The Partnering Process

Building a prospects list

The mechanics of prospect identification and network building have been made easier by the Internet, through social media networks and the multitude of annual regional and international partnering events, but the objective in dev eloping a truly useful list of prospective licensees or buyers remains quality over quantity.

It's important to start the prospect identification process with a very clear view of what you intend to offer and what you need in return. For example, a co -development deal where the licensee will be responsible for the bulk of clinical development needs a partner with deep pockets and resources, whereas a straightforward divestment of intellectual property may attract interest from prospects with cash but mode st development capacity.

- Research your prospects before making that first approach. A number of major and mid-sized companies post comprehensive lists of their licensing requirements on their websites, often accompanied by an outline of their licensing process and key contacts.
- Apply simple weighting criteria to your preliminary hit list which take account of a prospect's market presence and sales, licensing history, cash and development resources, track record in regulatory approvals and territorial p resence.
- Learn something of their internal structure: is the licensing function centralised or are there designated licensing executives for different therapeutic categories?
- Early-stage licensing deals often start through scientific curiosity on the part of a prospect's R&D team and it's always worth polling your own science team for possible contacts. Refine your shortlist through discussion with your industry network and advisors. Canvass your immediate network of Board members and advisors for opinions and insight.
- As an early-stage company, your licensing offering is likely to be fairly narrow or specialised and you are less likely to benefit from comprehensive subscription licensing databases or services than a focused search based on your own intelligence gathering.

Getting the best out of partnering meetings

Partnering meetings are the biotech version of "speed dating" and with preparation, they can prove a time and cost effective means of gaining that first introduction to a number of prospective partners. Registration generally gives you access to an online partnering service with keyword-searchable company profiles and licensing objectives with which to begin building your list. Your online profile should be concise and written around appropriate keywords so that your particular offering is easy for others to identify

Partnering meeting basics:

DO:

- Resist the temptation to fill every single slot in your meetings diary . It's important to leave time to organise notes, file business cards and for *"ad hoc"* meetings over a cup of coffee.
- Leave that 40 slide presentation at home. Time will be tight (generally less than 30 minutes per meeting) so forget the laptop and use a couple of printed slides in a binder if you need visual reinforcement of your proposition.
- Have the courtesy to allow your counterpart enough time to tell you about their company and licensing requirements. Listening and learning is part of the process.

AVOID:

- Weighing your opposite number down with marketing materials. A two p age flyer is usually sufficient for a first meeting, to be followed up with more detailed collateral if there is a continued interest.

- Chasing only "big pharma". While large companies will field large business development teams, they also tend to be inu ndated by meeting requests. Select and rank your prospects by how well they are aligned with your licensing objectives, their licensing history and whether they have the cash and other resources needed to move your assets along.

- Switching to "autopilot" after the first ten meetings. Stay focused on communicating the specific points which you believe might matter to each different potential prospect you meet.

- Feeling obliged to accept every offer of a meeting. Politely refuse those which serve no strategic value, unless you are desperate for the company of service providers.

It's good practice to organise your collated notes and corresponding contact details as soon as you are back in the office. Review and rank those prospects which you consider worth a follow up with specific information, send a courteous email to everyone you met with and prepare a short memo for your management team and project team leaders . It's always possible that someone else in your organization has met with one or more of your prospects and can provide useful insight.

Alexander Yule Consulting works with businesses at all stages of their commercial and corporate development, and particularly in the provision of cost effective but high quality business development support and interim leadership to early-stage enterprises. The principal has over 20 years experience in commercial and corporate support, working at senior level on behalf of life science and pharmaceutical companies (UK, Scandinavia and North America) across a range of product categories including oncology, CNS, urology, vaccines, infectious disease, medical devices and OTC/consumer healthcare

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