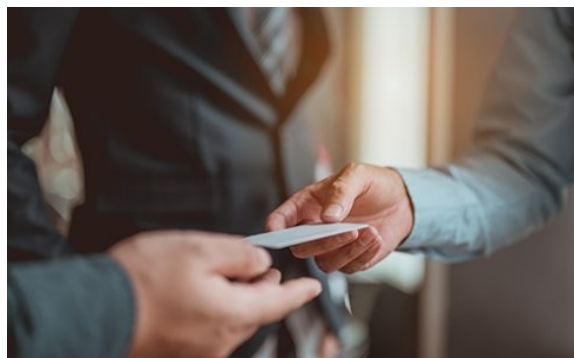


From Contacts to Community: Rethinking Business Development for the Year Ahead

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By Jim Ries



For a long time, business development has been measured by numbers. How many contacts did you make? How many meetings did you book? How full is your pipeline? While those metrics still matter, they no longer tell the whole story. In 2026, many of the most effective BD professionals are discovering that real momentum comes not from collecting contacts, but from building community.

A contact is often a moment in time; a quick conversation, a follow-up email, a potential opportunity. A community, on the other hand, is something you return to again and again. It's made up of people who share common challenges, interests, or goals, and who see value in staying connected beyond a single transaction. When business development shifts in this direction, relationships deepen, and trust has space to grow.

What's powerful about community is that it changes the nature of the conversation. Instead of leading with an ask, you lead with contribution. You listen more. You share what you're seeing in the market. You introduce people who might benefit from knowing each other. Over time, these small, consistent actions create a sense of credibility that no pitch deck ever could.

This doesn't require building something massive or formal. Community can take many shapes: a recurring roundtable, a small group of peers who check in quarterly, an online forum where ideas are exchanged, or a simple habit of bringing the right people together around meaningful topics. What matters is intention. The goal isn't visibility for its own sake; it's creating a space where people genuinely want to engage.

Technology makes this easier, but it doesn't do the work for you. Digital tools can help organize, invite, and follow up, but community is sustained by presence. People notice who shows up consistently, who adds value without keeping score, and who takes the time to understand what others actually need. That kind of engagement builds trust quietly, but powerfully.

There's also a long-term benefit to this approach. Communities tend to outlast individual opportunities. When markets shift or priorities change, relationships built on trust don't disappear, they adapt. In many cases, they become even more important, serving as a source of insight, support, and collaboration when things feel uncertain.

As you look ahead to the coming year, it may be worth asking a different kind of question. Not "Who should I reach out to next?" but "What kind of environment can I help create?" The answer to that question often leads to stronger relationships, better conversations, and more sustainable growth.

In today's business development landscape, success isn't defined by how many people you know. It's defined by the communities you help bring to life, and the role you play within them.

