

Cold calls require a warm-up

Five things every salesperson should do before picking up the phone or knocking on a door

By Jim Peduto

Cold calling is tough but an essential part of successful selling. First and foremost, cold calls help generate new business. But there are two other reasons for making cold calls: 1) they allow for instant market research, and 2) they help develop new business partnerships. While the primary goal of most cold calls is to make a sale, the secondary take-aways for the salesperson are a better understanding of customers and the market, and development of partnerships that can lead to other new business.

Cold calls are only successful, though, if the salesperson can reach the customer, engage the customer and learn something about that customer. That's why, despite the fact that we call them "cold" calls, salespeople should never call on a prospective customer without first doing some research and strategy planning. Here are five tactics salespeople can use to warm up their cold calls.

1. Get to know your prospective customers.

Make sure you know more about your customer than just the name of their company or organization. Go to the organization's Web site, "Google" them, read about them in industry trade magazines. Know who you are calling, what they do, how they do it and how they differentiate themselves in the market. And most importantly, know how your business can help them.

2. Soften the ground.

Sending prospective customers introductory information about your company can warm a cold call. You can set up a brief, easy-to-read html-based e-mail introducing your company. Make sure to include photos and/or simple graphics. This allows the customer to see a preview of what you do in just a minute or two. Brochure and postcard mailings or marketing kits complete with a small logo gift are other options for reaching out to your next customer.

3. Plan your opening statement.

Organize your thoughts into an opening statement to avoid common mistakes that give the customer an opportunity to abruptly end the conversation. Do not ask, "Is now a good time to talk?" The opening statement should have an introduction, a hook (what's in it for customer) and a bridge to questions or a close. The conversation should be a dialogue, not a monologue. A great question to ask: "Are you grappling with [insert cleaning issue here] in your organization?" By identifying pain points, you're showing the customer that you understand their challenges, and it gives you the opportunity to offer a solution.

4. Befriend gatekeepers.

A gatekeeper is the person who answers the phone. They are typically charged with screening calls and guarding the decision maker's time. The gatekeeper is a wealth of

information so it's best to get him or her on your side. Learn the gatekeeper's name and be pleasant, polite and honest. Tell them who you are and why you're calling. Sometimes asking, "I wonder if you could help me?" will get you the information you need, such as the name of the right person to talk to or the best time to call.

5. Draft a list of questions for the customer.

Take advantage of the time you've got with prospective customers. Learn as much as you can about their organization, their day-to-day cleaning challenges, and needs. Since the first call is about initiating a relationship (rather than closing a sale), use your talking time to ask questions and gather information that will be useful later in the sales process.

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