

## Two Keys to Marketing: Success: Cold Calling & Prospecting

*This article appeared in OHR Tracker, Summer 1999.*

Author: Carolyn Merriman, president

### **Warming Up to Cold Calling**

Do your hands get clammy just thinking about it? Cold calling can be intimidating for many salespeople, but it doesn't have to be. Using a few cold-calling tips can help your sales pay off in a big way. Here are some effective ways to make this process less scary – and more productive:

Introduce yourself – and give your message immediacy – with a customized fax. Chances are, a fax with some information that can directly benefit your prospect will end up on top of her “in” basket.

1. **Make a Plan:** What is your objective for this call? An appointment? Information about the contact's company? Whatever it is, state your purpose clearly. If you don't have a reason or an expected outcome, you'll stumble. Your contact will think you're merely reading a name off a list and try-ing to get 10 minutes on the phone.

2. **Research the Best Time to Call:** Keep in mind that everyone and every business is on a different schedule. Track your prospects' schedules and look for trends – then call at the appropriate time. Block out times in the morning, midday and afternoon to reach your targets. And keep a record of your calls, so you'll know when you reached whom, and on what day.

3. **Outline Your Call:** Organize your thoughts and know what you're going to say. Remember that this isn't the time to do a lot of “product dumping” or to give too much info. By having a lot of good questions planned and having a good objective in mind, you'll get that much closer – and feel more comfortable.

4. **Get in Touch with Technology:** The phone isn't the only way to make first contact with your target. Use technology to your advantage. Rather than sending a whole packet, send a professional-looking short fax with basic info and the message that you're seeking 10 minutes with them on the phone. Indicate when you'll check in. And make sure you do!

There are two additional methods of communication that have evolved with Technology. First is E-mail, which is a great tool for communication, but it's also pretty personal. Steer clear of using e-mail as a first approach. If you

want to reach decision-makers, you also need to respect some level of privacy and choice.

On the other hand, there is Voice Mail, which carries it's own pros and perils. Voice mail is everywhere these days. But it's still not a selling tool. You can, however, use voice mail as an opportunity to introduce yourself to your contact. It's wise to script your voice mail message. Clearly state your name, organization and phone number at the front and end of the message – make sure you speak clearly and slowly enough so that people can write down your information. Indicate that you'd like the courtesy of a phone appointment (at a minimum) or to discuss if there's a reason to meet face-to-face. "I'd like three minutes on the phone to identify if my service is appropriate for you. When we're done, we'll be better able to determine how we can meet your needs."

And let your contact know how you intend to follow up. "I'll be in my office today from 10 to 2 if it's convenient for you to return my call. If not, I'll call you back shortly." You are in charge of calling back.

5. **Keep Your Word:** If you promise to follow up with a phone call, then call. If you don't, your credibility is sunk. Rather than trying to reach too many people too broadly, whittle down your list to a few strong prospects – then send your fax or make your call. You'll be sure to follow through on your promise, and thus earn credibility with your contact.

6. **Sell Benefits:** Know the prospect's business well. If you've done your research and are customer-focused and oriented to the benefits for them – not you – you will never have to sell a widget. Your customer will buy the service and the solution. Customers will always buy the benefit if it's relevant to them.

7. **Put Pen to Paper:** Before you pick up the phone, script, or at least outline, what you want to say – word for word, as if you were talking. Write what you think your target would say and write your answer. Note key points you want to make. Before you call, clear your desk, have the questions in front of you with the client information there and literally read through it. And keep your script in front of you while you're doing the call.

8. **Practice Makes Perfect:** It's the best way to sound natural and sincere. Learn your script and practice it. You'll sound professional and you won't stumble over your words. And when you've perfected your delivery, you'll be able to be a better listener. In fact, you'll feel so at ease, you'll be able to focus on your target, their company and their product.

9. **Cultivate a Friendly Voice:** Keep a mirror on your desk and look into it when you're on the phone (it may feel funny the first few times, but it works!). You'll

start smiling and you'll hear new warmth in your voice. It's a great way to send your energy level over the phone. Plus, you'll sound like you're talking face to face with someone.

Your voice is an important first impression. But most of us don't know how we sound. Take time to listen to yourself – record your voice or listen to your own voice mail message. If you have issues regarding enunciation or grammar and usage, take any appropriate actions to fix them.

10. Be Comfortable: Use a headset to give yourself flexibility in your neck and shoulders. Stand up at your desk if you want. Pay attention to your body postures. Visual the person you're talking to. Use your hands. Smile. It helps your conversation have personality.

11. Set a Number for Success: Keep track of the number of calls you make and see how you're doing. "Out of every 30 calls, I believe 5 will end up in appointments." This is a good tool for sales management and the sales person as an individual. It gives you reinforcement and helps you realize there's a reason to make so many calls per week.

Finally, get in the habit. Make cold calling a part of your life. Do it regularly and soon it will become so ingrained in you that you'll do it well, and you'll find yourself doing it even when people call you. You may even find that it's actually fun!

### **Prospect Like a Pro**

Prospecting is a lot more than making calls. It's about building relationships and paving the way for future sales. While cold calling is an integral part of this process, prospecting also requires research, planning and strategizing before you ever pick up the phone or talk to someone face-to-face. Here are some steps to get you started:

1. Pre-Determine Your Prospect: Research your prospect's company and where your services fit in. If it's a big company, utilize contacts in one department to get referrals to another department. Get to know key decision-makers throughout the company and how their departments interact with other departments.

Get familiar with an organization's vertical and horizontal structure – that is, systems within a company and within departments. Often, a "vertical contact" helps you get a foot in the door, because a colleague of your prospect has positioned this referral. Understanding how various departments interact (horizontal) can open up new business opportunities you may not have thought of before.

2. Work Those Contacts: Sometimes you plant seeds that will pay off somewhere else. In business today, people aren't staying in any one place or

in any one level job. You need to have not just one, but lots of contacts. The person that is your client today could be gone tomorrow. Have more contacts, not less, in any one place. Prospect at different levels within the same organization.

3. Set Yourself Apart: Businesspeople are constantly being bombarded with messages these days, whether it's from the Internet, direct mail, telemarketing or face-to-face sales reps. Everybody's got something to sell, and everybody's going after people who are perceived to be buyers. Think hard about how to differentiate yourself in the muddle – and, mainly, think how it will benefit your prospects' business.

4. Think Deeper and Wider: Often, clients or prospects use your company for only one thing – and in the meantime, forget that you may have other services to offer. Look for opportunities to promote these services when they fit with your customers' goals. Make time to investigate what their companies are doing and plan how you can target new areas.

5. Don't Dump the Bucket: It's doubtful that one prospect could use every service that you offer. Customize your sales efforts for what a prospect really needs. Remember, though, his needs will be constantly changing.

6. Stay in Front of the Buyer: Keep your contact up-to-date with what you have to offer. Businesspeople often are opportunistic buyers. They may buy from the person who last came in the door. Stay in touch with what your customer is doing and planning.

7. Keep Your Prospect Funnel Full: When you keep a constant stream of prospects funneling in, you'll see better results. Many people let their prospects completely dry up and have to start all over again. Stay in touch with your targets and follow up periodically. You'll stay top-of-mind and won't have to expend as much effort finding brand-new prospects.

8. Follow the Paper Trail: Keep thorough notes of your contact with prospects. It's crucial to your success! Imagine what would happen if you're on vacation and a prospect calls while you're gone. By keeping a record of who you've contacted, others can pinch hit for you. This is also a way to demonstrate your worth to your own company. With good records, you've got proof of performance.

9. Precision Pays Off: Nobody said this would be easy! Prospecting is work. It's not something to be done sloppily. Many salespeople don't do it all, or they only do it when they're in a crisis and need the business – they'll just grab a list and start doing it. You get what you pay for. Do your homework, make your contacts, customize your solutions and be professional. It will pay off.

If you remember one thing, remember this: the best sales people are constantly prospecting – knowing that every contact they make may mean business down the road. And it's good for your image, too. Prospecting gives you an identity and credibility on a consistent long-term basis. So, get out there! Your next contact may be your next sale.



*Carolyn Merriman, FRSA, President, Corporate Health Group,  
[www.corporatehealthgroup.com](http://www.corporatehealthgroup.com), 1-888-334-2500*