



Mike Unwalla describes a day spent on developing business for the future.

I work for myself, and have operated [TechScribe](#) as a software documentation consultancy since 1999. Friday 27 June 2008 was a business development day. This article gives an indication of what I do when I am not engaged on a fee-paying project.

At 7:25, with a strong coffee, I do administration tasks. First, I review my e-mail and delete the spam. Some days, up to about 50 valid messages arrive, but today, there are just 13, which I will deal with in a moment. Next, to learn which web pages are the most popular, and to see the search terms that people use to find TechScribe, I briefly review website statistics. However, that does not tell me whether other terms that are not on the website would attract other potential clients. Finally, I complete my time sheet for yesterday. To evaluate the value of business development strategies, I need to know how much time I spend on tasks.

One e-mail message contains a request to review a draft International Standard about document management. Although that topic is not of particular significance to me, I send a few comments. Participation in the development of standards means that I maintain an awareness of best practice in technical communication. I am not as involved as I used to be, and rather than actively contribute to content, I just review documents.

The remaining e-mail messages are

from various groups and information sources, and for the next 25 minutes, I read them, and reply if necessary. Then, I scan my RSS reader. I use RSS¹ to keep up to date with business news, to find out what is happening in the technical communication field, and to see what the competition is doing.

After a late breakfast, I spend an hour studying the final module of a training course on how to attract corporate clients. With small companies, it is easy to find the decision maker and, therefore, to approach the company through that individual. I struggle to do that with large companies. The course emphasised that to sell to corporate clients, a corporate buyer needs to view a freelancer as an expert, so that the buyer comes to the freelancer.

I have not heard from one reviewer of an article that I am writing for a professional communications society, so I telephone her. She promises to send her comments today, and they arrive later.

Just after 11 o'clock, I use the Companies House website (www.companieshouse.gov.uk) to gather information about prospects (potential clients). For each company, I find its Standard Industrial Classification (SIC) codes, verify its company number against the number on its website, and find out when it started to trade. If I start to negotiate with a company, I purchase its accounts. I have never refused business from a company because of background checks, but I have been alerted to potential problems when I look at its accounts.

Every Friday, I send marketing flyers to prospects. The flyers are one-third A4. Address labels and stamps go directly onto the flyer. The address side contains a question, 'Great software? Yes, but...' to stimulate the interest of the recipient. The other side shows someone with a frustrated appearance staring at a computer screen. The headline reads, 'Is your user documentation letting you down?' A few lines of text direct readers to the TechScribe website. I wrote the text, and a graphic artist produced a visually appealing design. The minimalist design is for people who do not know that freelance technical communicators exist. The purpose is to

¹ RSS (Really Simple Syndication) is a method of publication. A website owner specifies new or changed web pages, using an RSS feed (an XML file). Subscribers can easily monitor hundreds of websites using an RSS reader (news aggregator) that displays brief information about changed pages.

raise awareness and to get recipients to evaluate TechScribe.

The 42 flyers that I send are the last of a batch of 2400. Analysis a few months later will show that this business development method does not work; I gained no business. (Previously, I sent different flyers, and followed up with phone calls, through which I gained 15% by value of my overall business. I need to go back to that method.)

12:40: I review e-mail again, and send a reply to the [ISTC Discussion group](#).

At 13:00, I leave the office to attend a business networking event that is arranged by a local IT company. The event is for the whole day, and includes presentations (which I do not attend) about the company's latest energy-efficient computers. The workshops contain some impressive computers, and I am surprised at both the small sizes and the relatively low prices.

Although I meet a few interesting people, this event is not likely to be of great benefit to me. Evaluating how much time is worth spending on business networking is difficult. For example, early in my freelance career, I spoke to someone at a training course, and as a result, I got a lead that resulted in a contract for over £11,500. I had met him previously at a formal business networking event, but I cannot attribute his lead to formal business networking.

Late in the afternoon, I return to the office and check e-mail. Before closing for the day, I back up my data off site so that, if the office ever burns down, I will still have my most precious asset. I also back up locally onto an encrypted, password-protected USB memory device.

A reviewer of this article asked about my schedule for business development. Sometimes, clients are slow to give me inputs and I have free time during projects; when that happens, I work on business development. Clients want results as soon as possible, so whenever practicable, I work exclusively on a project. For practical purposes, it does not matter if I do not work on business development every week, because my contracts are short.

To be successful, I need to promote my services and develop the business. That takes time. When I started my freelance career, I naively thought that I needed to work 48 weeks a year on paying contracts but, as business networking expert [Will Kintish](#) says, 'The strategy for survival is visibility.' Now, I spend as much time developing the business as on projects. **C**