

Don't be Afraid, Pick up the Phone!

By Mary V. Knackstedt

Professional marketers tell us that if you have no work at all, and you really want to develop a firm, there is no question that cold calls will work. A specialist in cold calls told me he makes 15 cold calls per day. He reaches seven people, and from them he makes one appointment. For every five people he sees, he makes one sale. This results in 50 sales per year, just from making cold calls.

He has a list of what qualifies a customer, and goes through it on each call. He determines exactly how to qualify the client, how to get the information he needs, how to build the appropriate rapport, and then to close the sale. He knows that if he skips any of the issues, that he is not going to accomplish that sale. He is also aware that if he does it on a continuing basis, he will continue to have business. And this is what keeps him going when people don't qualify, are rude, and worse. Action brings results.

Professional sales people spend about 45 percent of their time prospecting; 20 percent of their time presenting; 20 percent of their time demonstrating product knowledge; and at least 15 to 20 percent of their time in personal development and education to make sure that they are ready to be good salespeople.

As entrepreneurs, we need to look at the amount of lead time from prospect to the final sale. This runs, ordinarily, somewhere from four weeks to three years, depending upon the type of project. This means that not only do you have to maintain regular contact with your prospective clients, it takes constant prospecting to keep our companies as busy as we want them to be. You also have to realize that if you don't do some prospecting and developing today, you are not going to have the business four months from now or two or three years from now.

The first time I heard a sales trainer compare selling to going to war, I couldn't see the relationship. But both require strategic planning. Sales trainers say we need excellent training. Sales are not made strictly by chance; they are made by people who spend a lot of time training and working and developing their particular expertise, not just in design, but also in their presentation skills. Just as in war, we also have a very strong opponent. Somebody else is after that job; you are not the only firm. Therefore it is a question of who is going to win the job. Maybe we need to consider our sales development more like the battles of war.

To build a strong sales list, you need to spend 30 to 40 minutes a day prospecting, making cold calls. Then you have a continuing flow of new clients. Schedule your work so you can meet a few new clients each week. For cold calling to work well you must make it part of your routine. To develop your prospect list, read the local papers for news of new buildings, weddings, divorces, mergers and acquisitions, partnership announcements.

In any cold call, first you must get their attention. A sample script is: "Good morning, (name), this is (your name) from (your firm's name). I've read (or heard) that you are moving to a new building. We are a design firm that can work with you on this type of project. I called to schedule an appointment to tell you more of what we can do for you. Are you available Wednesday afternoon at 4 o'clock?" If at this point the prospect says, "I'm not interested," you ask why. If they are too busy, "is there another time?" If they really don't want to hear from you at all, could they tell you why. The roadblock could be financial. Or they may say that they have someone else.

You can still turn it around. Say "It has been interesting to me to see how many businesses like yours have ended up using our services after considering other people. I am going to send you a brochure on our firm. Will you just keep us in mind? If your design firm doesn't work out, let us know. Do you mind if I call you back in a month or so to see just what develops?" If they say, "I'll call you back," you should respond with, "Would you mind if I called you tomorrow morning at 10 to see how your schedule is going."

If they suggest that you send them the material instead of making an appointment, tell them you really prefer not to mail these things because many of the projects you do are very individual. It would be beneficial to both of you to meet in person. Is there a time that he or she can give you just a few minutes.

Or, after considering all the other objections, you may say that many clients who initially said the same thing changed their minds once they saw your plan for them. "If you have a few moments, I would be delighted to have one of our specialists stop and talk with you, or I would be happy to talk with you." The point is, cold calling is a question of verbal salesmanship. The battle is to get them going in your direction so that you have the opportunity to meet with them in person. Person-to-person interaction should be your goal.

When making cold calls, do it in front of a mirror so that you can watch yourself. When we act and look enthusiastic, it shows on the other end of the phone. Keep a timer so then you know exactly how long you are talking. Generally, a cold call should take three minutes. Keep track of the 45 minutes a day you set aside for cold calling and see how many people you can reach within that time. Keep a record of each call and any problem areas. Find yourself a consultant and talk to him or her about these problem areas. Perhaps he or she can give you a few tips and some verbal terminology that might help you be more successful in your next calls.

Practice. You need to practice before you get on the telephone. Know exactly what you are going to say and have your outline in front of you so that you hit all of the important points. It may help to stand up when you speak on the telephone. If you are standing and can watch yourself, your animation increases and you sound much more interesting. Just remember, that the client cannot see you; they can only hear you. Therefore, every bit of expression and animation helps.

To be a good salesperson, you must have ability and skill. You need to know how to communicate in the sales field. This means that you need good people skills as well as good sales skills and an appropriate schedule for carrying them out. Secondly, you must be committed to producing and you must be persistent.

Persistence wins clients. An art specialist from a gallery with a mediocre line has sold many exceptional projects due to persistence. He followed up each appointment with faxed information that day. The next day the prospect received a hand-delivered information packet about the

meeting. There was information forthcoming on a constant basis, so there was no way his prospects could forget about him. And, in many respects, that consistency is really what brought forward the sales.

A primary reason for making introductory or development calls is to keep your name in front of the clients. This can be done for any reason at all. If you can think of any reason to call them, do so. Send press releases on completed projects, or special events you have planned. Send them birthday cards or congratulations... anything that is appropriate; just keep your name in front of that client with a special need.

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