

Successful Prospecting in Sales

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Successful Prospecting in Sales

Succesful Prospecting in Sales
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Contents

	Preface	8
1.	Introduction	10
1.1	What Is Prospecting?	10
1.2	The Four Myths of Sales Prospecting	10
2.	The Role of Prospecting in the Sales Process	12
2.1	Introduction	12
2.2	The Changing Face of Prospecting	12
3.	General Skills that Prospecting Requires	16
3.1	Introduction	16
3.2	Research Skills	16
3.3	Organization Skills	17
3.4	Listening Skills	19
3.5	Effective Communication Skills	21
3.6	Problem Solving Skills	23
3.7	Interpersonal Skills	24

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3.8	Self-Motivation Skills	26
3.9	Perseverance	27
4.	Prospecting Tips	28
4.1	Introduction	28
4.2	General Prospecting Tips	29
4.2.1	Create Excellent Marketing Tools	29
4.2.2	Narrow Your Focus	29
4.2.3	Use the Information Available Online	30
4.2.4	Excel in Customer Service	30
4.2.5	Market Yourself Creatively	31
5.	Effective Introductory Sales Letters	34
5.1	Introduction	34
5.2	The Five Second Rule	34
5.3	The Language You Choose	35
5.4	Getting Past the Gatekeeper	35
5.5	Sales Letter Structure	37
5.5.1	Attention	37
5.5.2	Interest	37
5.5.3	Desire	38

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5.5.4	Action	38
5.6	More Letter Structure Tips	39
5.6.1	Headline	41
5.6.2	Credibility and Relevance Statements	41
5.6.3	How and Why Statement	42
5.6.4	Action or Follow Up Statement	42
5.6.5	Sign-Off	43
5.6.6	P.S.	43
5.7	Other Sales Letter Writing Tips	43
6.	Cold Calling Techniques	45
6.1	Introduction	45
6.2	Your Attitude towards Cold Calling	45
6.3	Cold Calling Techniques	47
6.3.1	Preparation	47
6.3.2	Introduction	49
6.3.3	Questioning	49
6.3.4	Objectivity	49
6.3.5	Listen and Interpret	49
6.3.6	Inform and Educate	50

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6.3.7	Involve and Coordinate	50
6.3.8	Keep Ownership	50
7.	Prospecting with Existing Customers	51
7.1	Introduction	51
7.2	Being Perceived as an Expert	51
7.3	Keeping the Customer Informed	52
7.4	Selling to Existing Customers	52
8.	Resources	54

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Preface

Having a never ending stream of new prospects and potential clients is the lifeblood of any business.

This textbook will cover how to prospect and development new business opportunities.

Sean McPheat, the Founder and Managing Director of management development specialists, MTD Training is the author of this publication. Sean has been featured on CNN, BBC, ITV, on numerous radio stations and has contributed to many newspapers. He's been featured in over 250 different publications as a thought leader within the sales and management development industry.



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1. Introduction

1.1 What Is Prospecting?

Throughout this ebook, you'll be getting some techniques, tools, and advice on how to be successful at prospecting as part of your sales process. But what exactly do we mean by prospecting? We mean the act of researching, contacting, and beginning conversations with potential customers. Without prospecting, there would be no sales profession.

When you are doing prospecting well, you are helping a customer to solve a problem, access a new area of business, or become more efficient by matching the customer's needs with a product or service that you offer. Yet some people have a negative attitude when it comes to prospecting in sales. They are concerned that they will be wasting time, that they will be perceived as a nuisance, or that they simply won't get the results that they were hoping for. But by following the advice in this ebook, you can learn to view prospecting as an opportunity rather than a chore.

1.2 The Four Myths of Sales Prospecting

Now that we've talked a bit about what prospecting is, let's talk about what it is not. You have probably heard or thought the myths listed below about prospecting. But when you are performing prospecting as part of your professional sales process, you will see that these myths are just that – myths. They are not accurate descriptions of what true sales prospecting involves.

- Myth 1: Prospecting is sales – prospecting is not sales. It is the first step in the sales process, certainly, but it is not the sales step itself. Prospecting is the act of locating customers that can benefit from the value that your product or service creates for them. The actual selling doesn't start until after you've identified, or qualified, someone as a viable prospect – and it may not even occur at the same time as your initial contact.
- Myth 2: Prospecting is a numbers game – this is a long-standing myth that is held by people who don't understand how to prospect properly. Anyone who is a sales professional and understands how to prospect will tell you that quality is what matters – not quantity. You won't be dialing numbers at random when you prospect professionally – you'll be contacting well-researched organizations that you believe are likely to need what you have to offer.
- Myth 3: Prospecting takes too much time. What takes more time – doing the research up front to make sure that you are only contacting people who are likely to be glad to hear from you, or contacting people randomly and hoping that some percentage of them pan out? Sure, prospecting takes time. But it saves time in the long run – not to mention saving you frustration and energy as well!

- Myth 4: Prospecting is too hard. Why is prospecting ever perceived as being hard? Because of the attitude that we tend to have towards it. You'll learn that prospecting done well is done from the attitude and position that you have something of value to offer in terms of the knowledge, expertise, products, and services that you are offering.

2. The Role of Prospecting in the Sales Process

2.1 Introduction

As we begin to examine the role of prospecting in sales, let's take a look at the basic sales process. Before a person becomes a customer, and hopefully a repeat customer, they must first be a prospect. You will always have more prospects than customers, since not every person you contact will see the benefit in the product or service you are offering. Figure 1 shows the basic development of a prospect in the sales process.

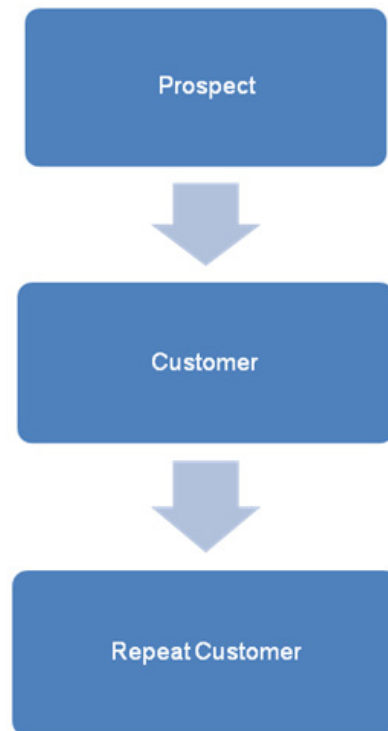


Figure 1: Development of a Prospect in the Sales Process

2.2 The Changing Face of Prospecting

Like everything else about business, prospecting changes on a regular basis. The way that we reach prospects will naturally reflect changes in our methods of communication and our technologies. The history of prospecting over the last several decades has changed dramatically, but the most dramatic changes have come since the advent of the internet and web-based advertising. Plus, the trend towards globalization means that we have to consider ways of communicating with others who may have very different needs than the customers we have worked with before.

Prospects have changed as well. Today, we as customers expect immediate, convenient, individualized service and if one doesn't provide it, chances are we have another choice to turn to.

Prospects and customers have changed as well. Today, we as customers expect immediate, convenient, individualized service. If one organization doesn't provide it, chances are we have another choice to turn to. So understanding your potential customers is vital to overcoming the competition and learning what it will take to help your prospect choose your product or service rather than the competition's.

In Figure 2 below, a comparison is made between traditional prospecting of the 1960s-1980s and modern prospecting. You'll see how the way we work with prospects has been impacted by the changes in our modern environment and by customer expectations.

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Traditional Sales	Modern Sales
Seller knows the product	Seller knows the prospect and his needs. In a business to business sales relationship, this means also understanding the prospect's marketplace and what their customers, suppliers, and partners need.
Value of the seller's offering is judged by the sales price.	Value of the seller's offering is judged by sales price plus non-financial aspects related to Corporate Social Responsibility such as ethics and the environment.
Salesperson is the only one who deals with the prospect.	Prospect may deal with anyone in the organization both before and after the sale.
Organization's focus for salespeople is on acquiring new customers	Organization's focus for salespeople is on retaining and expanding current sales relationships (though new customers are also sought)

Figure 2: Traditional vs. Modern Prospecting

Let's examine the information in Figure 2 in more detail. Whereas once it was enough to know the product you were selling when looking for prospects, today you need to know more than the product. You need to know what your prospects are dealing with in their own businesses. You should be able to answer the following questions about your prospects:

- What are their needs?
- What are their challenges?
- What do their own customers and partners need?

- How can my product or service meet the prospect or the prospect's customers' needs or assist with the challenges that the prospect is facing?
- How will my product or service make the prospect more competitive in their own marketplace?

If you don't know the answer to these questions, you won't be able to convert a prospect to a customer. However, you might not know all of this information when you first contact the prospect. Your first contact might involve some information-gathering with the prospect before you can know all of this information.

Next, Figure 2 tells us that the way that your offering will be judged by a prospect has changed. In the past, your prospect would have been interested in comparing your price to your competition's and making a choice based solely on cost. But today, your prospects will want to know more about your company. They will decide on a provider based in part on non-financial aspects of your offering, such as your company's values, ethics, social responsibility, environmental responsibility, and more.

What this means for the salesperson is that you will need to know more than just your product or service. You will need to be familiar with the aspects of your company that will be of interest to your prospects. You will have to present this information as part of your sales presentation so that the prospect knows what kind of company they are considering doing business with.

This leads us to the next item in Figure 2 – that you may not be the only person in your organization that deals with the prospect. In giving the prospect the full picture of your organization, you may need to bring in other representatives of the organization to help you. Plus, once you've made initial contact, your prospect may be having conversations with others in your organization as part of their selection process. For example, the prospect may want to speak to your product's technical team in order to review what changes would be necessary to their internal fulfillment systems if they choose your product. This means that in many cases, though you'll be making the initial contact on your own, it will take your team's effort to transform a prospect into an actual customer.

Finally, Figure 2 mentions the change in focus that organizations have for their sales teams. In traditional sales environments, the focus has been only on prospecting and acquiring new customers. Today, though prospecting is important, organizations now encourage salespeople to focus on retaining current customers and selling new products and services to them. This is because it is much easier and more cost effective to prospect amongst your existing customers. We'll talk more about this in the final chapter.

3. General Skills that Prospecting Requires

3.1 Introduction

Prospecting is a tool that every salesperson needs. But how do you develop your ability to prospect well? In this chapter, we'll look at some general skills that prospecting requires. As you read this information, consider your own ability in each of these areas. There are bound to be some of them in which you are already very proficient. Yet others may need some improvement. This is actually good news – it means that you have opportunities to become even more successful at prospecting than you currently are.

3.2 Research Skills

Prospecting for new customers involves a good deal of research. Unless it's done for you by your organization, you will need to locate potential customers that are likely to benefit from your products and services. If your business is providing services to a specific industry, your research will be easier, but your prospects will be kept to a more narrow area. If your products and services are not industry-specific, your research may be more involved, but you will have a much larger pool of prospects to work with. Having good research skills means being able to answer questions like:

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- What does my average prospect or customer look like? (size, number of locations, industry, annual revenue, types of customers, etc.)
- What are some of the challenges facing my prospect? Who is their competition and what are the trends in their industry?
- How can my products or services help this prospect to meet the challenges they are facing or to be more successful in their marketplace?
- Who is the decision maker at the prospect's business?
- Is there a best time of the week, month, or quarter to be contacting these prospects?

There will be other questions you will need to answer, depending on your product, service, and organization, but these are a good place to start. As you gather information on your prospects, keeping that information organized and accessible will also be important.

3.3 Organization Skills

If you are going to be a success as a salesperson, you have to be well-organized. You'll have information on your own products and services to keep track of, all the research information you've gathered on your prospects, your customers, and their businesses, and any other information that your organization might produce or require that you know.

Plus, you'll have information relevant to the job itself. You'll have to keep track of any sales you make if you are paid by commission or quota. You will have information on internal promotions and procedures, as well as information on how to use any data, tools, or software that you need to use. You'll also have a calendar to keep track of involving any meetings with prospects, customers, or internal support people.

So what can you do to help improve your organization skills? Here are some suggestions:

- Keep one calendar that has both business and personal appointments on it. Whether electronic or written, include the location of the meeting as well as the contact information for the person you are meeting with.
- Create a sales 'funnel' to track which stage of a sale your prospects are in. An example of a sales funnel is shown in Figure 3. The numbers in parentheses represent the number of customers in each stage of the funnel. You would create a spreadsheet or file for each of the prospects and customers at each stage in order to track when you move them from stage to stage through the funnel.
- The funnel should represent a specific period of time such as a month or quarter, at the end of which you can evaluate how well you are doing at moving prospects to customers.

- Get in the habit of creating a ‘to-do’ list at the end of your workday of things that you need to get done the next day. Label them in order of priority in case you aren’t able to complete them all. If something doesn’t get completed, move it to the next day’s to-do list.
- Use a contact management system software system, if possible, which will help you keep track of when you have spoken to, sent mail to, or sent email to a prospect, as well as when you need to contact them again.
- If you can’t get a content management system, create one of your own using Microsoft Access or Excel. You should be able to sort by different values that are important in determining how and when you contact each prospect (size of organization, type of industry, current products the prospect has, date(s) you promised to follow-up with prospects, etc.)

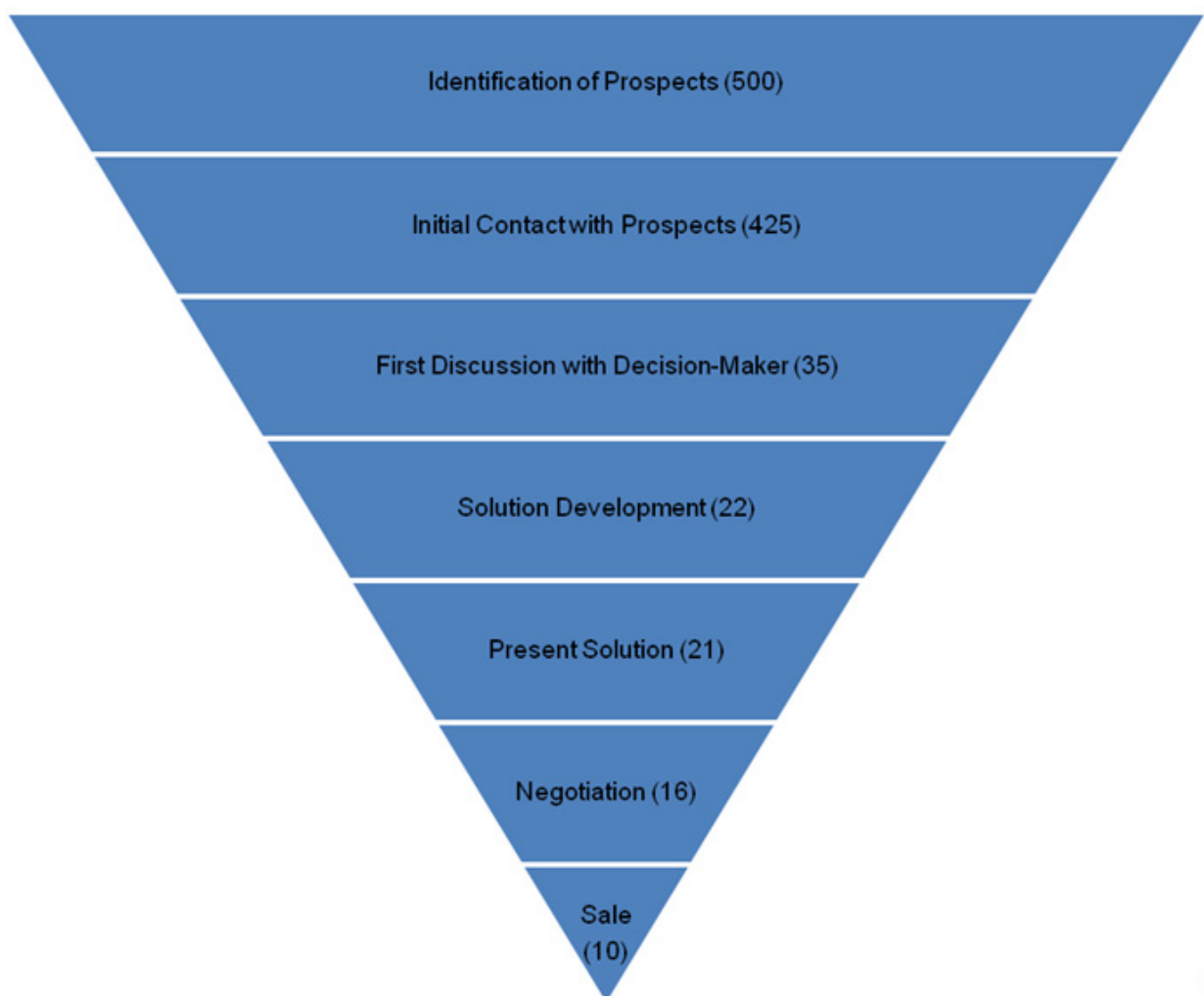


Figure 3: The Sales Funnel

3.4 Listening Skills

Successful prospecting in sales involves the seller being able to help the prospect identify his or his organization's true needs. The seller helps this process by being able to listen to and understand what the prospect is telling him.

Studies have shown that most listeners retain less than 50% of what they hear.

Good listeners are rare these days. Studies have shown that most listeners retain less than 50% of what they hear. Imagine what that means when it comes to a conversation that you might have with your boss, a colleague, or a prospect. If you speak for ten minutes, chances are that you have only heard about half of that conversation – and so have they. No wonder miscommunications happen so frequently!

In order to be a good listener, you should practice active listening skills. There are five key aspects of becoming an active listener. You are probably already employing some of them, but may need to practice others. However, once you are using these tools over time, you will find that they get easier and easier. Plus, you'll learn so much about your prospects and have such better conversations that you will be positively reinforced each time you practice.

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1. Pay close attention.

With this step, you learn to give the speaker your undivided attention. But you also let the speaker know that you are listening by using acknowledgements – types of verbal and non-verbal tools that help add proof that you are truly listening.

- Look the speaker in the eyes
- Stop any mental chatter
- Don't start preparing your response or rebuttal while the other person is talking
- Make sure your environment doesn't distract you
- Notice the speaker's body language and tone of voice – what are the non-verbal messages telling you?
- If you are in a group, avoid side conversations

2. Demonstrate physically that you are listening.

Use non-verbal and verbal signals that you are listening to the speaker attentively.

- Nod from time to time, when appropriate
- Use appropriate facial expressions
- Monitor your own body language. Be sure you remain open and relaxed rather than closed and tense.
- Use small comments like 'uh-huh', 'yes', 'right'.

3. Check for understanding.

It is possible for the other person's message to get mistranslated or misinterpreted, so that we hear a message that was not intended. Before responding, it's important to check for understanding using these tools.

- Use reflecting and paraphrasing. Check that you heard the message correctly by saying things like "what I hear you saying is...." or "If I'm hearing you correctly, you're saying....." or "I think you're talking about....".
- Ask questions that will help clarify the speaker's meaning. Suggestions include things like, "Can you tell me more about.....?" or "What did you mean when you said...?" or "I think you're saying... is that right?"
- Summarize what you've heard occasionally – don't wait until the end or you might not remember exactly what was said.

4. Don't interrupt!

There is nothing good that comes from interrupting the speaker. You will only be limiting your chance of understanding the message because you won't hear it all – and because the speaker will get frustrated!

5. Respond Appropriately.

When you are actively listening, you are showing your respect for the speaker, as well as gaining the information that you need to form your response. Once you have that information and have clarified it, it's time to form your reply. When expressing your thoughts:

- Be honest and open
- Be respectful
- Be thorough

3.5 Effective Communication Skills

Effective Communication Skills – in addition to listening, you must be able to respond well, whether in person, over the phone, or in writing. You must be able to offer solutions to the prospect's problems if the prospect is ever going to become a customer.

Communication skills are the tools that we use to remove the barriers to effective communication.

Imagine you are on one side of a wall and the person you want to communicate with is on the other side of the wall. But there's more than the wall in the way. The wall is surrounded by barriers. These barriers could be things like different cultures, different expectations, different experiences, different perspectives, or different communication styles, to name just a few.

You might experience only one of these barriers at a time, or you might find yourself facing them all. Getting your message to the other person requires that you recognize these barriers exist between you, and that you then apply the proper tools, or communication skills, to remove those barriers preventing your message from getting through.

Of course, communication is a two-way street. The person on the other side of those barriers will also try to send messages back to you. Your ability to understand them clearly could be left to a dependence on their ability to use communication skills. But that's leaving the success of the communication to chance. Instead, you can also use your own communication skills to ensure that you receive messages clearly as well.

Finally, there isn't only one point in your communication with another person at which you have to watch out for barriers. To be successful at communicating, it's important to recognize that these barriers to communication can occur at multiple points in the communication process.

Remember that communication skills involve both verbal and non-verbal communication. When communicating with others, the non-verbal aspects of what we are saying are actually more important than the words that we use. In fact, if the two conflict, we will automatically believe the non-verbal communication we are receiving over the verbal.

We instinctively recognize what body language and other non-verbal forms of communication are telling us.

So what do we mean by non-verbal communication? Mainly, we are referring to tone of voice and body language. Tone of voice is responsible for about 35-40 percent of the message we are sending. It involves the volume, emotion, and emphasis in our voice when we speak.

Over half of the message we are sending can be due to body language. Body language is a subconscious way that we communicate, but it is one that we recognize in others on instinct. Examples of body language include:

- Facial expressions
- The way they are standing or sitting
- Any swaying or other movement

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- Gestures with their arms or hands
- Eye contact (or lack thereof)
- Breathing rate
- Swallowing or coughing
- Blushing
- Fidgeting

Basically, body language includes anything they are doing with their body besides speaking. We recognize this communication instinctively, without having to be told what it means. It is important that when you speak to a customer, your body language supports rather than contrasts what you are saying.

3.6 Problem Solving Skills

The salesperson of today is a problem-solver who works in conjunction with the prospect to identify any issues that his organization has and then uses that information to offer solutions to the prospect's problems or situations. The tricky part of this situation is ensuring that the problem that the prospect is attempting to solve is the actual problem that exists.

The first step in problem-solving is to ensure that the problem the prospect is trying to solve is the actual problem that needs solving.

For example, when you first speak to a prospect, she might say that she needs a specific type of software. You could just sell the prospect the software and that would be the end of it. Or instead, you could ask the prospect questions in order to determine what the problem is that they are trying to solve. You may then be able to:

- Offer a better product or solution than the specific one the prospect asked for
- Offer a broader solution that the prospect didn't even know they needed or wanted
- Offer additional products or services that enhance your sale and also exceed the prospect's expectations
- Identify additional needs that the prospect has which you can then offer to resolve with other products or services
- Determine that you don't actually have a product or service that will solve the prospect's problem

The final point above may not seem like a solution you would want to offer. But the fact is that telling a prospect the truth will establish you as a reliable, trustworthy source of information for the next time they need something.

One simple problem-solving tool is to use something called ‘The Five Whys.’ It is simple because it uses the question ‘why’ up to five times in order to help get to the root of a problem. But remember that it is indeed a simple tool – if you are dealing with a more complex problem, you may need to learn other problem-solving skills. An example of how to use this tool is shown in Figure 4 below. Notice that in this case, it’s not necessary to use five ‘why’ questions to get to the root of the problem.

Prospect	Salesperson
I might be interested in a copy of your ABC billing software.	Might I ask why?
We are having problems keeping track of customer bills.	Why are you having trouble?
We do it by hand, but now our customer base has grown so much that we can’t keep up. Correspondence in general is difficult.	Why is correspondence difficult?
Because we have about 10 different pieces of information that have to go out to different customers in addition to the bills. Keeping all that in order is quite a challenge.	It sounds to me like you need more than a billing system – it sounds like a customer contact management system is what you really need. Why don’t I show you some of the benefits it could provide?

Figure 4: Using the Five Whys Tool

3.7 Interpersonal Skills

Interpersonal skills are more than just communication skills. They are the ‘people skills’ that seem to come to some of us so naturally, while other of us may struggle with them. Interpersonal skills will help you to work with your prospects and build rapport with them, but it will also help you to advocate for your prospects with your colleagues across your organization. Interpersonal skills also help you to build the type of long-term relationships that are important in turning prospects into customers that you keep for the long term.

Interpersonal skills are the ‘people skills’ that help you to work with and build rapport with prospects, as well as to advocate for your prospect within your own organization.

Some interpersonal skills include:

- **Courtesy** – it’s been said that good manners cost nothing, and that’s the truth. There is no reason to be anything but courteous when dealing with your prospects, customers, and colleagues. It fosters relationships and shows that you care about making the other person comfortable.
- **Respect for others** – you’ve heard the ‘golden rule’, that you should treat others the way that you would like to be treated. But the true expression of respect is something called the ‘platinum rule’ - treating others the way that they would like for you to treat them.
- **Ability to see things from others’ perspectives** – if you have a prospect or a customer who is upset about something, you might feel as if they have overreacted at first. But you need to be able to understand how what has happened is affecting your prospect or customer.
- **Perhaps to you, delivery of your product one day later is not a big deal.** But to your customer, it could mean lost sales, lost productivity, embarrassment for him in dealing with his own customers, or any number of things. Your job is to understand – and express that understanding – so that the prospect or customer feels heard and acknowledged.

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- Ability to understand various communication styles – each of us has a way of communicating with the world, and your prospect's could be very different from your own. These differences could create barriers to relationship building if you don't understand how they may show up.

For example, a person who you perceive as being rude or cold may simply be reserved or shy. Or a person you see as intrusive or forward may simply be interested in people in general and is not meaning any disrespect. This is just one form of keeping an open mind when working with others – a huge factor in interpersonal skills!

3.8 Self-Motivation Skills

As a salesperson, you have to be able to motivate yourself. There will be those times that you don't want to take the next step in the sales process, or to make that phone call to the next prospect. But you'll need to know how to work through those feelings and take the steps that your prospects and customers need – and that will help you be successful in your job.

There will be times that you don't want to take the next step in the sales process. Self-motivation will help you work through those times.

Motivation requires a goal to strive for. You can get as creative as you want in the goals that you set for yourself, as long as they will help you to take the next action(s) that are necessary in moving through the sales funnel. The goals don't have to be related to your sales funnel – they could also be related to your own personal growth.

Here are some tips for how to keep yourself motivated:

- As we said, motivation requires goals. Decide on what your goals are – and write them down. Consider short, medium, and long-term goals.
- Do it anyway. We all have days where we just don't feel like doing our work. But in a job like sales, every day and every contact can be important. So even if you don't feel like doing something on your list – do it anyway. The more practice you get at this, the easier it will become.
- Stop procrastinating. It's very easy to find things to do other than what is on your list. You need to recognize when you are procrastinating and nip it in the bud. The sooner you get whatever it is you are procrastinating over finished, the sooner you will be free of it and ready to move on to the next thing on your list.
- Set rewards for yourself. As you complete your goals, be sure to celebrate your successes with rewards for yourself. This positive reinforcement will then motivate you to work towards the next goal – and the next corresponding reward.

3.9 Perseverance

As you start contacting prospects, you will find that you hear ‘no’ a lot more than you hear ‘yes’. This can be discouraging, but you should recognize that it’s just part of the process. Perseverance is vital, along with self-motivation, to keep from losing your momentum. Remind yourself that every ‘no’ is getting you one step closer to the next ‘yes’.

Of course, if you continue to get no after no without getting any success with your prospects, you might want to seek input from others. Persevering doesn’t mean continuing on blindly with an approach that isn’t working. It means continuing to move forward, even if you have to change your approach repeatedly until you get one that seems to work the best.

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4. Prospecting Tips

4.1 Introduction

There are a number of different tips that can be used in order to help turn a prospect into a customer. They all require a certain level of understanding on the part of the salesperson regarding what the prospect needs, which then requires a solution be presented that meets those needs. How you move through these steps varies depending on what kind of product or service you are offering and the level of complexity that the appropriate sales process requires. However, Figure 5 shows the general sequence of steps that sales processes follow. The final step, repurchasing, will not necessarily happen with every customer, but in many organizations the product or service you offer is one that can be repurchased, providing you have met or exceeded customer expectations to this point.

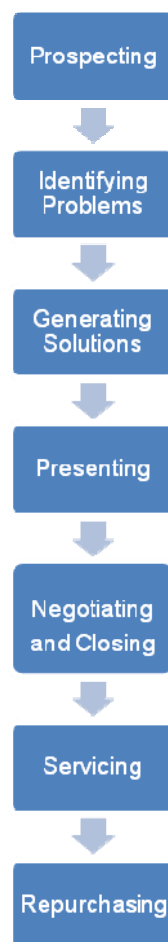


Figure 5: The General Sales Process

Of course, you can't move through the sales process until you've located the prospects that you aim to turn into customers. Following are some tips to help you locate those prospects. Depending on the type of business you have and the organization you work for, some of these may not be possible for you. But keeping an open mind might help you generate ideas that will work for you.

4.2 General Prospecting Tips

4.2.1 Create Excellent Marketing Tools

Your organization might have created a marketing tools package for you. But if not, you'll want to think about the image that you want to present to your prospects. What materials will you need? How can you make them appear to be related in a cohesive package? Think about creating a marketing package that includes:

- A branded web site
- Business cards
- Product or service information sheets
- Postcards or other mailers
- Letterhead

This type of presentation makes you appear professional and organized. But from a prospecting point of view, your prospect should be able to recognize anything they receive from you because all of your marketing collateral will have a similar design or style. Once your prospect becomes a customer, they will be able to recognize anything from you on sight, which will pull your latest mail out of their 'junk mail' pile.

4.2.2 Narrow Your Focus

As you prepare to contact prospects, start by narrowing your focus to a specific group of the most highly qualified prospects. Instead of calling 1,000 companies in a month that might want your product or service, concentrate on doing a really good job of contacting 100 companies in that month that are the most likely to need your product or service.

Do thorough research on these prospects, make the calls you need to make in order to locate the decision maker, and follow-up on each of them by sending your marketing materials. Set times to call them and review what you've sent them. Learn about their organizations and what benefits your product or service can provide. By narrowing your focus and doing a more thorough job understanding your prospects, you will get best return on the time you are investing.

4.2.3 Use the Information Available Online

There are four great sources of information online when you are working on your list of prospects. First is the information that your potential prospects have put online about their own companies. You can see how they represent themselves in the marketplace. What values are important to them? What are their strengths? What does their annual report say about them and how they envision the company's future? Can you identify any weaknesses that they might have? How could your product or service help them to be in an even stronger position?

That's where the second source of information can help – the information online about your prospects' competition. Who are their main competitors? What kind of edge does the competition have, if any? What are they focusing on and how are they representing themselves in the marketplace? Can you get any ideas that could help your prospects to be better positioned?

Now you can do a search for information from independent sources on your prospects. What are customers or reviewers saying about your prospect? Are there any specific complaints that seem to be reappearing? What news is out there about the business itself? Are there concerns about the prospect's ability to compete in any way? Are there issues raised about specific aspects of the prospect's operations? If you can bring solutions to these issues to the table, you will be demonstrating value to your prospects.

The final area of information you can research online is related to your own competition. What will your prospects be hearing from the competitions' salespeople? Are you prepared to respond to those offerings? By being familiar with what other offers your prospects will receive, you will be prepared when and if the prospect brings them up. Even if they don't bring them up, you will know how to position yourself and your company in order to remain the forerunner in the prospect's mind.

4.2.4 Excel in Customer Service

Yes, even before a prospect has become a customer, you can practice excellent customer service skills. Consider how your prospects will be responding to your marketing efforts, and make sure that it is easy for your prospects to get back in touch with you. For example, what does your voice mail say? What options are available to your prospect? If your prospect doesn't feel as if he or she has a direct route to you, it is unlikely that they will even stick around long enough to leave a message.

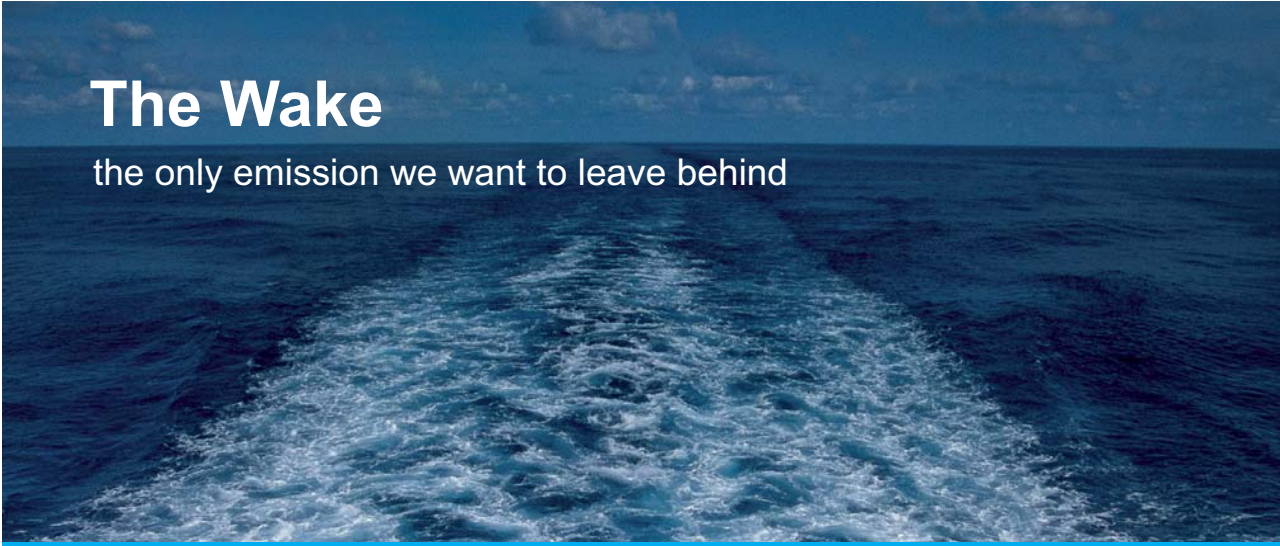
The prospect should feel as if you are eager to speak to them. What about leaving a cell phone number, or better yet, allowing them to choose an option that will connect them to your cell phone number? If that's not possible, can the customer hit zero in order to get to a live person and leave a message? Or what about leaving your email address on your message as well? Think about how you would like to be treated if you were responding to a salesperson who is contacting you, then give them the information they need to reach you.

4.2.5 Market Yourself Creatively

There are traditional means of marketing, such as advertisements, cold-calling, and having a website. But how can you market yourself beyond these venues – the same venues that your competition will be using? Here are several ideas for you to consider.

- Offer your help to others – you never know how your good deeds will come back to benefit you. So why not help others on a regular basis? As you offer your assistance to others, you distinguish yourself from the pack and you will make it easy for the person you help to remember you the next time they have some business to pass on to someone. So consider joining a local business association, offer to teach at the local Small Business Administration, volunteer to help others with their business plans, etc. In any way that you can, put yourself out there to help other business people. In addition to making connections in the community, you'll get the benefit of feeling good about knowing that you are helping others be more successful.
- Offer some work samples – want to demonstrate your value to a potential prospect? Why not give them some work samples that are related to what they do? For example, if you see something on their website that you think can be improved, why not send them a letter indicating some of the improvements you could help them with? Or if you have identified a challenge that the prospect has in the marketplace, why not send them some information on a case study that demonstrates how you helped another company with a similar situation?

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- Network, network, network – get used to it, networking isn’t going anywhere. There is nothing like a personal relationship to help you connect to a prospect. Think about it from your own experience. When you have hired someone for your own needs, have you been more comfortable with a stranger or with someone that a friend or family member referred to you? Start by visiting your local business, industry, or service group meetings. Then join as many as you think you can do a good job of attending. Get in the habit of carrying your business cards with you wherever you go – you never know when you will have the opportunity to network with others.
- Consider cross-promoting your business – think about your customers. Who are their other providers or suppliers? Come up with a list of them and think about whether or not you can promote each other, then approach the ones that you think would be the best fit. Consider how you could help each other. For example, if you are a copywriter, can you locate a graphic designer that you can package your services with and market as a team? You could each be an excellent source of referrals for each other, and you in turn will become more valuable to your prospects and customers if you can help them with other needs that arise in their business by recommending your colleagues.
- Join in online – there are thousands of forums, chat rooms, and blogs out there on the internet – some of which are bound to be related to what you do, or at least related to what your prospects do. If you can chime in on the conversation in a way that adds value to the conversation, you could be noticed by some of your prospects as having something valuable to say. You can usually sign your posts on forums and blogs with your contact information, and you could always make it available on your profile for participating in chat rooms.
- Create an e-newsletter – this is another way to establish yourself as an expert in your field. But there is an even more valuable result of an e-newsletter – the list of email addresses that you will have when people register for it. You’ve started a relationship with those that sign up, making it much easier for you to contact them and for them to trust you with their business.
- Write online articles – this is another tool for being noticed and considered an expert for your industry. Write authoritative, information-rich articles and post them on your website and on many of the free article sites online. Your article may be picked up and published by other website owners, e-newsletter publishers, or bloggers, as long as they also include the short bio and contact information that you have written at the bottom of each article.
- Go where they go – where will your prospects go in the day to day operation of their business? If you can figure that out, then you know where to have a presence. For example, do you sell women’s shoes? Then having an advertising presence in local spas and hair stylists’ is a way to be where your prospects are. Do you sell computer equipment? Then have a presence at local computer repair shops. Think creatively about where your prospects are likely to be and make sure that your prospects will see your product or service advertised there.

- Attend trade shows – or participate in them. Get a booth ahead of time, or if you don't, ask someone if they want to share space with you. They get some free help and someone who can show them around town. You can find potential prospects there and make your introductions to other attendees – as long as you're not preventing customers from approaching them. Then be sure to follow up on any leads that you make during the trade show.
- Host a free seminar – this can be yet another easy way to help establish yourself as an expert. Even if your prospects don't come to the seminar, they may see your advertising and name and contact you for more information about your services. It's also an excellent way to help you get over any fear of speaking and can be a great venue for practicing your sales pitch.
- Don't forget about the local news outlets. You can send out personalized press releases to the local news outlets and may get more of a response than you expected. Sometimes local news will run articles on local entrepreneurs, local businesses and a new product or service, or a new approach to doing business in the area. Keep the local news abreast of what's happening in your organization and you may find yourself pleasantly surprised.
- Pick up the phone or get in the car – if you are facing a slow period of business, the only thing to do is to get into action. Call a customer to check in on how their business is going and whether or not they have anything on the horizon they need to discuss. Or get in your car and go visit your prospects and drop off some information. Sometimes just showing up one more time than the other guy can be the key to getting the business you need.

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5. Effective Introductory Sales Letters

5.1 Introduction

In this section we'll examine some sales letter techniques that will help improve the chance of your letter campaign being successful. How do we define success? In two parts:

- Your letter gets past the 'gate keeper' to the decision maker, and
- The decision maker wants to hear more

This is no easy feat. Think about the mail you've received in the last few days. How much of it was unsolicited advertising? How much of it did you read before you tossed it out? Not much of it, probably. And it's probably very rare that you would actually follow up and take further action on a piece of unsolicited mail.

Getting one of your prospects to treat your letter seriously means that you have to grab their attention in just a few seconds. The prospect has to see some value in what they are reading in order to keep reading. And then they have to be convinced that the value is something that they want, need, or could benefit them. But in many cases, before your prospect even gets to see your letter, it has to get past whomever is opening their mail. That person will be looking through dozens of similar pieces of mail every day or at least every week. So to get to your prospect, your letter needs to be different – well written, professional, and relevant to your prospect's needs.

5.2 The Five Second Rule

Getting someone's attention is harder than ever these days – but keeping it is even harder! We have so many competing attempts for our attention that we have to make fast decisions about what is important and what is not. Think about all of the ways in which we are bombarded with information and sales attempts – television, radio, print, billboards and other street advertising, telephone advertising – it's everywhere that we turn. In such a world of noise and information, how can you stand out from the crowd?

In today's fast-paced work environment, you have about five seconds to capture a prospect's attention. This means that you have between ten and twenty words of your opening statement in order to get the prospect to keep reading. This is why so many sales letters and marketing collateral pieces use headlines – they are effective at grabbing attention within the five-second rule. You don't have to use a headline if you don't want to, but you do still need to grab the reader's attention in the first line or two of your letter.

5.3 The Language You Choose

Your reader should be able to get the gist of the letter in that first opening statement – which will communicate more to the reader than what the letter says. It also tells them something about you – that you can communicate efficiently and effectively, meaning that you respect their time. As you think about the vocabulary that you are to use, be sure of a few points:

- Be careful and choosy about the words and information that you include. If every word isn't forwarding your message or isn't important to your point, you need to keep editing.
- Be certain that your contact would understand any jargon, 'tech-speak' or abbreviations that you want to use. If in doubt, spell it out.
- Use language that is relevant to decision makers, such as the financial impact of implementing a product or service.
- Use vocabulary that a decision-maker is used to reading. In other words, don't 'talk down' to a prospect, but don't use such unusual vocabulary that they would need a dictionary to read it. As a good rule of thumb, read the most popular trade or business journal in their field and use a similar level of vocabulary.
- Keep the tone professional and polite. Don't imply a level of acquaintance with the prospect that doesn't yet exist or any other similar 'tricks.' Honest, straightforward, and professional is best.

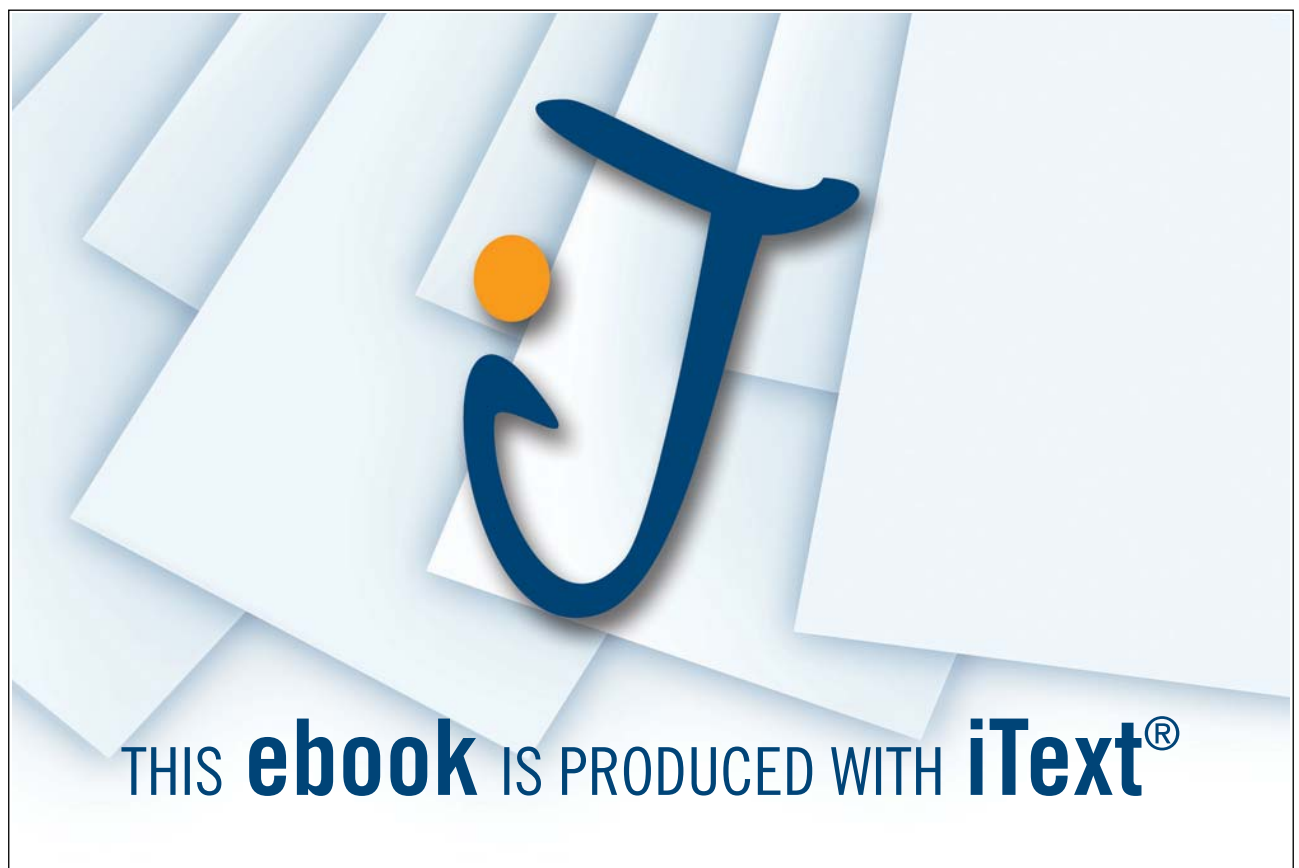
5.4 Getting Past the Gatekeeper

The introductory sales letter has to get past the gatekeeper (the secretary or personal assistant) if it is every going to have any impact. Remember that the gatekeeper's job is to save the boss's time by filtering out anything that they don't perceive as important. So in order for your letter to make the cut, you need to make sure that it is:

- Personalized to the decision maker, with correct spelling and the correct title. If you don't have this correct, your letter will look like a random mass-mailing, not the carefully researched sales letter that it is.
- Significant for the financial, commercial, or operational issues of the company. If it's not relevant to the organization, again, it looks like a mass-mailing and will be destined for the garbage bin.
- Of interest to the decision maker and demonstrating a potential benefit. Otherwise, why would the gatekeeper pass it on?

- Well-targeted to the decision maker. In other words, you must be asking the right person to make the decision that you are asking them to make. If your letter is addressed to someone who doesn't have the level of authority needed to move forward, it is unlikely they will pass unsolicited mail on to their own boss.
- Credible. You have to sound like an expert in your letter and a reliable source of information on the topic you're addressing. You can do this by including some testimonials, some examples of other clients (if you have their permission), or some relevant data that would interest the client. Be sure to include your personal contact information – and be sure you will be the one responding.
- The letter should be grammatically perfect. Don't rely only on a spell check feature for spelling and grammar – it can miss words that are spelled correctly but used incorrectly. Any mistake on the letter will make you look unprofessional and as if you didn't care enough to do some basic proofreading. Letting someone else in your organization read and edit it is also a good idea. Don't let a perfectly good prospect be ruined by a failure to read over the letter.

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5.5 Sales Letter Structure

The letter should follow the AIDA structure. This is a classic, effective sales model, and one that has been around since the 1950s. The acronym stands for:

- A – Attention
- I – Interest
- D – Desire
- A – Action

The model refers to the process that is required for a person to act on external stimuli – not just sales opportunities, though it is a perfectly valid model for sales. Anytime we make a sale, we must first gain the attention of our prospect, and then generate some interest on their part to learn more about the product. Next, they must want the product – they must see the value in the product for their organization – before they will perform the action of contacting you for a telephone appointment or a sale. Let's look further at each individual step.

5.5.1 Attention

Getting the attention of your reader is the first step, and is important because it sets the tone for your relationship going forward. As the saying goes, you only get a single chance to make a first impression, so be sure that you are representing yourself, your product or service, and your organization in the best possible light.

How you get the prospect's attention and the first impression that you make will set the tone for your relationship going forward.

5.5.2 Interest

Once you've gotten the prospect's attention, you can't hold it unless you generate some interest. Remember, you usually have about five seconds to create that interest in your customer. Something will appear interesting to your prospect if:

- It is relevant to the prospect and can provide some kind of advantage (benefit) for them
- You are approaching the person who has a need for your product or service
- You are approaching the prospect at the right time – both in the sense of convenience and in the sense of the correct time of year / correct timing for your prospect to use your product or service.

- You can talk the language of the prospect. You should be able to empathize with and understand the prospect's situation, then express that understanding in a way that shows you have that understanding of their situation.

5.5.3 Desire

Once you have the prospect's interest, you need to be able to grow that interest into desire for your product or service. This requires further development of your value to the prospect. This step will continue when you get the prospect on the phone or when they have agreed to a meeting. In this phase of the letter, you should:

- Discuss the prospect's:
 - Situation
 - Needs
 - Priorities
 - Constraints
- Include information on why the prospect should trust you and why they should be comfortable doing business with you. Your job is to demonstrate that you are not a risk – you are a proven partner in helping businesses like theirs become successful.
- Distinguish yourself from the competition. Since you have done your research, you should be able to put your best, competitive aspects into the limelight in your letter.
- Identify any particular advantages of your product over others, and identify every way in which those advantages can help the prospect.

Taking the prospect from interest to desire requires that you learn more about what the prospect's needs are and how you can help them.

5.5.4 Action

If you have completed the first three stages thoroughly and well, this final stage of action should flow forward easily. The prospect will have a strong desire for taking the next step – or even for buying your product or service, and they will either believe or be considering that you are the right choice to be their provider. It now only remains for you to get the prospect to take the next step – the action which you propose to the prospect in your letter. Be aware of a few things, though:

- Caution, hesitancy, or the simple fact that there is so much more to do these days for all of us may mean that it takes some follow-up efforts in order for you to get the prospect to take the next step.

- Make sure that you follow-up on any response that you need to make as soon as possible. You don't want to let the prospect think that their business wasn't important enough to follow-up on right away
- Make it very clear what you are asking the prospect to do next. If you are asking for a phone appointment, make it clear how they should proceed to set that up. Will you be calling them? Should they send you an email? Make it as easy as possible for your prospect to reach you.

If the first three stages have been done thoroughly and well, this final step will flow easily.

5.6 More Letter Structure Tips

When you write your introductory sales letter or any other letter to a prospect, there are some structural aspects that are important if you want your letter to be professional and well received.

- Always check the details before you send the letter. You should be certain that you have the correct title, the correct spelling of their name, and any professional qualifications that you know are accurate.

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- Keep your sentences short and direct. Use bullet points or numbers if you have several points to make. You should keep the letter to one side of the page since you'll be keeping it to the main points.
- Remember that you want the letter to be read in 20 to 30 seconds so that your prospect will be able to judge whether or not they want more information pretty quickly.
- The letter should include:
 - Salutation – Dear Mr, Mrs, Ms and surname. If you don't know the surname, you could use Dear Sir or Madam. But hopefully you have done your research and you know the correct name. You can always call the prospect's secretary and confirm the name and address.
 - Headline statement – this is optional, but as we mentioned, it is a great way to capture your reader's attention
 - Credibility statement – establishes who you are, your credentials – in other words, why they should listen to you
 - Relevance statement – why you are writing to them and what the importance to them could be
 - How and why statement – this is optional, but you should tell them why your offer is the best they will receive and how you are the best choice for a company to offer this service or product.
 - Action or follow-up statement – this is mandatory. You need to let the prospect know what you want them to do next. What is the outcome you want? A phone call? An email?
 - Sign-off - the closing statement of your letter, including a thank you for their attention.
 - P.S. Statement – although this can work in many situations, you should avoid it if you are writing to senior decision makers because it could be considered unprofessional.

Let's look at a couple of these in more detail.

5.6.1 Headline

If you decide to use a headline, there are some guidelines that you should follow in order to make it as effective as possible:

- Make it concise, relevant, and unique
- Use a maximum of 15 to 20 words
- Avoid using uppercase letters, which make things harder to read and could be construed as ‘shouting’
- Avoid using italics, bold, or colors, all of which can appear unprofessional and can limit readability
- Put the headline at about one-third to one-quarter of the way down the page where the eye naturally falls first
- Try writing the headline after you’ve written the rest of the text so that you know what the top point should be and what headline would be most meaningful

5.6.2 Credibility and Relevance Statements

In some cases it is easier to combine these two statements into one – or at least into one paragraph. Your job with this section is to establish yourself and your company as experts in the industry and as having something of value to offer. Here are some suggestions for creating your credibility and relevance statement:

- Mention what your company has done in similar areas or industries to your prospect’s business
- Use technical language only if it is relevant and if you are sure that your prospect will understand it
- Use language that shows you are familiar with the prospect’s industry, needs, concerns, and problems as well as their successes
- Most sales letters avoid mentioning any information about pricing. If you feel you can give at least a general idea of what the financials would be for your customer to take advantage of your offer, give it.
- If you do mention costs, relate them to the potential returns on that investment. Since decision-makers are always cost conscious, demonstrating the value they will get in return is an excellent way to answer cost-related objections before they even arise.

- If the prospect works in a highly competitive marketplace, mentioning their competition may be acceptable as long as it is relevant. If the prospect is not surrounded by aggressive competition, then mentioning the competition is not as acceptable.
- Focus in on one theme, one benefit, and one result. Drive home what the main value is that you are providing. Make sure you have explained what is in it for the prospect to take the action that you are suggesting in your letter.

5.6.3 How and Why Statement

This is your chance to explain in concise terms how you would be the best partner the prospect could choose if they need the service or product you are offering. It is your opportunity to show them why you are the expert that they need and why your company's ability to fulfill their need is unique. What is it about you that separates you from the rest of the pack? What do you bring to the table that other salespeople will not?

5.6.4 Action or Follow Up Statement

This statement is when you ask for a specific action from your prospect and you tell him what you will be doing next as well. This could be notice that you will be calling them to follow up within the next week or so. Don't give them a specific date and time because it will sound presumptuous. However, you could ask them to email you or call you with a convenient date and time for a phone call. Remember, the rule is to make it easy for your prospect to contact you or take the next step.

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5.6.5 Sign-Off

Before you sign your name, it doesn't hurt to restate what you will be doing next. Then to remain professional and polite, stick with the standard closings that are expected in business letters. Use 'yours truly', 'yours sincerely', or 'yours faithfully'.

5.6.6 P.S.

If you feel that it will complement the rest of the letter and if the tone is appropriate, you can use a 'P.S.' to add a last bit of interesting information, to draw more attention, or to highlight a final point. You could direct the prospect to your website, mention a special offer, or mention that you will be in their area during a specific week if they would like to meet in person. However, if you are writing to a high-level decision maker, avoid the P.S. It can seem too much like a gimmick at that level.

5.7 Other Sales Letter Writing Tips

When you are writing your sales letter, there are a few more tips to keep in mind in order to appear professional, efficient, and credible. These include:

- Less is more. Get to the point fast – if you can't read the whole letter in under a minute, it is entirely too long or too complicated.
- Remember that you are not trying to sell the product or service – you are only trying to sell the next step (usually a phone call).
- Write the letter using the 2nd person – you, your, yours. This ensures that you are continually directing your information to the company and the prospect specifically.
- If you enclose additional information, be sure to note that you have done so – and why. Why should they take even more of their time to look at what you've included? What is the benefit?
- Make sure that the visual presentation is easy to read. This includes the font, the margins and page layout, the length of the paragraphs and sentences, and any bulleting or numbering of information. Does the letter look neat and organized? Is everything properly aligned? The letter should be visually appealing.
- Use the tone and style that would be most appealing and appropriate for the reader. Think of who you are writing to and then write accordingly.
- Your presentation of the offer should be believable. If it sounds like it is too good to be true, your prospect will not believe what you are offering. This doesn't mean that you can't offer them information or resources free of charge – but your offer shouldn't be so outrageous that your prospect will not believe it. Remember that under-promising and over-delivering is better than over-promising and under-delivering.

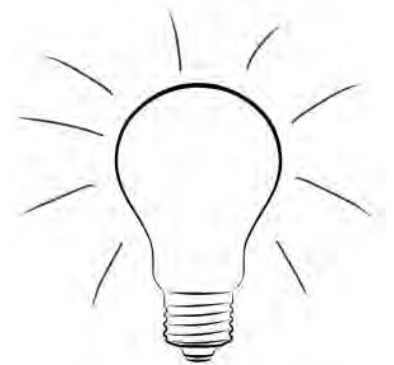
- Avoid trying to be funny or clever. You have no guarantee that your attempt at humor will be understood or interpreted in the way that you intend it, and it could make you look unprofessional instead.
- Don't pose puzzles or make it difficult for your prospect to understand what you are offering. You might be excited about the answer to the puzzle – but your prospect is too busy to play games or have to put forth extra effort to understand what your letter is saying.
- Remember that what you are writing should make the reader say 'yes, I want to learn more about that.'
- If you can, try to get the prospect's secretary or personal assistant on your side. Let them know that you are writing and why. Then when you send the letter it is more likely to be noticed by him or her out of the pile of letters like yours.

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6. Cold Calling Techniques

6.1 Introduction

Cold calling refers to the first interaction that you initiate with a prospective customer. Usually this first call is done by phone, but it could be done by dropping in for a face-to-face visit without an appointment. Cold calling is an important aspect of prospecting because it helps you to generate more and more prospects. It keeps you in the act of marketing yourself and your organization – something that every business has to do to keep selling.

Many people dread cold calling. They see it as a negative experience where they will be hung up on, yelled at, or worse. But that attitude could be the difference between you being successful or not. The fact is that when you are able to perform cold calling well, those same abilities are those that will help you perform in other areas of sales – perseverance, self-discipline, self-motivation, and goal accomplishment. Every business and every entrepreneur that has ever been successful has mastered the art of cold calling. It's what keeps the business going when business is slow and it keeps you motivated when you need it. Your attitude towards cold calling is what will make it easier for you to perform this very necessary part of generating prospects.

6.2 Your Attitude towards Cold Calling

When you begin to view cold calling as the valuable tool that it is, you can take the negative feelings out of it entirely. Think of cold calling as the ability to approach someone new with a sensible proposition in a way that is open, professional, and meaningful to that person and company. Cold calling can be an incredibly effective tool in generating prospects for your business because it keeps you focused on remaining in action. However, it will only be as effective as your attitude towards it.

Those who view cold calling in a negative light see it as a cold, impersonal numbers game that is depressing, degrading, and painful to do. These salespeople see themselves as the human equivalent of junk mail or telemarketing. Viewed in this light it is no wonder that these salespeople have such a difficult, uncomfortable time with cold calling. However, when you view cold calling in a more positive light, cold calling is seen as a creative activity that empowers you as a salesperson. Cold calling can enable you to:

- Get ahead of the competition
- Identify and generate enormous new business possibilities
- Become known in your organization as a person who can make amazing things happen in sales
- Establish relationships that will benefit you and your organization beyond what a first sale can generate
- Be seen as a leader, no matter what your current job title might be

You can help change your attitude towards cold calling by seeing it from your prospect's point of view rather than your own. This can open up the potential for cold calling success. Figure 6 shows you the difference between viewing cold calling from your own point of view versus the customer's when it's done well and when it's done poorly.

When You Have a Negative Attitude towards Cold Calling It Is...	How Customers Experience It When You Have a Negative Attitude towards Cold Calling...	How You and the Customer Can Experience Cold Calling When You Do It Well...
Fearful	Nuisance	Honest and open
Unpleasant	Time waster	Informative
Boring	Irritating	Interesting
Repetitive	Pushy	Helpful
Confrontational	Dishonest	Beneficial
Stressful	Shady	Professional
Meaningless	Disrespectful	Respectful
Demeaning	Contrived	Advantageous
Painful	Unprofessional	Cost-saving
Thankless		Credible
		Innovative
		Thought-provoking

Figure 6: Cold Calling and Your Attitude

As you become more practiced at cold calling, your goal will be to move your attitude, experience, and behavior into the third column. In the beginning you will probably find this difficult. But as you practice some of the techniques discussed here and you concentrate on improving your attitude, eventually you will understand that cold calling truly is one of the greatest skills that a salesperson can have.

6.3 Cold Calling Techniques

There are eight basic cold calling techniques that you can practice. As you read these, notice that the goal is not to sell the product or service during this process. Instead you are aiming to open up the conversation between you and the prospect. You can think of this as getting to the ‘first base’ of a selling relationship. The eight basic cold calling techniques are:

- Preparation
- Introduction
- Questioning
- Objectivity
- Listen and interpret
- Inform and educate
- Involve and coordinate
- Keep in touch

Let’s look at each of these in detail.

6.3.1 Preparation

Preparation is important so that you don’t waste your own time or the time of the people you will be calling. There are three parts to successful cold calling preparation.

- Knowing your own product and service inside and out
- Your attitude towards cold calling and your mental approach to it
- Your knowledge regarding your offer or proposition and how it will add value to your prospects’ organizations and situations

Without being prepared in these three areas, what are you going to say to the prospect? Why would he or she be willing to listen? Why would he or she trust you to be the supplier of this service or product? You should know how your product would benefit the prospect, why your prospect should feel comfortable choosing you, and then be able to express all of that to them succinctly and clearly. Otherwise, your call will have been wasted effort.

As you prepare yourself mentally for cold calling, there are some things you can do to help make sure you are successful:

- Study Figure 6 and focus on the third column
- Focus on viewing cold calling as a very powerful tool
- Set up your desk and work area so that it supports your cold calling process – make it comfortable and organized
- Take regular breaks, eat well, drink enough fluids, and get enough of both rest and exercise
- Don't let other things interrupt or distract you
- Set hourly, daily, weekly, or monthly goals to help keep you motivated
- Visualize how you want the people you call to see you and that will help you live up to that image
- Work at being more comfortable with talking to people at all levels of an organization

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You've done your research on the organization, and you have a strong understanding of how your product or service will benefit the customer's organization. You even feel you can explain it clearly in terms of financial returns on the initial investment. But you have to do one more thing – you have to realize that even after you've done the research and come up with a proposition, you might find that your prospect is interested in or needs a completely different product or service than the one you were proposing. This just means that you need to have enough of an understanding of your product or service line in general that you can change your proposition, if necessary, once you have spoken to the prospect.

6.3.2 Introduction

When you call the prospect, you have about five to fifteen seconds to capture the prospect's attention. As you open the conversation, you need to be very clear and concise about who you are and why you are calling. Have a very strong reason for asking to speak to the prospect or for requesting a scheduled time to speak in more detail. Explain the benefit the prospect will enjoy in return for giving you a few moments of time.

6.3.3 Questioning

Once you get the prospect to give you some time, you have the opportunity to show that you know what you are talking about by asking facilitative, intelligent questions. There's also the danger that you could show that you don't know what you're talking about if you ask the wrong questions, which is even more reason to do your research. Invite the prospect to tell you more about what you have learned and how they see the situation at hand, and use that information to form new questions. If you are sticking to one specific benefit or value that the product or service provides, this won't take as long as it might seem. A few focused questions and you will know whether or not your current proposition is relevant and whether or not you need to add to or change it.

6.3.4 Objectivity

Although this sounds unusual for a salesperson, objectivity is an important characteristic of someone the prospect will trust as an advisor. Think about your own experiences as a customer; were you more likely to buy from someone who pushed and pushed their own products and services and denigrated the competition, or not? Instead, focus on making yourself a good guide and a knowledgeable partner in the prospect's decision making process. This reinforces your role as an expert that the prospect can rely upon.

6.3.5 Listen and Interpret

This tool goes hand in hand with being objective. If you aren't pushing your sale, but listening to and understanding what the prospect is saying, you encourage the prospect to think of you as an advisor rather than a salesperson. You can interpret what they are saying by asking clarifying questions that let the prospect have a chance to correct something if it wasn't what they meant to say. Some examples of ways to clarify what you're hearing are:

- What I think you're saying is...
- So if I'm hearing you correctly, your main concern is...
- Let me be sure I understand; you're saying that...
- So you felt that...

6.3.6 Inform and Educate

If you are going to position yourself as the expert in your given service or product area, you need to be bringing some information to the table. If you are not able to explain, define, and elaborate on your offering, you are not going to be seen as the expert that you want to be. Every question that the prospect asks is an opportunity to demonstrate the value that you can bring to the prospect as an expert in your field and in theirs.

You are also helping yourself by learning whether or not there is an actual fit between the prospect's needs and your offer. Take your time and help the prospect understand how you can add value to their organization. In the worst case, you have left an excellent impression with someone who might become a customer – or refer customers to you – in the future.

6.3.7 Involve and Coordinate

Once you've determined that there is a match between what you have to offer and what the prospect needs, now you need to explore how the prospect would like to move forward. Let them give you an idea of what would be the best next move because they are the ones that know how their company's purchasing processes work. Do you need to have a face-to-face meeting? Send a written proposal? Let them tell you what they need you to do and then you can coordinate the action. Demonstrate your value starting now by making it easy to do business with you.

6.3.8 Keep Ownership

Once you have gotten past the initial cold calling and you are on the way to a sale, you may need to pass the customer on to another division in your organization. But no matter what happens next, remember that this is your customer. You need to keep ownership of the customer's experience with your organization. Take excellent notes, make sure everyone agrees upon delivery dates and times, and keep in touch with the customer to make sure their experience is good. Keep the customer informed and remember that no matter what might happen, as the salesperson you are the 'face' of your company for the customer. Fulfill your role with the first sale and you will find that successive sales with the customer are easier because they know you and trust you to come through on your promises.

7. Prospecting with Existing Customers

7.1 Introduction

It takes a great deal less effort to maintain a customer relationship than to find and secure new customers. As a result, it would behoove any salesperson to take the steps necessary to maintain contact with his customers so that his efforts can be as focused and effective as possible. Luckily, in this age there are plenty of tools available to help you to maintain positive relationships with all of your customers.

7.2 Being Perceived as an Expert

If you have done a good job of selling to the customer, chances are that your customers now see you as a partner in their business. At the very least, they should see you as a source of expert information and assistance when they need it. You can reinforce this perception of you by taking some simple steps like:

- Sending customers information from industry publications or other sources that are related to their business
- Keeping informed about any regulatory changes to their business

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- Following your customers in the news so that you know what their challenges are and what they might need in the future
- Creating a network of contacts so that if your customer needs something you don't provide, you have a specific person that you can refer them to
- Continuing to receive training on developments of the products that your company offers, as well as any products that your competition is offering
- Attending conferences that are related to your industry and sharing what you learn with your customers

7.3 Keeping the Customer Informed

If you are established in your customer's eyes as an expert, getting in touch with them will be easier to do. You won't be perceived as the average salesperson trying to push the latest product. This means that you will have the opportunity to keep your customers informed of any changes to your company's products and services. You should keep customers informed of things like:

- New releases of a product they are using
- Changes to a product or service they are using
- Any problems that have been discovered with a product they are using (don't wait until they come to you!)
- Brand new products that you think the customer will be interested in

7.4 Selling to Existing Customers

Once you've made that first sale, you will find that each individual future sale will be easier – the process will be faster, the close will be easier, and you'll find the entire process simpler if you are trusted and considered an expert by the customer.

To facilitate future sales to existing customers, you will need to keep detailed information on the customer. This will help you to target the right customers when your company is offering new products or running promotions. That way when you call, you have benefits to offer that you know will truly be an advantage to your customer. Calling the customer with an offer that provides no benefit to them will quickly discredit you as their 'expert'.

Some of the things you should keep in your file include:

- Current contact information – capture any changes in personnel or titles and ensure that you have the correct spelling and contact information for each person.
- Information on their current services – both provided by you and by any competition.
- A copy of the company's quarterly reports or other similar documents so that you can refresh yourself with relevant information before you contact the customer.
- Any notes you've made in previous conversations with the customer about any additional products or services.
- Any personal information you've learned about your contacts. Asking a customer how their son's football team finished the season or how their wife's charity venture is going are excellent ways to establish rapport and distinguish yourself from the competition.

You will hopefully have your customers on some kind of rotating contact schedule. There might be some customers that you want to contact once a month, once a quarter, twice a year, or just once a year – it depends on the customer and on your business with them. But there's nothing wrong with staying on the customer's radar. You can do this through personal contact, phone calls, emails, or by mail when you send out those articles you've been clipping or that information you've been collecting from trainings. Keep showing up in a positive, helpful way and you will certainly be the first person that your customer thinks to call the next time they need a product or service that you offer.

8. Resources

Businessballs.com. Sales and Selling – Training and Techniques. The Changing Face of Selling.
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