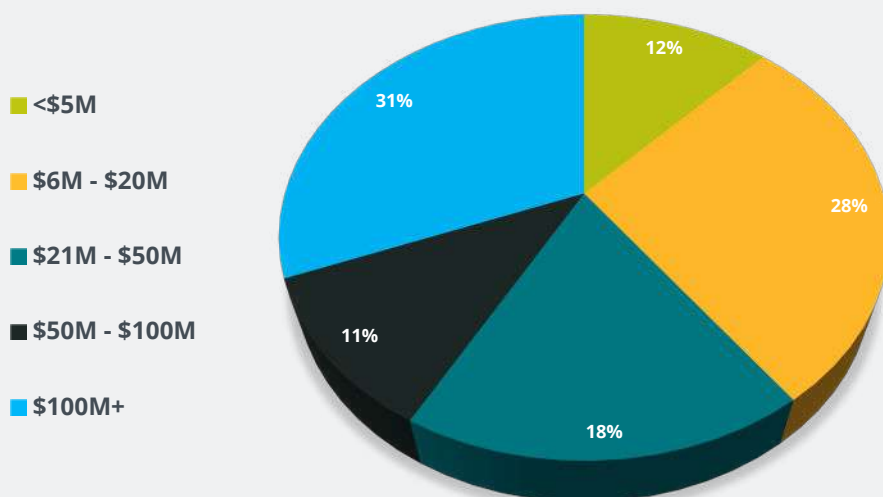
Size of Firm



Total Offices of Firm



Annual Revenue



Summary

What to do with the information...

The **AEC.BD** report provides a wealth of information into how AEC firms approach business development, employing seller-doers and dedicated business developers to drive more work for their companies.

Here are 10 key takeaways for leveraging the research:

Embrace the Seller-Doer Model.

Not only have the number of seller-doers increased, but their time spent doing business development has also increased since the ***Sell. Do. Win Business.*** research was conducted in 2015.

Leverage Business Development Talent.

Companies with full-time business developers continue to grow their ranks for a reason, but they are also using this role differently. Bring intentional business development strategy with these professionals, and partner them with your seller-doers to be trainers and coaches.

Create and Monitor Goals for Seller-Doers.

Help them to understand the business development expectations of them and regularly monitor their progress against these goals. Don't just say "go sell" and not provide any guidance.



Don't Overwhelm Your Seller-Doers with Project Work.

There is a well-known challenge in the AEC industry right now related to a lack of technical talent. As a result, seller-doers are spending even more time *doing* to fill the gap, but that means they aren't developing new business. Make sure they have weekly time allotted to focus on their BD activities.

Incentivize Business Development.

Reward business development efforts by incentivizing it. Provide the opportunity for additional financial rewards or other incentives to both encourage and reward the behaviors. Also recognize success by acknowledging the efforts of your seller-doers – and understand that success is doing the right things, trying hard, and generally making a positive effort. No seller-doer – or business developer – wins 100% of the time.

Create Ongoing Business Development Training Programs.

Don't rely on once-and-done training, but utilize firm principals, business developers, successful seller-doers, outside consultants, and other third parties to drive business development learning. Do not expect seller-doers to succeed in business development without giving them the tools and skills. Let the survey results regarding current and planned training topics as well as future skills and techniques guide your training content.

Monitor Changing Buyer Behaviors.

As digital natives increasingly move into decision-making positions and older generations exit the workforce, it is critical to regularly evaluate your firm's business development approaches to ensure you are not falling behind. Several years ago the CEO of a large engineering firm told SMPS Foundation Trustees that "I have Baby Boomer business developers calling on Millennial decision makers and it's not working." Make sure your BD strategy evolves with the changing workforce dynamics.

Try New Business Development Techniques.

As evidenced by the research, the tried-and-true business development approaches are still an important component of successful business development, but there are myriad newer techniques that can be very successful in establishing name recognition and generating inbound leads.

Play to Strengths.

Everyone has different areas of strengths, and it is critical to allow your seller-doers and business developers to leverage their skillset by employing techniques that align with what they are both good at and comfortable performing. Results are key, of course, but there are many different roads to a destination – work with your team to help them find the path of least (personal) resistance to the destination.

Consider the Evolving Roles and Responsibilities.

One notable finding of this report is the number of firms that are using, or plan to use, the Marketer-Business Developer hybrid role. Although most dedicated staff in “get work” roles tend to focus on marketing or business development, there is an interest in the Marketer-Business Developer hybrid at firms of all types, sizes, and markets, with 42% of survey respondents identifying that they plan to use this role in the future. This is a call to action for those currently working in one role to cross train in the other.

Much has changed since the original Sell. Do. Win Business. research was completed, and yet the need for strategic, intentional business development is more critical than ever. Yesterday's BD techniques are still essential, but there are more tools available than in the past. The AEC talent shortage has accelerated over the past decade, putting added pressure on seller-doers. And yet the seller-doer is more prominent than ten years ago, and firms anticipate more seller-doers and more time spent in business development in the future.

The key to success is being strategic and intentional, using your business developers (if you have this role on staff) in new ways, and setting up your seller-doers for success, no matter their position within the firm.





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Thank You

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