4 Tips for Mastering Cold-Calling (and How to Not Annoy Leads in the Process)

The cold call has traditionally been looked down on. But for B2B transactions, cold-calling's negative image is undeserved.

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Let's face it: Most of us don't enjoy receiving an unexpected phone call or email from someone trying to sell us something. If you're an entrepreneur, you're certainly aware of this fact and probably feel more comfortable approaching customers by focusing on SEO or Facebook marketing. After all, these tools don't require a direct, out-of-the-blue conversation.

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But don't give up on cold-calling just yet. Because, done right, this strategy can actually be one of your most effective sales methods, especially if yours is a B2B brand. What's more, you can actually master cold-calling in a way that doesn't annoy your leads, so you can grow your business as never before. Here's how:

1. Do your homework.

A cold call will seem much less "cold" if you've done some research before you approach the prospective client. As Ben Buckwalter, founder and CEO of Legacy of Leads, explained to

me by – ahem – phone: “I never go into a call blindly. Before going into a sales call, I do my research about the person and their business. I read all the reviews. I learn the history of their company, so I know their pain points completely. This way, I can control the flow of the conversation and crush objections because I know who I’m talking to and why they need me to solve their problems.”

In addition to conducting research through sites like LinkedIn, you can also find clues through actions that a sales target has already taken. Someone who has visited your website and subscribed to your mailing list is providing clear indicators that he or she would be more receptive to your call.

Pay close attention to industry news for your target audience. Company expansions, a new hire in a key position or even a big shift in industry practices could make someone more open to your message. Do your research, so you can plan accordingly.

2. Educate and listen.

One of the best ways to differentiate yourself from the competition is by taking on the role of an “educator” rather than a salesperson during your call. You can best accomplish this when you know your product or service inside and out, and understand the many ways you can provide solutions to client pain points.

With this mindset, you won’t fear objections. Instead, you’ll value opportunities to listen to a prospect’s concerns so you can provide answers better tailored to the prospect’s needs.

In a Marketing Sherpa case study regarding sales-call effectiveness for Canada’s *The Globe and Mail*, a call analysis revealed that salespeople were placing too much emphasis on their promotional offer, rather than the benefits of the product itself.

By adapting the script to focus on the value of the *product* and ensuring that callers were better focused on answering customer questions, the newspaper increased its hourly sales by 33 percent.

3. Build credibility.

You don’t have much time to make an impression with a cold call — and that makes building credibility during the first few seconds of your conversation of the utmost importance.

In a blog post, sales guru (and *Entrepreneur* contributor) Grant Cardone offered a sample script for how to showcase credibility and qualify a lead at the same time:

“This is Joe from Grant Cardone’s office. Mr. Cardone, the owner, asked me to call and give your company a tool he created that has increased sales at companies like yours by as much as 40 percent. To be sure I’m not wasting your time and that I can actually help you, tell me, how many sales people do you have?”

Providing a specific example of what your company can do will go a long way toward piquing your lead’s interest. This is especially true if you can mention a referral from a common connection or a client in the prospect’s industry whom you have helped in the past.

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Data and social proof will also make your pitch much more interesting and appealing. According to research from BigCommerce, adding customer testimonials to a website helps increase per-visitor revenue by 62 percent. Embracing similar tactics in a sales pitch can greatly increase your chance for converting a lead into a solid sale.

4. This is key: Follow up on a consistent basis.

That initial cold call isn’t where you are going to close the sale, more than likely …

Even the most successful cold calls generally only lay the groundwork for getting a prospective client into the sales funnel. Instead of trying to get a prospect to buy “now,” engage in what’s a short initial conversation to set up a more formal sales appointment in the future when you can make the full sales pitch.

Next, you’ll need to follow up. You could even ask the client which contact method he or she would prefer. This way, you can establish a time line that won’t get annoying. Be mindful of the prospect’s sales cycle (some buying decisions are made in a few days, others may take several months).

Research from the Brevet Group found that “80 percent of sales require 5 follow-up calls after the meeting.” You cannot give up after one or two attempts. As Niti Shah recommended in a HubSpot blog article, continue to demonstrate value in each communication.

“In your follow-up email, send one or two relevant materials from your own company’s content, such as a long-form content resource or recent blog article that addresses a challenge that you think they might be experiencing,” Shah wrote. “Make it clear that you’re available to speak about their goals and that you have expertise in specific areas that matter to them.”

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5. Recognize that not every sales call is going to be a success …

In fact, you'll likely get a lot of rejections, especially when you're first starting out. But, as you use these tips to improve your process and take steps to learn from your failures, you will be better positioned to build a positive rapport with leads and guide them into the buying funnel – all from just a cold call.

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