



The cold call

Proper techniques can get your foot in the door

Why is it that some sales professionals love to make the initial cold call while others cringe at the thought of calling someone they don't know?

Prospecting is the lifeblood of sales success. Yet, studies show that many salespeople are reluctant to make the initial call. Granted, it's not easy calling a stranger, but it is a fundamental new business development responsibility.

Over the years, I've had an opportunity to interview over 3,000 sales professionals from a variety of industries. I've asked those who struggle with making the initial call, "What's behind your call reluctance?" I don't think you'll find their top five answers surprising:

1. "I don't want to make a fool of myself and close the door on an opportunity."
2. "I don't know what to say."
3. "I don't believe in my company's product or service."
4. "I feel like I have to make a sale and that feels too pushy."
5. "I don't like talking on the phone."

Generally speaking, these candid responses reinforce my belief that salespeople want to be successful but the path is not always clear about how to achieve that goal. They want to make the initial call, but they don't know what to say.

Fortunately, this is a trainable issue.

Let's begin with a little quiz. After reading each statement, decide if you agree or disagree:

- » The purpose of the cold call is to secure the sale.
- » When you call, you have up to two minutes before a prospect will cut you off.
- » If the prospect asks you a question,

it's to your advantage to answer the question right away.

- » To create curiosity, highlight the results you've helped other clients achieve.
- » The best way to secure an appointment is to ask.

The correct answers are: a-disagree, b-disagree, c-disagree, d-agree, e-agree.

I had never made a cold call when I first began my company 15 years ago. I bought every book available hoping to find an ef-

fective approach that I could adopt.

Unfortunately, and much to my dismay, most of the strategies and scripts presented were convoluted or manipulative. So, I decided to conduct my own research. I interviewed business owners and top level leaders, asking them all the same question: "The salespeople who call you and are able to secure an appointment to meet with you. What do they say that

influences your decision to want to meet them?" I took copious notes and then developed my own scripts.

Here are the key points that I incorporated into my approach:

1. **Keep it short.** You have 40 seconds – that's it. Today's time-challenged executives don't want to have a conversation with you. They want you to get to the point. If you are professionally compelling, they might listen. If you sound like everyone else, blah, blah, blah, expect them to say, "No thanks" and hang up. Once your message is scripted, time yourself. That way you'll know how efficient you are with your words.
2. **Establish credibility.** In one short sentence, recap your expertise and

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who you work with. There are many ways to accomplish this. However, I've found that by simply saying, "Our expertise is . . ." and "We work with (manufacturing, service, etc.) companies who want to . . .(outcome)" or "Our clients include . . ."

3. **Quantify results.** This is the appointment-getter. Highlight a compelling result that you have

helped a client(s) achieve. For example, when I make an initial call, I might say, "Clients who leverage my proprietary call strategy report their call-to-appointment ratio moves from 1-in-10 to as high as 8-in-10." Decision makers want results - a strategy, idea or process that will help them be more productive or profitable. You might try saying, "I've been conducting research on your company and I have an idea that could streamline how you . . ." once your due diligence is complete.

4. Make the ask. The purpose of the call is to secure an appointment, not to have a conversation, and certainly not to answer questions or send information. Plain and simple, it's to meet face-to-face or to agree when you can conference call. It's imperative that you close the call by asking for the appointment. Several of my clients ask for a short 15-minute initial meeting. If that meeting goes well, another longer meeting is then scheduled.

5. Project confidence and competence. People want to do business with people who can help them be more successful. Rehearse your script so it sounds conversational.

If you stumble over the same word or phrase more than three times, change your wording. You want to sound professional, not scripted.

Remember, the goal of the initial call is to secure an appointment. It's not unusual for coy decision makers to ask questions. Unsuspecting salespeople mistakenly interpret this as "interest," when in fact it's a deliberate ploy to uncover information so the decision-maker can disqualify you. When asked a question, kindly say, "That's the purpose of my call. I'd like to meet with you and at that time, I'd be happy to answer any questions you may have. Would you be available for 30 minutes on . . .?"

The initial call is just one methodology – networking, asking for referrals and developing strategic partner relationships are all effective strategies to build a viable pipeline of qualified prospects. I've found doing one thing every day makes building my pipeline manageable rather than being a dreaded burden. So go ahead, make a call, schedule a luncheon, or ask for a referral. That way, you'll be one step closer to starting 2010 with a robust pipeline of qualified prospects. ■

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