

## Smooth approach helps others get foot in the door

By LISA GOFF

**F**ORMER ACTOR AND TENNIS PRO, failed opera singer and Broadway producer Timothy Askew admits that he's had an odd work life. But somehow his jumble of jobs prepared him to be a successful salesman, as the growing revenues of his 8-year-old firm **Corporate Rain, Inc.** prove.

"There's a level of sales presentation in which an educated tone and bespoke presence really works," explains Mr. Askew. His company provides corporations with salesmen with those qualities. It sets up first meetings with top executives at firms where its clients have never been able to get to first base.

To do that, his employees use a deceptively simple strategy: They write a letter to the target executive, then call twice a week until they get a definitive yes or no.

"We pursue them with enormous courtesy, but very aggressively," says Mr. Askew. Corporate Rain has about a 15% success rate, not bad considering that it's going after contacts its clients have completely given up on.

Outsourcing this very specialized sales task to Corporate Rain is cheaper than hiring a business development executive. Also, Mr. Askew notes, having a little distance from the person who has been

pleading for a meeting can help give his clients and edge.

Largely, though, companies hire Corporate Rain because they really hate doing this part of sales.

"There's tons of rejection at this stage," says Mr. Askew. Many of Mr. Askew's employees are former or retired executives, who are able to approach officers as peers when they call on clients' targeted companies.

Currently, Corporate Rain has 40 employees, most of who work from home. About a third operate from headquarters in New Rochelle, NY. Revenues last year were \$1.6 million. Despite the sour economy, Corporate Rain's revenues have doubled or tripled each year since its founding. ■

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