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Relationships that Expand Markets

Commercial Development and Market Expansion through Relationships

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Abstract- ***This essay discusses sustainable commercial development as the result of a deliberate combination of opening new markets, strengthening presence where the company already operates, close coaching of sales teams and continuous training. Drawing on the strategy and relationship-marketing literature published up to 2023 and on the author's professional experience in commercial management, territorial expansion and coordination of sales promoters, the text argues that structured relationships — with clients, institutional partners and the company's own teams — are a strategic resource that is hard to imitate and therefore a source of lasting competitive advantage. It presents a map of growth options, a method for client visits, a reflection on the limits of sales-force reach, feedback and training practices, and a virtuous growth cycle, together with indicators for management.***

Index Terms- ***commercial development, competitive advantage, market expansion, relationship marketing, sales team management, sales-force reach, training***

I. THE GROWTH DILEMMA

Sooner or later, every commercial company faces the same question: **where should we grow?** Sell more to current clients, win new clients in the same region, open new regions, launch new products — each alternative requires resources, involves risk and depends on different capabilities. Companies that answer this question by improvisation tend to alternate between periods of accelerated expansion and periods of retreat, when they discover they have grown into places they could not serve well.

Professional experience in commercial operations with field teams — sales promotion agencies, banking correspondents, service providers — shows that sustainable growth rarely comes from a single move. It results from the disciplined combination of four actions: **opening new markets**, **strengthening presence where the company already operates**, **closely coaching teams** and **supporting the launch of new products**. The element that connects these actions is the relationship.

This essay seeks to support that thesis. First, it places growth options within a classic conceptual framework. It then discusses why relationships are a strategic asset. Next, it examines the practices that turn this idea into results: opportunity mapping, client visits, reach, team coaching, referral generation and training. Finally, it discusses risks and indicators.

II. GROWING WHERE YOU ALREADY ARE — AND WHERE YOU ARE NOT YET

Ansoff (1957), in an article published in the *Harvard Business Review*, proposed a simple and still very useful matrix to organize growth strategies. It crosses products (current or new) with markets (current or new), producing four paths: market penetration, market development, product development and diversification. Figure 1 adapts the matrix to the context of a commercial company with field teams.



Figure 1. Ansoff matrix adapted to commercial companies with field teams. Source: prepared by the author based on Ansoff (1957).

The matrix makes clear that risk increases as the company moves away from what it knows. **Market penetration** — more visits, more reach, more productivity among current clients and regions — is the lowest-risk option and often the one with the highest immediate return. **Market development** — new agencies, companies and regions — requires investment in institutional relationships and structure. **Product development** leverages the trust already built with current clients to offer complementary solutions. **Diversification** combines both novelties and should be approached with caution.

In practice, sustainable commercial development rarely chooses a single quadrant. It combines

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penetration (to generate cash and reputation) with gradual moves into market and product development — always supported by existing relationships.

III. RELATIONSHIPS AS A STRATEGIC ASSET

Since the 1990s, the marketing literature has advocated a shift from a transactional logic — centered on each sale — to a relational logic centered on building lasting relationships (Grönroos, 1994; Kotler & Keller, 2019). Morgan and Hunt (1994) showed that **trust** and **commitment** are the central variables of these relationships: partners who trust each other and are committed to continuity cooperate more, resolve conflicts constructively and stay together longer.

"A relationship is not friendliness: it is the sum of commitments kept over time."

The resource-based view (Barney, 1991) helps explain why this generates competitive advantage. Resources that are valuable, rare, hard to imitate and well exploited by the organization sustain superior performance. Products and prices are easily copied by competitors; a network of relationships built over years — with managers of institutional clients, partners and loyal, well-trained field teams — is rare and hard to imitate, because it depends on accumulated history, reputation and trust.

In commercial operations with field teams, relationships have at least three dimensions:

- **With end clients**, who buy, buy again and refer others.
- **With institutional clients and partners**, such as public agencies, partner companies and financial institutions, who open or close doors.
- **With the company's own teams**, whose engagement determines the quality of service.

The three dimensions reinforce one another. Well-coached teams serve better; well-served clients refer and buy again; satisfied institutional partners expand access.

IV. THE CLIENT WHO OPENS DOORS

In many businesses with field teams, the end client can only be reached with the authorization or support of an institutional client: the public agency that provides space for service, the company that allows promoters on its premises, the financial institution that defines products and conditions, the professional association that promotes the partnership to its members. This institutional client rarely buys anything directly, but it decides who will have access to the audience that matters.

The relationship with these counterparts follows its own logic. Their managers do not evaluate the company by sales volume, but by the **absence of problems** and the **perceived contribution** to their employees or members. Complaints, inappropriate conduct by promoters, unresolved issues and excessive approaches are perceived as costs; respectful service, clear information and quick solutions are perceived as benefits.

Three practices follow. The first is to appoint a **relationship owner** for each relevant institutional client, with a regular contact schedule even when there is nothing to negotiate. The second is to **anticipate problems**: communicate changes, fix failures before they become complaints and report on the work done. The third is to **create visible value** for the counterpart — for example, by offering useful information, taking part in initiatives of interest to employees and adapting service to the institution's rules and routines.

SIGNS OF A HEALTHY INSTITUTIONAL RELATIONSHIP

- The counterpart takes and returns calls naturally.
- Problems are raised directly with the company, not only with the counterpart's superiors.
- The institution invites the company to internal initiatives and events.
- New units or departments are opened to the company without lengthy negotiations.
- Agreements are renewed without disputes.

V. MAP BEFORE YOU EXPAND

The first step in any expansion is knowing where the opportunities are. The **market map** is a simple tool that gathers, for each potential client or region, the information needed to prioritize efforts.

Table 1. Structure of a commercial opportunity map

Field	Content
Client or region	Agency, company, city or district
Potential	Number of people who can be served; estimated volume
Current status	Served, partly served, not served
Competition	Presence and strength of competitors
Decision-maker	Name, position and contact of the person in charge
Next step	Action, owner and date
Priority	High, medium or low, combining potential and ease of access

Priority combines two criteria: **potential** and **ease of access**. High-potential, easy-access opportunities should be pursued first; high-potential, hard-access ones require a medium-term relationship plan; low-potential, hard-access ones can wait. This discipline prevents the team from spending energy on attractive but unfeasible opportunities while accessible ones remain unexplored.

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VI. THE CLIENT VISIT AS A METHOD

Even in the digital era, the client visit remains the most powerful commercial development tool, especially when the counterpart is an institutional client. But a visit only produces results when it is treated as a method, with three moments.

A. Before: prepare

Define the purpose of the visit (introduce the company, resolve an issue, propose an expansion), gather information about the client and the counterpart, review the relationship history and prepare concise materials. A good preparation question is: "what does this client gain by meeting me today?"

B. During: listen more than you speak

The visit is, above all, an opportunity to understand the client: priorities, difficulties, perceptions of the current service and unmet opportunities. Long presentations should give way to open questions. Commitments made should be concrete and realistic.

C. After: deliver and record

The value of the visit materializes in what happens afterwards. Record what was discussed, send a summary of the commitments made, fulfil them on time and schedule the next contact. A visit without follow-up can be worse than no visit at all, because it creates unmet expectations.

A FIVE-QUESTION VISIT SCRIPT

1) How do you rate the service you receive today?
2) What makes your team's day-to-day work in this area most difficult?
3) Are there units, departments or groups that are not yet well served?
4) What would we need to do to expand our partnership?
5) What is the best way and frequency to stay in touch?

VII. REACH: HOW MUCH IS ENOUGH?

Increasing reach — the number of points, people and channels through which the company gets to the client — is one of the most direct levers of expansion. More promoters in more locations means, in principle, more service encounters and more sales. Experience shows, however, that the relationship between reach and results is not linear.

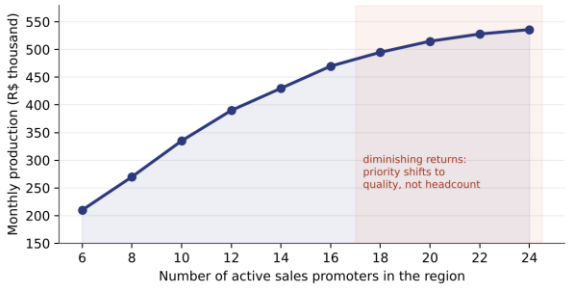


Figure 2. Illustrative relationship between the number of active promoters in a region and monthly production, with diminishing returns beyond a certain point. Source: prepared by the author, with illustrative data (2023).

Figure 2 illustrates the pattern of **diminishing returns**: the first promoters occupy the highest-potential points and generate large production gains; later ones begin to compete for the same clients or occupy lower-potential points. Beyond a certain point, adding people raises costs more than revenue, and the priority should shift from **quantity** to **quality** — productivity, qualification, conversion and retention. Zoltners, Sinha and Lorimer (2009) reach a similar conclusion when discussing sales-force sizing.

Sizing reach correctly therefore requires tracking productivity by point and by person, redistributing teams when necessary and expanding to new locations before saturating existing ones.

VIII. DESIGNING TERRITORIES

Reach is not only a question of how many promoters a company has, but of how their work is organized in space and time. Territory design — deciding which clients, points and regions each promoter or team covers, and how often — directly affects productivity, travel costs, service quality and fairness among team members (Zoltners, Sinha & Lorimer, 2009). Poorly designed territories produce two symmetrical problems: overlapping effort, in which several promoters compete for the same clients, and coverage gaps, in which valuable clients are visited rarely or not at all.

A practical approach combines four steps. First, **estimate the potential** of each point using the opportunity map. Second, **define visit frequency** according to potential and relationship stage: high-potential points and new institutional partners require more frequent presence. Third, **balance workloads**, so that each territory offers comparable earning opportunities and requires comparable effort — an important condition for motivation and retention. Fourth, **review periodically**, because potential changes as agencies grow, companies relocate and competitors enter or leave.

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Table 2. Criteria for allocating visit frequency

Situation of the point	Suggested frequency
High potential, consolidated relationship	Weekly fixed presence
High potential, new relationship	Weekly, with manager participation in early visits
Medium potential	Every two weeks
Low potential	Monthly or on demand, supported by digital channels
Point with pending issues or complaints	Immediate visit until resolution

IX. RECOGNITION AND INCENTIVES

Coaching and training are reinforced — or undermined — by how the company recognizes and rewards its teams. Incentive schemes based exclusively on volume tend to encourage short-term behavior: concentrating on easy sales, neglecting after-sales service and, in the worst cases, offering unsuitable products. Schemes that combine volume with quality, compliance and development indicators send a different message: that the company values sales that last.

Recognition does not need to be only financial. Public acknowledgement in weekly meetings, opportunities to share good practices with peers, participation in strategic visits and access to new territories or products are powerful motivators, especially for professionals who see a career path in the company. The manager's role is to make recognition **specific** — linked to concrete behaviors and results — and **consistent**, so that teams understand what is valued and why.

X. COACHING SALES PROMOTERS

If client relationships are the strategic asset, the people who build them every day are the most important link in the chain. Close coaching of sales promoters — with field presence, constructive feedback and referral of new business sources — multiplies results.

A. Feedback that develops

Effective feedback is specific, timely and focused on behavior rather than on the person. A practical model is **situation, behavior and impact**: describe the concrete situation, the observed behavior and the impact it produced, leaving room for the professional to reflect and propose adjustments. Praise should also be specific: recognizing exactly what was done well guides repetition of the behavior.

Table 3. Generic feedback versus feedback that develops

Generic	Develops
"You need to sell more."	"In yesterday's visit to the hospital, you didn't ask about the night-shift staff; they are half of the audience. How can we include them?"
"Good job!"	"The way you explained the conditions to the client, with the simulation on paper, built trust. Let's use it as an example with the team."
"Too many pending issues."	"Three of your five pending items this week were due to illegible documents. How about checking the photo before sending?"

B. Pointing to new business sources

The manager who moves among teams, clients and partners has a privileged view of the market. They notice opportunities that individual promoters do not see: a neighboring agency not yet served, a department of a company with pent-up demand, an event where the team could be present. Pointing these opportunities out to teams — and checking whether they were taken up — is one of the most concrete forms of support. Referrals from clients themselves also deserve attention: Reichheld (2003) showed that customers' willingness to recommend a company is strongly associated with its growth, making referrals a barometer of the relationship and a low-cost source of new business.

XI. NEW SOURCES AND NEW PRODUCTS: THE VIRTUOUS CYCLE

When the relationship strategy is combined with support for launching or developing other company products, a virtuous growth cycle emerges, shown in Figure 3.

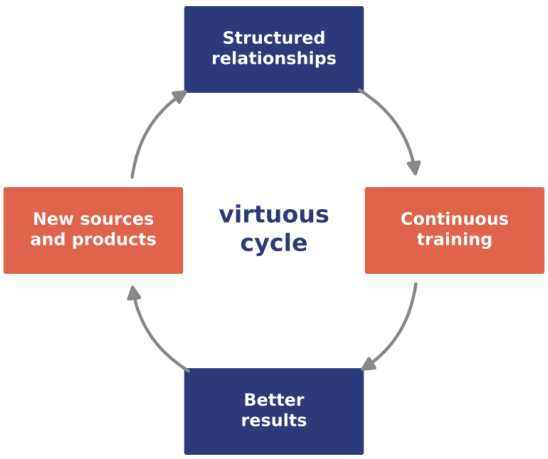


Figure 3. Virtuous growth cycle based on relationships and training. Source: prepared by the author (2023).

The mechanism is intuitive. Structured relationships with clients and partners generate trust and make room for new products. Training enables teams to offer these

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products with confidence and suitability. The results obtained reinforce the credibility of the company and its teams, which eases access to new business sources — new clients, new partners, new regions. These new sources, in turn, broaden the relationship base, restarting the cycle at a higher level.

Launching complementary products requires care. A client who trusts the company expects the new product to suit their needs. Unsuitable offers break trust — the very asset that made the offer possible. Product-development support should therefore include specific training, clear support materials, a defined target audience and monitoring of the first sales.

XII. CONTINUOUS TRAINING

Training is the fuel of the virtuous cycle. Sales teams need to master products, rules and processes; communication, negotiation and service skills; and, increasingly, digital tools. In regulated markets, training also covers conduct rules and consumer protection.

Kirkpatrick and Kirkpatrick (2006) propose evaluating training at four levels: **reaction** (did participants like it?), **learning** (did they learn?), **behavior** (do they apply it on the job?) and **results** (did performance improve?). Many companies evaluate only the first level. For commercial development, what matters are levels three and four — and it is precisely field coaching that makes it possible to verify them.

Table 4. Training formats for field teams

Format	Best use
Structured onboarding	Products, rules, processes, conduct
Short weekly meetings	Updates, cases of the week, recognition
Field coaching	Practical application and individual feedback
Peer exchange	Sharing the practices of top performers
Short digital content	Quick updates and reference

XIII. AN ILLUSTRATIVE EXAMPLE OF REGIONAL EXPANSION

To make the preceding arguments concrete, consider an illustrative situation composed from typical professional experiences. A commercial company has operated for several years in a state capital, with about twelve promoters distributed across public agencies and partner companies. Production is stable, but leadership sees signs of saturation: new promoters sell less than veterans and compete for the same clients.

The first move was **qualified penetration**. Instead of hiring more people for the capital, management redistributed teams according to the potential of each point, introduced weekly field coaching and reduced pending issues. Average productivity per promoter rose and complaints fell.

The second move was **market development**. Using the opportunity map, management identified three inland cities with sizeable agencies and companies and little competitor presence. Before sending teams, it made institutional visits to local managers, presenting the company, its conduct and the references obtained in the capital. Only after securing institutional support were local promoters selected and trained.

The third move was **product development**. With the trust built, the company began offering a product complementary to its main one, with specific training and a defined target audience. Management closely monitored the first sales to ensure suitability.

Table 5. Illustrative timeline of the regional expansion

Period	Move and result
Months 1–3	Team redistribution in the capital; coaching routine; fewer pending issues
Months 4–6	Institutional visits inland; prioritized opportunity map
Months 7–9	Selection and training of local promoters; service begins in two cities
Months 10–12	Third city opened; monitored launch of complementary product
Month 12	Total production above initial level, less dependence on the capital, complaints falling

The example shows that sequence matters. By starting with the quality of the existing operation, the company generated cash, reputation and references that eased entry into new markets; by opening new markets with institutional support, it reduced risk; and by launching new products only after consolidating trust, it protected the relationship.

XIV. PHYSICAL PRESENCE AND DIGITAL CHANNELS

The growth of digital service might suggest that physical reach has lost importance. Experience indicates the opposite: digital channels **complement** but do not replace physical presence, especially when the product requires explanation, trust or documentation. What changes is the division of roles. Physical presence focuses on opening the relationship, on the most important decisions and on solving complex problems; digital channels take over ongoing contact, information, reminders and simple transactions.

For commercial development, the combination brings two advantages. First, it allows each promoter to serve more clients without losing closeness, because part of the relationship takes place remotely. Second, it generates records that help management understand client behavior and plan visits. The necessary care is

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to respect clients' privacy and contact preferences, in compliance with Brazil's General Data Protection Law (Law No. 13,709/2018), and to avoid message overload, which wears down the very relationship one seeks to strengthen.

XV. EXPANDING WITH INTEGRITY

Growing with integrity is not only a moral matter: it is a condition for growth to last. In regulated markets — such as credit, insurance and financial services — the conduct of field teams is scrutinized by clients, institutional partners and regulators, and a single inappropriate practice can compromise contracts that took years to win. Even in less regulated markets, reputation travels quickly among clients and institutions.

Three safeguards help reconcile ambitious targets with integrity. The first is to **include quality and compliance indicators** — complaints, cancellations, pending issues — in team evaluation, alongside volume indicators. The second is to **train on conduct**, not only on products, with concrete examples of what is and is not acceptable. The third is to **monitor the first sales** of new products and new promoters, when deviations are most likely and easiest to correct. Companies that adopt these safeguards find that integrity and growth do not compete: they reinforce each other, because trust is precisely the asset that makes expansion possible.

XVI. RISKS AND PITFALLS OF EXPANSION

Enthusiasm for expansion can hide pitfalls. The first is **growing beyond service capacity**: opening new clients or regions without the structure to serve them well compromises the reputation already built. The second is **trading quality for volume**, expanding teams without training. The third is **neglecting current clients** in favor of new ones, opening space for competitors. The fourth is **depending on a few people**: when a relationship is concentrated in a single manager or promoter, their departure puts the client at risk.

Table 6. Expansion pitfalls and remedies

Pitfall	Remedy
Growing beyond capacity	Service plan before opening
Volume without quality	Mandatory training and coaching
Abandoning current clients	Minimum contact schedule with the existing base
Concentrated relationships	Contact records and a backup owner for each client
Unsuitable products	Training, target audience and monitoring of first sales

XVII. MEASURE TO MANAGE

Commercial development needs indicators that go beyond sales volume. Table 7 suggests a balanced set that simultaneously tracks expansion, penetration, quality and people.

Table 7. Commercial development indicators

Indicator	What it reveals
New clients or partnerships opened	Pace of market development
Share of wallet in current clients	Depth of penetration
Productivity per promoter and per point	Efficiency of reach
Visit conversion rate	Quality of the approach
Sales from referrals	Strength of relationships
Products per client	Success of product development
Team turnover	Engagement and climate
Training hours applied	Investment in people

XVIII. FROM PLAN TO EXECUTION: A 90-DAY ROADMAP

Commercial development strategies often fail not for lack of ideas but for lack of execution. A short roadmap with weekly milestones helps turn intentions into results.

Table 8. 90-day roadmap to start a commercial development cycle

Weeks	Focus
1–2	Diagnosis: production by point and person; pending issues; institutional clients and the state of each relationship
3–4	Prioritized opportunity map; team targets; institutional visit schedule
5–8	Visits; team redistribution; weekly field coaching with structured feedback
9–10	Training focused on weaknesses observed; process adjustments
11–12	Review of indicators; decision on new markets or products for the next cycle

XIX. THE ROLE OF SALES LEADERSHIP

None of these practices is sustained without leadership. A sales leader who drives sustainable development plays three roles. They are a **strategist**, choosing where to grow and at what pace. They are a **relationship builder**, representing the company before institutional clients and partners. And they are a **developer of people**, coaching, guiding and recognizing teams. In operations with field teams, the third role tends to be the most neglected, because it requires field presence and time — two scarce resources. It is, however, the one that translates most directly into results, since every well-coached promoter multiplies the manager's reach.

The leader also sets the example on conduct. In regulated, trust-based markets, the way a manager treats clients, partners and teams sets the standard that

will be reproduced in the field. Aggressive targets without clear conduct limits tend to produce short-term gains and long-term losses; demanding targets accompanied by explicit values and close coaching tend to produce lasting growth.

XX. FINAL REMARKS

Sustainable commercial development depends on the ability to open new markets while strengthening presence where the company already operates. Client visits, opportunity mapping and planned expansion of reach broaden geographic and sectoral coverage; close coaching of sales promoters, with constructive feedback and referral of new business sources, multiplies results; and combining this strategy with support for launching new products creates a virtuous growth cycle.

The central argument of this essay is that structured relationships — with clients, partners and teams — are a rare and hard-to-imitate strategic resource. Companies that invest in this resource and in the continuous training of their sales teams build lasting competitive advantages, because what sets them apart is not the product, which can be copied, but the network of trust they took years to build.

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