



TELEPHONE PROSPECTING AND SELLING REPORT

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Avoiding the “Just Checking In” Call

Guess who says the following:

“Hi, I’m just calling to check in with you.”

- a. Parolees out on probation, checking in with their probation officer.
- b. Sales reps who call customers or prospects and can’t come up with anything more creative or interesting to say.
- c. My teen-aged daughter, every two hours on the weekend.
- d. All of the above.

The answer of course, is “d.” What we will concern ourselves with is “b”, the Probation Officer call.

These calls are most often placed by reps who call regular customers on a regular basis, or when placing follow-up calls to those lukewarm prospects.

And the result usually is not very good.

No wonder. There’s nothing of interest or of value there for the listener. Are they supposed to get excited simply because you called to check in with them?

Have a Reason, With Value

What to do? Have a reason for calling. Have something of interest. Search your notes from previous calls and make that the reason for this call. For example,

“Stacy, it’s Ken Mackerel with Fish Supply. I’m following up on our last conversation from January. At the time you mentioned that you were going to be expanding your catfish operation in August, and I wanted to share some

information about what another customer of mine did to help keep his expansion costs low and increase his capacity.”

Use Your Database

Here’s a specific way to help you come up with great reasons to call, and call the right people.

Let’s look at a scenario using something that every company experiences: changes.

For example, has your personal or business bank changed names and/or ownership within the past couple of years? A friend told me his has changed. Three times. One astute bank sales rep who has been pursuing him manages to contact him after each change while the effects are fresh in his mind. Although he hasn’t moved yet, the timely calls combined with the annoyance of the changes are beginning to wear down his resistance.

Let’s look at the sales ideas and strategy at work here ... the ones you can use too for a variety of situations.

1. Prospects can be particularly vulnerable after their existing vendor is acquired, merged, or undergoes some other type of change.

2. Taking advantage of it requires you to track who a prospect uses, and be able to sort your database accordingly, just like the rep mentioned above probably did.

Most contact management and CRM programs allow you to customize fields and sort accordingly. Consider assigning a field for “Current Vendor.” Then it’s a breeze to do a quick sort of all the prospects who have the competitor’s name in the field, and plan your next contact.

When calling these prospects, naturally you don’t phone with an attitude of, “So I see your vendor was just acquired. I bet things are a mess there!”

Instead, treat the call just like you would a normal follow-up. But, be prepared to ask questions designed to get them to tell you the problems and pains they might be experiencing as a result of the change.

For example,

“Mike, you’re still with AB Vendor, right? I see. With the recent acquisition, some of my other customers have noticed some changes in the promptness of getting orders delivered. If that is an issue for you, we have some options that might be worth taking a look at. What has been your experience?”

Use With Any Change or Event

You could use this technique with any number of changes or events that customers or prospects might have interest in, that could be a great reason for calling if that situation occurred.

For example, let’s say a prospect told you that if you ever came out with a left-handed adapter for your product, they would get them in minute. You would then put LHA, or “Left-handed adapter” in your notes, and when your company introduced one, you’d simply do a sort on that code or term and have a great list to call, with a great reason for calling.

The only reason to make the Probation Officer call, (unless you actually have one) is a lack of creativity or work. Use these ideas and you’ll go further with these prospects and customers.



Sales Observations

Immediate Follow-Up Won This Sale. I went online and downloaded forms to open up a Scottrade brokerage account. Within an hour the local branch manager called me to follow up. Impressive response. I likely would have opened an account without the quick follow-up...although, then again, maybe not. Like most people, I am busy, and have lots of well-intentioned stuff stacked in my "to get to" piles. This follow-up got action right now. I sent the application and check that day and was trading in the account within two days.

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Here's a good strategy I used this month. It's a simple question: **"Can I be the last to present?"** When you know there will be several players vying for the business, and you are presenting to a group, ask to be the last to bat. This way, you can get a feel for what was already presented, and the last presentation typically has the freshest, strongest impact.

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Further, when there will be several decision makers, ask your contact for a rundown on them, their backgrounds, interests, etc. Ask whether any of them already have a preferred vendor or favor any of the other presenters. Sell your contact as much as you can before the presentation. Ask them if they will be in your corner. I've had people like this lobby for me BEFORE the call.

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What The Wealthiest Reps Think. Having trained tens of thousands of sales reps over the years, here's my take on a behavior trait that separates the winners from the losers. As it relates to any type of continuing self-improvement, the winners say, **"Hmmm, how can I adapt this so I can use it?"**

The cynics, whiners, and losers say, "I've seen that before." Or, "That doesn't apply to me."

Commenting Negatively on Unusual Names is Ignorant. I'm so tired of the ignorant comments some people make when I say and/or spell my name over the phone (i.e., "Oh, that's a strange one."). I go out of my way to make **positive** comments about the names of others. Especially first names. (Ok, mostly I do it with females, since it would be weird otherwise.) I'll often say, with sincerity, "Oh, that's a pretty name," or, "What a great name!" Not surprisingly, it's met with appreciation. If someone has an unusual name—here's a big shock for some people—they KNOW IT already. No need to comment negatively on it.

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"It's Less Than You'd Think..." A SelectQuote commercial uses a technique that's been around forever, but still bears repeating since the principle is timeless.

The ad states (I'm paraphrasing here) "What do you think a 40-year old male would pay for \$500,000 worth of term life insurance? \$100 a month? \$75. \$50. No. For less than \$45 a month ..."

You see this technique used all over. Infomercials for just about every cooking device, gadget, or body enhancing system or chemical. The psychology is brilliant and you can use it too.

1. While describing the product/service/result (with them in the picture), build value by helping them get a perceived price point in their mind:

"If you were to go to the hardware store and get all of the different tools that could be handled by just one SuperThingAmaBob, you'd spend hundreds of dollars."

2. Then present a series of prices higher than the actual price, so that the final price seems tiny in comparison to the value you built, and the high prices you started with:

"Even at \$200 it would be a good investment. At \$100, this

handy device would be a steal. At \$75 we probably couldn't keep them in stock. But, we're not selling them for that. You can get your own for just \$49.99, paid in 12 monthly installments."

How can you minimize your own price or investment, and build value?

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My Newest Technology Toy: It's the Apple I-Pod. And really, it's not a toy. It's making me money. I loaded it with tons of sales and marketing CD programs. I used to carry around a CD player and lots of CD's on trips, sometimes losing them, sometimes not even taking them. This little beauty makes it so easy to listen, learn, and profit! (By the way, I can help you with some great telesales CD's to load into yours!)

Go and have your best month ever!

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The 12 Dumbest Things Salespeople Do (Continued)

By Jim Meisenheimer

Last month I shared the first five dumb things. Here are the next seven.

6. Getting mugged by your own mouth. If you're not careful with the language you use, you run the risk of sounding like the "Mediocre majority." For example, you should avoid using these **phrases:** *I think, can I be honest, can I ask you a question, I know you're busy so I won't take up much of your time, how soon do you need it, I agree with you, what do I have to do to earn your business today, So, what do you think?, I was wondering,* etc. Avoid them like the Plague!

Action Step: The more you prepare what you'll say and how you'll say it during a sales call the less likely you'll end up getting mugged by your own mouth.

7. Making the sales call a virtual "Improvisation." There are only two types of sales calls. One is prepared and the other is a total improvisation. My definition of preparing means in writing. Now, you will not prepare every word of your calls, since much of what you say depends on what they say. However, much of it can be prepared.

Here's a short list of what I recommend you thoroughly prepare, in writing: **Prepare** your objectives. **Prepare** your opening statement. **Prepare** at least 12 open-ended questions. **Prepare** how you will segue into your presentation. **Prepare** how you will deal with the price objection. Also **prepare** how you will ask for the customer's commitment to order your product/service.

Action Step: **Prepare** in writing the words you will use in each of these key steps in your selling process. Preparation always sounds better than improvisation. Always!

8. Forgetting to develop the "Brand Called You." One of the cardinal sins I observe salespeople making is your complete reliance on the branding of your products and your company. Please remember, most people don't buy the product or company. Most people buy because of the relationship with the sales professional.

To be a success today, and in almost any business, you have to be an extraordinary marketer! Get Peter Montoya's book, "The Brand Called You."

Action Step: I believe everybody is unique. Discover your uniqueness and parade it around your sales territory. Forget about being boring, bland, and benign. Blending in is out! Standing out is in! Do everything you can to be different in a memorable way!

9. Playing the win-lose instead of the win-win game. Never offer a price concession without getting a concession from your prospect/customer. To do so means he wins and you lose. Whenever someone asks you for a better price, ask them for a better deal, which could mean a larger quantity, something else added to the order, an extended contract etc.

Action Step: This one takes courage. Do you have what it takes to make your selling game a win-win game?

10. Putting your family on the back burner. Most people don't think bad things can happen to them. I think it's called the theory of self-exception. Maybe it's because you're so optimistic. You think you'll live forever. You think your family members will live forever. Take it from me it doesn't always work out that way. My first wife Louise died when she was 34 from cancer. My brother John died when he was 46 from a brain tumor. My brother Ray, a New York City fireman, was killed on 9/11 at the age of 46. Enough said.

Action Step: When you put your family on the backburner you're risking life's biggest regret: "I wish I had spent more time with my family." To avoid this potential tragedy make your calendar the centerpiece of your life and make sure every member of your family is on your calendar.

11. Living life in the multi-tasking lane. How many tasks can you do at the same time and do them equally well? Some people, notably researchers writing on the subject, are now saying that tasks completed by the multi-

taskers are losing out in the quality department.

Action Step: Start every day with a written list of what you want to get done during that day. Using numbers, be sure to prioritize your list. Do one thing at a time. Do the most important thing first. Don't do anything else unless it's more important than the next most important thing on your list.

12. Giving a "Gazillion people" your cell phone number. Man do I get a lot of heat when I talk about this in my **No-Brainer Selling Skills Boot Camps** and sales training programs. I've heard all the reasons why salespeople give everybody their cell phone number. I know why people print their cell phone number on their business cards. I know why salespeople do this but I'm not sure it makes any sense.

Maybe it would make some sense if you had the only cell phone in your sales territory. That would be a clear advantage for you. Whenever you give somebody your cell phone number it becomes the default number which people use to call you. The more people you give your cell phone number to, the more people will dial your cell phone number every time for every minuscule reason they want to talk to you.

Every time you give someone else your cell phone number, you also give up a piece of your control over your life

Action Step: Tell your customers, except for two or three of your biggest, you're disconnecting your cell phone number because it's taken over your life. My guess is you'll get some well deserved empathy and sympathy.

Avoid these dumb things salespeople do, follow the Action Steps, and your selling will be smarter, and more profitable!



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Nine Voice Mail Blunders Guaranteed to Get Your Messages Deleted

It is not surprising that so many sales reps complain about not having their voice mail messages returned. Judging by the dozens of voice mails I have received from sales people over the past couple of weeks the reason is obvious: they are lousy.

Sales reps complain about the impact of voice mail on their selling success but often they are their own worst enemies. Here is a list of common voice mail blunders and how you can manage them.

Blunder 1: Leaving a Message Too Soon. The first tip in managing voice mail is NOT to leave a voice mail message. The trick is to get a live prospect and that often means trying at different times. Prepare a list of at least 50 or so prospects. Try calling them earlier (e.g., start at 7:30) or later (after 5:00) in the day. Don't leave a message, simply dial. If there is no answer, hang up and move to the next name on the list. Cycle the list for about an hour with the objective of getting a live prospect. Try doing this every day for about two weeks.

Blunder 2: Not Listening. When you do encounter voice mail, LISTEN to what the prospect has to say. Some have bland generic messages ("I'm not in. Leave a message") but others might give you some clues about how to approach them. For instance, suppose the message says,

"Hi this is Pete Prospect. Today is Monday, May 16th and I will be out of the office until Thursday May, 18th. Please leave a detailed message and I will get back to you as soon as I can."

Note that Pete provided the date. It implies he interacts with voice mail so that when you do leave a message the chances are pretty good that he will listen to it. Because the message is detailed, one gets the impression that Pete is a detail person. This suggests you might want to be equally detailed in your approach. But more significantly, Mr. Prospect is out till Wednesday. There is no point in leaving a message at this stage because there are probably thirty other messages waiting for him. Even if you leave a good message there is a

pretty good chance that it will be lost in the chaos of catching up.

Finally, and this is so critical, don't call Pete on Thursday! His day will be hectic after having been gone for three days. Think about it. Call on Friday when things have calmed down. If you have to leave a message, do so but again at least you increase your chances of it being heard.

Blunder 3: Failure to Research. Over the last month or so, I have received voice messages from vendors who assumed I was a long distance company, a service bureau, a telephone manufacturer, and a high tech firm. Simply clicking onto my web site will tell you what I do...and it's none of the above. The sales reps wasted my time and theirs. But the sad thing is they are probably leaving dozens of other similar messages to the wrong targets. Of course, when they do not get a reply they get discouraged. They become victims of their poor preparation.

Learn a little about your prospect. It does not have to be a lot, but enough to craft a message that is relevant.

Blunder 4: Providing Infomercials. One of the greatest voice mail tragedies is leaving an infomercial i.e., a grotesquely long, delirious message that tells the prospect everything and anything. In effect, it's like a radio commercial over voice mail.

Think about the prospect's perspective: she is inundated with voice mails all day long. The last thing she needs is your product diatribe. The prospect will tire by the third line and quickly erase your message.

Blunder 5: Poor Delivery. As if infomercials were not enough, some sales reps compound the problem with poor delivery: the aahhhs, ummmms, errrs, duhs, that are liberally peppered throughout the message. And I am especially talking about monotone deliveries that put the prospect to sleep.

You have about 5-8 seconds to catch your listener's attention; keeping it is even tougher. If you sound lifeless, unsure, hesitant or if you speak too fast or too slow, or if you are too loud or too soft, you will lose the prospect's interest.

So here's what you need to do: Jot

down what you want to say. Write it in sentences or point form, whatever works for you. Then practice delivering it a few times before dialing. The message should flow trippingly and convincingly from your lips. There is no excuse for a poorly delivered message.

Blunder 6: Inspid Messages. I am floored by the messages that are left on my voice mail. Sometimes I'm amused, but rarely am I impressed, much less interested. The reason? The messages don't grab me by the collar and say "Listen." Instead, they are drab speeches about their product or their company. Borriiiiiinnng!

A good voice mail message has four components: your name, your company, a message that intrigues, and entices a call to action Here is just one example of an intriguing message:

"Mr. Wallace, this is Vic Vendor calling from Altace Inc. Mr. Wallace, I have a question on extended learning programs that I am told only you can answer. Could you please give me a call at ___?"

This is a powerful voice message. Note how the rep uses the prospect's name a couple of times. Using the name gets the prospect to listen more carefully to the words. Next, the rep creates intrigue and mystery with his message about being the only person who can answer the question. This flatters the prospect at some level and creates curiosity.

Blunder 7: Not Integrating Other Mediums. If there is more than one way to skin a cat, there is more than one way to leave a message. Make your voice mail part of an overall contact strategy.

Voice mail should be just one of the tactics you use to garner interest and stand out from the crowd. Supplement your voice message with an old fashioned letter. Consider sending a fax. If you have the e-mail address of your prospect, send a brief message.

Use these mediums in combination. For example, you might leave a message telling the prospect to expect a "package" in the mail. This alerts her to keep

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his eye out for “something” which, in itself, is intriguing. Perhaps you could use a fax as a follow up message to the package rather than another voice mail.

The point is, you need to be creative. Some prospects respond better to e-mail than voice mail, others to fax versus mail.

Blunder 8: Lack of Persistence.

One of the BIGGEST blunders is a simple lack of persistence. Of the all the voice mails I received over the last two weeks not one rep...not a single, solitary rep...has called and left another message! Personally, I rarely listen to voice mails from vendors because I figure if it is important enough they will call back. They rarely ever do. That tells the whole story.

I recommend that sales reps leave four voice mail messages spaced three business days apart. I call it the 4/3 strategy. When you do the math it reveals about two calendar weeks of follow up but spaced apart so that it is not too overbearing. I will supplement the messages with a fax or e-mail (if I have it) or a letter. I want to the prospect to know that I will not give up easily. I will be polite, but persistent.

Blunder 9: Stalking. The last blunder is not nearly as common as a lack of persistence but it does exist and it is sinister and frightening in nature. It occurs when a sales rep calls and leaves a voice mail message (or messages) every day for days on end. Not long ago at a training seminar a sales rep bragged that he left 38 (yes, thirty-eight) messages to a prospect. That is not prospecting, it's stalking. It's a waste of the sales rep's time and energy ...and you can bet it was not endearing to the poor prospect. (I'd be calling the police).

Summary

Avoid these classic voice mail blunders. Yes, it takes a little more time and effort but that is precisely what will set you apart from all the other sales reps who are calling your prospects. Go to it.

(Jim Domanski is President of Teleconcepts Consulting, a telemarketing consulting and training firm. Contact him at 35 VanStone, Kanata, Ontario, Canada. 613-591-1998. His newest book is “Add-On Selling.” Order by calling 800-326-7721, or see it online at www.businessbyphone.com/add-on.htm)



Handling Objections By Phone

By Joe Catal

This month I'll address many of the common objections most of us hear on the phone.

“I Want to Think it Over”

Whether you realize it or not, when a customer tells you he wants to think it over, this is a great opportunity for you to close the sale. The only time a customer ever says that is after you have given your full presentation. As we all know, that's the best time to close the sale. If you sell on the phone or face- to-face, you know the reality of call backs. The chance of closing the sale decreases dramatically. From now on you'll know exactly how to respond and ask for the order. I've written it out for any type of product or service.

For example, with the telephone on-hold messages I sell, when the prospect says he wants to think it over, I respond with,

“Dan, are you saying that because you want to think about what you want to put on the program, or are you saying that because you think the price is too high?”

Most will say the price is too high. If they say that, simply reply back,

“How much too high do you think it is?”

If they say \$100, (and I can meet or negotiate a better price), I'll say,

“Other than the price, is there anything else that would keep you from going ahead with this?”

Most will say no. If you can meet or negotiate a better price, tell the prospect you can, and immediately write up the sale.

Other Examples:

“Are you saying that because you want to think about how many cases you want to order, or are you saying that because you think the price is too high?”

“Are you saying that because you want to think about how often you'll use our service, or are

you saying that because you think the price is too high?”

As you can see, this will work for any product or service. You'll be surprised how effective this routine is. After asking this question, you'll know exactly where you stand. Always keep in mind, before you can answer an objection, you have to ask a question back to find out why they're saying it. You simply just can't blurt out some scripted response such as,

“What is it you want to think about?”

“I'm your best source of information, what do you need to know?”

“You know all there is to know, what do you want to think about?”

These are all old and stale techniques that get you nowhere fast. We all know the main objection is money. Get the money objection out on the table and deal with it now! You'll close a lot more sales.

“Can You Give Me a Better Price?”

When people ask me for a better price, I say,

“Jim, we do have a better price. Right now you're getting one program for \$400. You can get three programs for \$795. That would make it only \$265 a program. Should we sign you up for that program?”

Or. **“Would you like to take advantage of that?”**

I've found 5-10 percent of the people will say yes. Most of the others will just say they'll stick with what they're getting.

(Joe Catal is at saleman@bellsouth.net. His book “Telesales Tips from the Trenches: Secrets of a Street-Smart Salesman” is available in hard copy, or as an e-book for \$19.95. Or order, call 800-326-7721, or go to www.BusinessByPhone.com)

Success Tips From Readers, Seminar Attendees, and Clients

Here are great tips from attendees at my seminars, some submitted by readers, and others I observed.

Customize Your Browser Toolbar So You Can Customize Your Calls

Rajagopal Vijayabhaskar suggests that if you work on a PC and use the Internet, it helps to customize the links bar on your browser with links to useful websites relevant to your prospects and customers. For example, if calling New York, you can have a link to the latest News/Weather in NY). This can be discussed with the client to break the ice.

Keeping Track of the Voice Mail Messages You Leave

A quick thought for you on tracking voice mail messages that has worked well for me. I have an Excel spreadsheet that I store my messages in. It has the date/time of the message in one column, the body of the message in the second column (on a much wider column width) and a third column with the date and time I call back. In this way, I have a record of all the calls I receive, rather than trying to find scraps of paper, etc. It also helps in locating phone numbers or client info, in that you can use "Control F" and type in any word or phrase, and Excel will find occurrences of that particular word or phrase. I'm sure there's also a way to "store" voice mail's in ACT!, Goldmine, etc, this has worked best for me.
Dennis Preston

Listening to the On-Hold Message Can Pay Off

At a recent seminar for Practitioner's Publishing Company (provider of informational resources to accountants and financial professionals), Weldon Adams shared an experience that is a great tes-

timony for listening to a customer's on-hold message. While on hold, Weldon heard the message state "...please ask about our new business valuation service." PPC sells numerous resources to help CPA's value businesses. Weldon checked his database and saw that this customer didn't have any of their materials. He used that information on the call to ask some very targeted need-oriented questions, made some great recommendations for business valuation resources, and won a nice sale.

A Nice Touch on Voice Mail, Or Openers

While listening to taped calls prior to a training program with AccuData, I heard Matthew Nee use this technique numerous times on voice mail:

"Hi, it's Matthew Nee with AccuData. Hope you're doing well..."

It came across as very sincere and conversational.

Work With the Gatekeeper to Get Information, and to Get Through

At the Irvine Telesales College seminar, Perry Hillegas with Scansoft shared what he does with screeners. He realizes that gatekeepers play a very important role in keeping less-skilled sales rep out, and letting him in. He likes to say,

"You probably know a lot about what goes on in this department. Tell me, what are some of the major headaches that Mr. Big encounters ...?"

This helps the gatekeeper feel significant, and it yields great information. Plus it helps Perry get to more decision makers.

What is working well for you? Send it along and we'll publish the best we receive. Send an Email to ArtS@BusinessByPhone.com.

Responding to, "I'm Happy With Who I'm Buying From."

In response to, "I'm happy with who I'm buying from, try,

"I see. When was the last time you did an audit of what else is available that you might not be getting?"

Another: **"Have you looked at what that might be costing you?"**

Learn the Decision Makers, and the Process

Keep in mind that you're only present (on the phone) for a small percentage of the buying process. Find out what that process is, and how you can affect it:

"What is the typical process when you move forward on something like this?"

"What channels will this need to go through on your end?"

"Who else is involved as this travels through your organization?"

Motivational Quote

Walt Disney said, "If you can dream it, you can do it." What is your dream?

One Answer for Lots of Tough Questions

Here are questions you might hear from prospects:

"Why should I use your service?"

"What would I want to use you?"

"How can you help us?"

"Why are you better than what I have?"

An answer you can give:

"I don't know. Let's find out."

Then you can get into your questions.

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A Review of a Reader's Call

Mitch Eichner is a sales pro with REMCO Energy Solutions. His company helps retailers cut down on their utility expenses. He had purchased my "How to Develop Opening Statements that Create Interest, Not Resistance," CD, and submitted his pre-decision maker conversation and opening for my review. Here it is.

First, when he has the decision maker's assistant on the line:

"Hello Sara, are you Mr. Controller's assistant?"

"I'm Mitch Eichner the National Accounts Manager for REMCO Energy Solutions Specializing in working with major retailers like; J.C. Penny, Best Buys, Aeropostale, J.Crew, Charlotte Russe, Brookstone, Coach, and Panda Restaurants, improve their bottom lines through better utility auditing and bill management. In some cases we've been able to reduce their utility spend by as much as 10% If my calculations are correct that could amount to a reduction of around \$430,000 a year for Duane Reade. I wanted to ask Mr. Controller a few specifics about his current business environment to determine if this would be of any value to him."

"Do you know when he would be available?"

"Great. So I'm better prepared when I speak with him, there's probably some information you could help me with first ..." (Then ask her questions.)

Opening Statement to Mr. Controller

"Hi, I'm Mitch Eichner the National Accounts Manager for REMCO Energy Solutions Specializing in working with major retailers like; J.C. Penny, Best Buys, Aeropostale, J.Crew, Charlotte Russe, Brookstone, Coach, and Panda Restaurants, improve their bottom lines through better utility auditing and bill management. In some cases we've been able to reduce their utility spend by as much as 10% If my calculations are correct that could amount to a reduction of around \$430,000 a year for Duane Reade. Does that sound about right? If this isn't a bad time, can

I ask you a few specifics about your current business environment to determine if this would be of any value to you and your company?"

Art's Analysis

Overall, this was very good. I spoke with Mitch and he's a successful, seasoned sales rep. I detected that he is a lifelong student of sales, always striving to get better.

Regarding the call, when speaking with the assistant, he might not need to give the entire detailed description. However, it probably wouldn't hurt. The ultimate goal is to collect some information from the assistant, which this should accomplish.

We will focus more on the opening itself. Here are my suggestions to tighten up the approach with the ~~decision maker~~ My changes are in this font.

"In some cases we've been able to reduce their utility spend by as much as 10% If my calculations are correct that could amount to a reduction of around \$430,000 a year for Duane Reade. ~~Does that sound about right?~~ *(Don't ask them to make a decision at this point. This could be considered threatening and perhaps a salesy question which could create resistance.)*

~~If this isn't a bad time...~~ "If I've caught you at a good time..." *(make it positive)*

~~Can I ask you—~~"I'd like to ask you" *(Just state that you will be asking questions. Asking if you can ask a question is a question itself.)*

~~a few specifics about your current business environment to determine if this would be of any value to you and your company?~~

"about a few specifics to see if this could be of some value to you." *(Let's shorten it and make it more conversational, less formal.)*

Again, a nice job overall

Have High Expectations

When planning for a call, always ask yourself, **"What's the best I could do in this situation?"** Not what you would settle for; but what you would expect if everything went your way. This is what you should shoot for, and ask for. Asking big gives you confidence. And even if you don't get what your opening position is, one thing's for sure: you won't get more than what you ask for.

Related Example: A rep didn't present his deluxe version of a product, thinking the prospect wouldn't want to spend that much. The prospect eventually bought—from a competitor who did present an even *more* deluxe version!

Seen in Sales and Marketing Management Magazine:

One company had all employees take a shift calling C-list customers, simply to determine if they could remain in the company's database. It gave the staff a newfound respect for what sales reps face (just scratches the surface, as we all know) on a daily basis. Not a bad idea.

Include a Compliment in the Referral Opening

When calling a referral, include some personal information from the person who referred you. Preferably a compliment. This starts the call on a real positive. A sales rep did this on a call to me, and I found myself in a more receptive frame of mind, and I realized why afterward. For example,

"Hi Dan, I'm Kelly Stevens with Info Supply. Bob Russell at Muffler Industries suggested I give you a call. He said some great things about you, particularly how you have ..."

Great Questions

"What's most important to you about this project?"

"What will getting this project done the way you want it mean to you?"

"And what's important to you about that?"

Soften the Impact of a Negative

When your prospect or customer makes a request you're unable—or unwilling—to fill, don't hem and haw, or give in. Let them know you won't be able to grant the wish, but soften it first in a positive way.

"I would love to be able to offer free shipping. The fact is, the price you're getting is the lowest around, and our margin is razor thin already, and we're just passing on the actual shipping cost in order to offer that low price."

"I wish I could get it quicker for you. The manufacturing process dictates that the machine burns in for 24 hours before we can ship it. This way you get a unit that's already been tested, minimizing the chance it will go down later, causing an even bigger headache."

A Few Voice Mail Ideas

With some companies' voice mail systems you need a map just to get to your contact. For example, occasionally you need to trek through several layers of instructions before reaching your buyers, but there are simpler passages. Once you learn them, put the codes in your notes so you can save time: **"Press # immediately, then 23 to get to Pat."**

When you prefer to speak with a real voice and not a digitized one upon reaching an electronic switchboard, you can try the standard escape hatches: hitting "0", "*", or "#." Another option is to simply stay on the line. Many systems revert to a live person if nothing is selected.

If you're prospecting a company for the first time and the voice mail system asks if you want to hear the directory, it might be worthwhile to do so. You might hear titles listed with names. Or, if you already have written names, this can give you the pronunciations.

Closing Ideas

People like to own things, but with some items and services, they don't like buying them. So quit using the words "buy," "sell," and "sold" when talking with your customer. Instead of *"Is this the machine you'd like to buy?"*, try, **"Is this the machine you'd like to own?"** It sounds better, and customers feel more comfortable.

Present a "similar situation." People are interested in people—especially those they can relate to. When you have a customer who says they can't afford what you sell, try, **"You know Bob, I was talking to someone the other day who was in the same budget situation you are, and here's what he did . . ."** Be prepared for such instances.

Use the **"Why not try ...?"** closing question. It's a nonthreatening way for them to make a decision. **"Pat, why not try the deluxe model?"** Psychologically they're trying, not buying.

Listen for "Future Tense" Statements As Buying Signals

A strong buying signal to watch out for: when they speak in the present or future tense regarding your product or service, or the other details that would be affected by a purchase. This means that emotionally they already have bought. They see themselves in the picture, already using your product or service. For example,

"I guess we'd make room in the back office for the unit."

"Hmm, I'm not sure how many people I would train on that installation."

"We will probably need to adjust our production schedule to meet the new demand."

Think of what statements you hear that indicate emotional ownership and be on the lookout for them. Upon hearing them, move toward the solid commitment.

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