

Cold Calling that works

A FIVE POINT PLAN FOR TELESales PROFESSIONALS

If you work in telesales, then the phone needs to be your best friend. The average UK-based telesales professional will make over 80 outbound calls per day. Yet it is all too easy for these to become wasted calls, and you end up frustrated that your conversion rate is not as high as your colleagues’.

We’ve put together a list of what we think the best tips are for making your cold calls work, and outlined the main pitfalls to avoid. They are proven to work, so I hope you are able to apply them in your own role, and begin to see real results.

By Tim Runacre,
Head of Product Development,
Reed Learning



1. Plan your calls

OK, so when you’ve got high volume call targets it’s not realistic to spend 15 minutes researching each prospective customer. However, some basic preparation is essential. We saw an example of what happens when you don’t prepare at the start of this article. Simple things like pronouncing a person’s name wrong can automatically put up a barrier between you both. Run through all the names on your target list in your head first, and practice pronouncing those who might pose a difficulty later on.

If you are in B2B telesales, it is also worth considering the role of the person you are about to call and the industry they work in, so you can find common ground and build a rapport.

Most importantly, before you make any calls you must decide what your objectives are and what you want to get out of each call.

2. Structure your calls

With so many sales structures and processes easily accessible to telesales professionals, it is amazing how many still do not structure their cold calls. And if you don’t do this, then you are relinquishing control of the conversation and making the whole exchange between you and the prospect more difficult than it needs to be.

One structure I would recommend you apply to all your cold calls is as follows:

1. Introduction
2. Probe and confirm
3. Match
4. Deliver recommendations and price
5. Close

You will notice that it is only once you have fully investigated the needs of your prospect, and confirmed them, that you should then demonstrate your solution and try and close the deal.

3. Handle objections effectively

I have never heard a cold sales call where the prospect has not expressed at least one objection. Indeed, it is often when the salesperson has had the chance to overcome several objections successfully that the prospect is convinced of the suitability of the product or service and purchases it.

Objections come in many forms and are not always clearly stated. As well as genuine objections like “that’s far too expensive for my budget”, watch out for a general sense of uneasiness from the prospect: there may be an underlying objection they do not feel comfortable sharing with you. If so, you need to get to the bottom of it, or there is very little chance of closing the deal.

Here are some guidelines for handling objections effectively:
Listen – Do not interrupt
Acknowledge the objection – Use sympathetic phrases such as “It’s a valid point ...”
Check understanding – Restate the objection to ensure you have understood it.

Answer the objection – Calmly and logically. Use your expert knowledge of the product or services USP’s to weaken and outweigh the objection.
Confirm – Use a closed question to confirm your answers have satisfied the customer.

Continue – Continue the sales structure by picking it up at the point the objection occurred.

4. Listen; take advantage of buying signals

Buying signals occur when a prospect responds directly to your sales pitch with a positive question or statement, such as “how much does it cost?” Neglect buying signals at your peril. A common pitfall that many telesales people fall into is that they are so preoccupied with getting their whole sales pitch out, that they ignore buying signals and refuse to adapt their offering to the interests of the prospect.

In the anecdotal sales call at the start of this article, I gave the cold caller at least two possible buying signals (“Which of our competitors did you have in mind”, and “how much?”) which she failed to respond to. I cannot emphasise enough how important it is to listen to what your prospect is asking you, and not to provide a solution until you know what the problem is first.

5. Close the deal confidently

Great News! You’ve matched your prospect’s needs to a decent value proposition, successfully overcome any objections they had, and now all you need to do is close the deal. Easy, right?

You might be surprised how many telesales professionals actually end up convincing the prospect not to buy, simply because they are too inefficient at gaining commitment and closing the deal. Some people just find it incredibly difficult to ask other people to part with money.

Closing is the last and most important part of the sales structure. There has been much research conducted on recommending which ‘type’ of close to adopt. You might choose the assumptive close (assuming the customer will buy and using a leading question to gain confirmation, e.g. “I could get one to you tomorrow providing we’ve got it in stock”), the minor point close (gaining confirmation by asking about a minor point, e.g. “when would you like delivery?”), or the alternative close (offering alternatives to choose from when the customer seems ready to buy, e.g. “do you want the blue or red version?”).

If any of these types of closing techniques work for you, then that’s great. My own preferred option is the straightforward (and more honest) ‘direct question close’. This is simply establishing commitment to purchase when you feel your prospect is ready by asking them straight out, e.g. “shall I go ahead and raise an order?” Then, even if they hesitate to respond, you must resist the urge to interrupt. To start talking at this point may distract the prospect’s attention from a decision, sound like you are trying to justify the sale, and generally make them feel pressurised.

What now?

Feel like this is a good start and you could use a little more practice? Try our new Best Practice for Telesales training course, endorsed by sales specialists Silent Edge. More experienced at telesales? You need Advanced Selling Skills for Telesales. You’ll find more information about all of this at: www.reedlearning.co.uk/sales or contact us free on 0800 132 448/more.info@reedlearning.co.uk