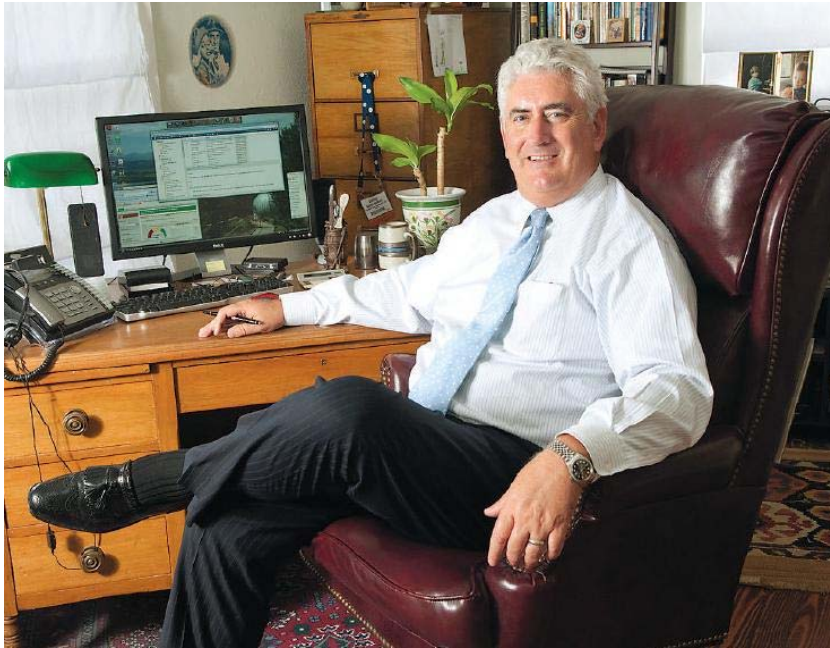


IDEAS IN ACTION

Make it rain

OUTSOURCED-SALES COMPANY **CORPORATE RAIN** HELPS CLIENTS LAND BIG NEW BUSINESS DEALS BY DOING THE INITIAL LEGWORK

BY CHRIS CYREK | STAFF WRITER



VIRTUAL SALES REALITY: David Downey, president of outsourced-sales company Corporate Rain, uses a virtual office pool of former high-profile executives and even actors to help corporate clients land new business the old-fashioned way — through letters and phone calls.

David Downey and his team at Corporate Rain International are “rainmakers.” This doesn’t mean they’ve developed advanced weather-control technologies or they’re dropping dollar bills from helicopters.

Rather, what Downey does is send out letters — letters that seek to establish a relationship on behalf of a client. His employees, for the purposes of these letters and all follow-up communications, are indistinguishable from the client, trained to assume the role of the client company. The letter is followed by phone calls to the right people and, with any luck, a

number of these shots in the dark will be returned and the Corporate Rain sales reps can go to work.

But in order to put all that accumulated knowledge to work on behalf of their clients — which range from corporate behemoths like AT&T to nonprofits and universities — Corporate Rain first has to soften up prospects with the letter.

“We’ve spent a lot of time on the form letter,” jokes Downey. The small “outsourced sales” company represents clients as they seek to connect with senior-level executives at other companies they are targeting for new business. Tom Chenault, of Fort Worth-based software development company Chenault Systems, has tapped Corporate Rain to handle his sales in the past

“I’ve known them for a long time and I trust them,” Chenault says of his relationship with Rain. “They do what I call ‘real work.’ They get on the phone and call people and set up meetings.” Doing the dirty work of calling people, absorbing rejection — “they must have thick skin over there,” Chenault says — and positioning his company to close a sale are the reasons Chenault Systems has chosen to work with Corporate Rain.

“Because of them, a lot of people know who I am. They got us in front of a bunch of people I wouldn’t know how to get in front of,” Chenault says.

Getting the client in front of potential new business is the important thing. “What we do, precisely, is we arrange very highly qualified new-business meetings with senior executives and/or financial decision-makers at companies with whom our clients want to do business,” explains Downey from his home office.

Scattered as it is with mementos and assorted trinkets, Downey’s office is a far cry from the fluorescent-tint maze of cubicles most office dwellers are accustomed to seeing.

“I’ve had jobs where I would have an hour and 45 minutes to two hours in commuting time. That’s a big part of your life that you can’t get back,” he says.

Quality of life, explains Downey, is the big sell he makes to his team of sales-force employees. Flexibility and the ability to spend time doing charity work are some of the reasons he originally signed onto the company as the “number cruncher” for founder Timothy Askew, a former actor and “big picture guy” who originally developed the concept behind Corporate Rain while making the New York City cocktail-party circuit in the ’90s.

Assembling the high-caliber talent that actually makes the phone calls and works through the contact database in order to connect clients and potential business partners is at the heart of what makes



BIGGEST CHALLENGE

When you're working virtually, making sure that everyone is tied in and communicating effectively can be a challenge. Corporate Rain worked to deploy technologies as they become prevalent and low-cost: first with communications such as email and more recently with programs such as GoogleTalk, GoToMeeting, Skype and Salesforce.com. President David Downey says that by embracing the virtual office, Corporate Rain is now able to bring together its far-flung team in an online space.

Corporate Rain one of the most successful small outsourced-sales teams in the country (as ranked by The Black Book of Outsourcing, a customer-satisfaction rating firm).

“The caliber of individual that we have representing (our clients) would be a very expensive hire,” Downey says. “The people on our staff conducting these sales campaigns are all former senior executives themselves. They’ve been business owners or still are.” Most are multi degreed (Ph.D.s, MBAs, JADs). Some are Broadway actors or actresses. “One you would recognize from ‘Law & Order,’ ” Downey says. Another used to be a vice president for former General Electric CEO Jack Welch.

“He wanted a better quality of life,” Downey says, “and he had bought a fish farm down in North Carolina. But he could give us 20 to 25 hours a week.”

Even though his sales team is made up of former titans of industry and the like, most of them work part

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David Downey
Corporate Rain

time. By drawing on this network, and virtualizing the sales process on a renewable, contract basis, Corporate Rain is able to offer its clients the services of sales reps that would easily command a six-figure salary at “half that cost,” Downey says.

Bringing the team together in a virtual space brings with it another set of challenges. Askew, for example, is described by Downey as a “technological Luddite,” but with the use of cheat sheets and strategic sticky-notes, the operation hums along. Targeted businesses never know that the sales pitch has been outsourced, and the return on investment for the client is the chance to close deals.

“Our clients’ days are transformed from having to look for their next opportunities to closing their next opportunities,” says Downey. “It’s basically very patient, polite persistence. It’s an old-school approach with heavy phone work.”

And, he adds, “We initiate it with a piece of snail mail.” Proof that even in the virtual office, a stamped envelope can still make the difference.