

SELLING SMART

By Joe Marr

AS A SALES AND MANAGEMENT CONSULTANT, COACH, AND TRAINER, I often hear many reasons why salespeople stop making prospecting calls. One of the most common reasons is fear of the unknown, or more simply said, they just don't know what to say. Surprisingly, this fear holds true for warm calls just as much as cold calls.

For certain, the hesitancy to make cold calls is easy to understand—after all, they are calling “strangers.” However, reluctance about calling known contacts may be less expected, but can be caused by some of the same reasons. Let's examine both and consider some ways to keep call reluctance from becoming prospecting paralysis.

“A salesperson can feel confident calling anyone, if they make it about the prospect or customer, not just about making a sale.”

No Shortage of Reasons

Do any of these reasons sales and/or business people give for not making calls sound familiar?

- I'm tired.
- Voicemail!
- They all hate us.
- I don't feel good.
- I'll do it tomorrow.
- I'm too busy selling.
- I don't have a good list.
- I won't know what to say.
- This is a bad time of year.
- I'm busy pursuing business.
- I'm tired of talking to strangers.
- I'm afraid they'll be rude to me.
- I hate dealing with gatekeepers.
- I'm afraid they'll hang up on me.
- They think I have nothing to offer.
- I'll get put on hold and be left there to rot.
- The company should give me more leads.
- I just need more time to get this figured out.
- I have to do more research on this account.
- I'm not sure I'll be able to get my words out.
- I'm sick of the phone being slammed on my ear.

What business/sales people don't often confess about these “reasons” is that they're really just excuses for not making uncomfortable prospecting phone calls. And almost all of these excuses are the manifestation of feelings of inadequacy or inferiority. But these feelings have less to do with the value or potency of their product or service, and more to do with the role they must play to sell it—the role of “the sales person” stereotype.



Slime Factor Fears

Since our culture has established that sales people (or worse yet, a telesales person) are an unsavory, unprincipled sort, when sales professionals find themselves in that role, they worry too much about what prospects think about them. And even when they finally make the call, they're often so worried about how they might sound that they go on and on about their product or service, and may never get around to talking about the prospect's needs.

Get Over Yourself Already!

What's interesting about all this anxiety over sales calls is that prospects barely even give the bad calls they receive a second thought. At the very worst, most prospects consider these calls an interruption or nuisance, and at the very best, may end up wanting to know more about your company, service, or product. So, when salespeople feel like the next cold call is a "make or break" situation instead of simply a casual inquiry, they get too caught up in what the prospect thinks of them personally. In reality they need to realize that their phone call is a small blip in the prospect's busy life.

I'd Call 'em, But What Would I Say?

If they don't have any new services or products to discuss, many sales people don't know how to start a conversation with an existing customer. One approach they can use to get a conversation started is to simply talk about an article or headline loosely relevant to their business. The "Have You Read the News?" approach sounds something like this:

"I know we haven't spoken with each other in a while, but I was reading a piece in Focus Magazine about ... and I thought of you. Did you see it? What was your take on it? Would it be helpful for you to know that I (we) can help you with ... ?"

The "Have You Read the News?" lead-in is also a soft approach to cross-selling. As long as the article you talk about is related to your business' capabilities, this approach is a way to help a client discover more ways you can serve them.

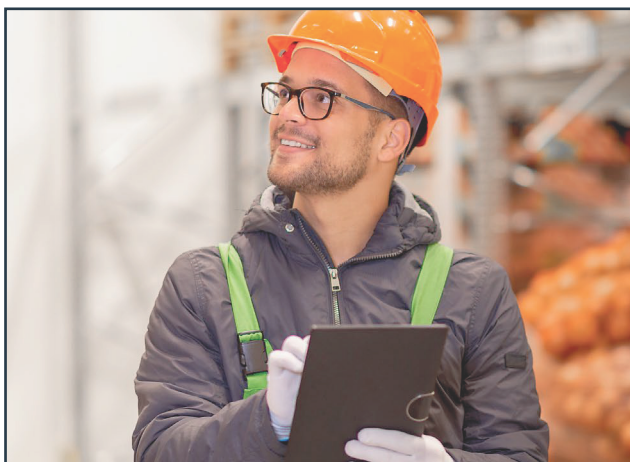
Breakthrough

Sales and business people who have stopped making prospecting calls should consider three things to get them back on track:

1. They need to realize that most of their reasons are built around fear, are excuse-based, irrational and not realistic. To remedy these feelings, they need to face their fears and overcome them.
2. A salesperson can feel confident calling anyone, if they make it about the prospect or customer, not just about making a sale.
3. Sharing current news or something they've researched about the prospective client creates relevant and welcome business conversation, often opening up opportunities for a no-pressure sale.



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