

Taking the pain out of prospecting

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What is it that makes successful prospecting, even for the best sales people, so tough? Whether a lead is developed from a counter sales person, a contracted service company, an existing customer, or a networking event, making it into a sale depends on your ability to follow-through. With sales success predicated on your effectiveness in closing new business, knowing how to turn a lead into a customer is crucial. The account you add today could be a top 10 producer tomorrow.

The best prospectors among us work diligently on perfecting our sales approach. Whether it's by honing organizational skills, streamlining a sales cycle, or utilizing measuring tools, best practice sales is about building and using methods that work. Here is a proven system that takes the pain out of prospecting.

1. Call for appointments – Current technology has made face-to-face cold calling passé. For any qualified lead, start with your phone and make an appointment. If your call is answered, introduce yourself and say: “I understand that you use product/service we provide, and that you may be satisfied with your current supplier. I would just like to introduce myself in case your current provider happens to backorder an urgent need. I’ll be in your area next week on [name a day and time]. I’d like to send you a tentative appointment.” If your call goes unanswered, leave this as a message. I find that by assuring people I intend to only take a few minutes of their time, most agree to meet with me.

2. Confirm the appointment – Use

your computer as a tool. Add the prospect’s contact information into Outlook, or an equivalent database, and email him an appointment promptly. Most contact databases require a return acknowledgement, which leads the prospect to make a decision. Be

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prepared to repeat your request if you get a quick “no thanks” and reconfirm that you only need a few minutes. Respondents may try to reschedule at a more convenient time. Be accommodating.

3. Record the call – Create a record. All legitimate customer contacts should be recorded for historical tracking purposes in a report. A sales person can’t navigate in the future without being able to look in the rearview mirror for where he has been.

4. Build a new relationship – Make the most of your face time. People don’t

like to be sold; they like to buy. Before they buy, they must first trust you and you must understand their need. For each confirmed appointment, set a goal to have the prospect talk about themselves for at least 20 minutes. In that conversation you will learn how you can help. If your prospect is unwilling to spend the time allowing you to get to know him, excuse yourself and move on.

5. Establish next step agreements – Mark your calendar. For each prospect willing to let you help him solve a problem, set a calendar appointment to meet again before you leave his office. Make sure that appointment includes an established next step agreement for mutually desired outcomes.

6. Prioritize your new business opportunities – Make a list. A successful sales person maintains and reviews a weekly list of his or her Top 5 new business opportunities, prioritized by potential closure dates.

7. New business review – Put it all in perspective. I recommend that you discuss your top opportunities at least twice per month with your manager, to help you strategize next steps and dates. This review must include recorded monthly sales and margin targets. To answer the question – “How am I doing?” – these need to be measured against your dashboard goals. Reviews put your sales effort in perspective and alleviate the stress and confusion associated with a complex sales cycle. Consistent discussion of the Top 5 targets, including next steps and dates, helps guarantee satisfaction and success.

Taking the pain out of prospecting can be rectified by using this proven system. Grow your sales by utilizing the many organizational tools available to streamline your lead-to-close process. Good work management systems allow you to get the most done in the least amount of time, resulting in rewarding prospects and a prosperous career. gasworld.com/interviews

