
How cold calling can increase sales

Cold calling can be daunting, especially for younger sales people. Here's how to get over the 'fear' and embrace the success rate cold calling brings.

Putting yourself out there on the stage is not for everyone. Just as approaching strangers at a networking event, and striking up a conversation can be daunting, so too can cold calling. Even the name invokes images of being exposed and outside, being uncomfortable in a harsh environment, being rejected.

No wonder then, that salespeople are now trying to find many new ways of approaching prospective customers, from email to inbound marketing, to social networking.

But the cold call is not dead.

What people are resisting is the traditional approach to cold calling that has had its day. Cold calling done properly, is an empowering and effective way for businesses to target new customers.

Why does cold calling work?

They say nobody makes cold calls anymore, and nobody likes receiving them. Today email and social platforms are often seen as a more effective approach to reaching your prospects.

And these are an incredible part of the mix. With a well-crafted email, you might get a response where the phone didn't work. Social media can help you leverage your connections and build your personal brand, so that when you do connect, the prospect knows they're speaking with a professional.

But like most things, it's not always that simple. Emails are easy for frazzled customers to ignore and until you get speaking to someone you can only make assumptions about their business.

With social you can have a softer approach, where the platform lends itself to a more conversational dialogue, but the same is still true - there are more opportunities for misunderstanding and avoidance.

Done correctly, a cold call should be all the things other platforms are - well researched, providing insight into what could be important for the prospective company and a strong value proposition. Also, it gives the opportunity to open up the conversation straight away with questioning and gain insight into what is truly important to the customer.



Why are sales teams afraid of cold calls?

With email and social, you can spend time thinking out what you are going to say and how you will say it. With a cold call, you have to be able to think on your feet. On a call, the buyer can challenge you, and you may have to back up what you are saying straight away without any preparation. You also have to develop your skills in keeping the discussion going beyond what you would say in an email. A call is a two-way dialogue.

All this can be quite intimidating for today's new generation of workers who are confidently embracing other platforms and may see cold calling as a thing of the past.

A study by Behavioral Science Research Press suggested that as many as 40% of salespeople will experience call reluctance even despite years of knowledge.

One way to eliminate the fear of rejection is to help your sales team prepare for the call. According to author Jill Konrath, in her book *SNAP Selling*, sales teams should be able to articulate a message that is simple, invaluable, aligned with the prospects business and they must be able to convey why your offer should be a priority for the company at that time. If they can do this, they stand more of a chance of buying some time with today's busy companies, where they can explain more about your service.

To do this, sales teams should be ready for a good enough knowledge of what they are selling in simple terminology without using industry buzzwords. They should be able to highlight the experience they can bring or ask insightful questions. If they have done just ten minutes research,

they will have an understanding of what is happening in the business and what the priorities are.

With all of that, they are much less likely to face rejection than simply dialing for dollars but pointing out the difference can be critical in helping teams understand the value of the exercise without being intimidated by it.

Your sales team should know that they are not disruptive for nothing; they are disturbing because they have something important to say.

Calling in chunks at set times can also help to eliminate procrastination.

Also, have them think about what is within their control. It is not within their control to get a prospect to say yes, but it is within their control to prepare well for the call, ask the right questions and to do so repeatedly in an organized fashion.



The fraud factor

Part of call reluctance can be to do with the salesperson's attitude to sales as a career. There is a cultural tendency to think of sales as a profession that involves scamming and many people think this way. The global economy operates on the principle of buying and selling and without this there would be no profit, and consequently no jobs. Even if you make a great product, you still need to get it to market.

Part of eliminating call reluctance in your sales team is about shifting perceptions from one of annoying nuisance setting out to con people, to a valuable member of the community evangelising a product that is helping the consumer. After this shift, your sales team will be glad to spread the message.

Getting the right mix

Cold calling is of course only one part of the mix and other elements such as email, social and inbound marketing should be used to great success. It should be targeted to prospects likely to benefit from your offer. But if you get this mix right, cold calling can be an invigorating way to move your business forward.

This guide was written by Sean O'Neill, who has been selling for ten years, much of which has been business development with extensive cold calling experience. Images from Shutterstock.