

Prospect Like a Pro

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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.

2. Work Those Contacts

Sometimes you plant seeds that will pay off somewhere else. In business today, people aren't staying in anyone place or in any one level of job. You need to have not just one client contact; you need to have depth and multiple levels of contacts at your client organization. The person that's your client today could be gone tomorrow. Have more contacts, not less, in any one place. Prospect at different levels.

3. Set Yourself Apart

Business people 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 your offer will benefit your prospects' business.

4. Think Deeper and Wider

Lots of times, 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 opportunities.

TIP...

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 new business opportunities you may not have thought of before.

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. Business-people 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 for.

7. Keep Your Prospect Funnel Full

When you keep a constant stream of prospects funneling in, you will see better results. Many people let their prospects completely dry up and have to start all over again. Stay in touch with your contacts 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. And it's 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 invest in. Do your homework, make your contacts, customize your solutions and be professional. It will pay off.

In Summary

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.



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