

8 Ways to Fortify Your Accounts



1. Internal account reviews - unless you commit to a measurable process for ongoing improvement, account teams will default to nothing more than enclaves of apathy. Account by account, herd everyone who works on the business into a room and walk through financial performance, market dynamics, client internal politics, growth opportunities, and agency soft spots, (see *How Quarterly Reviews Make a Difference*). Craft a 90-day action plan then do it all over again 3 months later. Accounts left unmanaged - un-led describes it better - eventually disappear.
2. What's the plan? - seat-of-the-pants clients who hurl last minute projects at you which they've known about for months need to be roped into a plan before everybody goes nuts. Your mission: hold an annual planning retreat with every major client. Go offsite and spend a day planning TOGETHER what you'll do and how you'll work for the rest of the year. By the way, you pick up the tab - it's the cheapest way we know to keep an account for at least another year.
3. Capabilities presentations - a lot has changed since this time last year - the client's people and yours, market dynamics, competition, your competencies. Host a meeting to get your client current on your new capabilities -- talented new staffers, new services and departments, enhanced capacity - and you'll reinforce their decision to hire (and keep) you. Remember, it's entirely possible that at this very moment your competitors are prepping a similar song-and-dance to woo your very clients to greener grass. The first rule of client retention is *Never, ever take an account for granted.*
4. Know clients better - Plan now to attend at least one trade show, visit outlying factories or stores in other markets, or put people through a client's instruction program ("put 'em behind the grill," we used to say in the fast food business). Do it on your nickel; it will be a statement. Clients don't expect you to know everything about their business, but they want you to know more.
5. Reset the bar - Proactivity is at least 50% of keeping a client. Challenge the account and creative folks to generate one big spanking fresh idea for each client every quarter. All that high priced talent you're warehousing ought to be able to come up with four sparkling ideas a year the client wasn't anticipating. It's what they expect - unsolicited solutions and opportunities.
6. Fix the inside stuff - straighten out the sloppy or ineffective things in your own house that hinder your ability to deliver timely and flawless execution. If a recalcitrant internal department is road-blocking or you're burdened with balky

infrastructure, fix 'em. Because should the gods smile and you land all that projected new business, those internal snafus will really gum up the works when your agency machine gets larger.

7. Switch creative teams - people get stale working on the same stuff. Stir things up by assigning creative Team A to do a project for Team B's clients. Sure, they won't know all the peculiar little never-dos, but that's exactly what you want - fresh thinking. You'll reinvigorate the creative gang, give the account people practice in delivering lucid strategic briefs to an unfamiliar audience, and generate something fresh for your clients.

8. Revisit promises - when you pitched your brains out getting Client X, you made commitments and promises, written and unwritten. Ah, romance! But like any romance, promises uttered in the heat of the moment often fade. Dig out and revisit the presentation. Recommit to deliver the things you said you'd do - sort of like renewing marriage vows. Promises left unfulfilled undermine trust.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Joe Grant". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style with a large, sweeping initial "J" and "G".