

## Chaplin gives contractors tips on thriving through the recession to London networkers

'How to survive and thrive as a contractor in the current recession' was the topic of ContractorCalculator CEO Dave Chaplin's talk at last week's London networking event hosted by contractor employment benefits company [Tarpon](#).

"Contractors need commercial contracting skills to ensure they win contracts during the recession," explains Chaplin, "and that means having a [high impact CV](#), treating [contractor interviews](#) like sales meetings and using first class [negotiation skills](#)."

According to Tarpon Marketing and New Media Manager Minesh Gandhi, contractors don't get many opportunities to share skills and experiences: "You fill a room with over 50 contractors and that's a lot of experience in the contracting sector to share around."

### Ask for the business

Chaplin talked in detail of the need for targeted, high impact CVs, explaining why it was that contractors had just ten seconds to grab an agent's attention. He then discussed the interview or 'sales' process.

"Contractors don't have interviews with their clients in the sense that permanent employees do," continued Chaplin. "In fact, 'interview' is a totally misleading term; contractors have sales meetings and, at the end of each meeting, must close the deal and ask for the business."

He went on to describe the various types of 'closes' contractors can use to secure a contract, and after the talk even some of the more experienced contractors admitted they needed to be more proactive in 'interviews'.

### After all the hard work, negotiate a good rate

Contractors discuss rates with their agents on only two occasions – when they have the first conversation after they've sent in their high impact CV, and after the interview. Chaplin emphasised how important it was never to give a rate at the beginning, as it only gives the agent something to beat down.

The result can be an impasse, as Chaplin explained: "I've had conversations when the agent says 'what rate are you on?', and I say something vague like 'well, market rates', and we keep this going for five minutes, with neither of us really saying anything."

This got a laugh from those contractors in the audience who had been there themselves, and Chaplin continued: "Then I say, 'well one of us has to say it – shall I?', and because I've done my homework and know what the realistic rate is, I go in at 20% above what I'll accept."

Once the interview is over and the client wants the contractor, then, said Chaplin, the contractor is in the position of power, and can name a rate. As long as it is realistic, at that point the agent has little room for negotiation.

### Doing well through the recession

The audience included contractors at every stage of the contract lifecycle, including those between contracts, or getting close to the end of their contracts, and the mood of the meeting was very buoyant. Gandhi, who organised the networking evening, was delighted with the turnout.

"We had to take this event off our website because it was over-subscribed," says Gandhi. "We've attracted a very eclectic mix of contractors who have been able to share Dave's experience, learn from each other and make valuable new contacts, which was our objective."

And, as Chaplin commented, "Hopefully contractors will have left having gained some new skills: I've always wanted to share my experiences with other contractors, which is why I wrote the [Contractors' Handbook](#). From my own experience, I know that there is no reason why a contractor can't do very well during a recession."

### Range of contractors

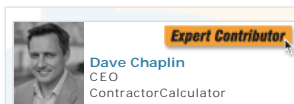
Introduced by Tarpon Commercial Director James Doyle, Chaplin began his talk by asking: "How many contractors are not in contract? How many contractors are approaching end of contract with no renewal? How many contractor first-timers

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Dave Chaplin,  
ContractorCalculator

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Minesh Gandhi, Tarpon



started last year and don't have a second contract?"

All three categories were represented by the audience, as were many key sectors, including IT, telecoms, interim management, teaching and personal wellbeing. Contracting experience ranged from less than one to more than twenty years.

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Dave Chaplin is a former IT contractor in the City of London, and is founder and CEO of ContractorCalculator, and author of the Contractors' Handbook.

Started in 1999, ContractorCalculator (this site) is the leading independent website for the UK contracting industry – most of whom are highly skilled knowledge workers. [Read Full Profile...](#)

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