

Connect with Prospects using a Systematic Process

Introduction

There are many industry standards when it comes to prospecting, but three established principles especially come together to help your ability as a sales professional when you first engage with prospects. Though much has been taught and written on the subject, there is little qualm that this is still an enigmatic topic for many sales professionals, sales managers and sales leaders.

It is helpful to understand that in reference to the first step in any sale process, we are not inferring that the prospect contact is the very step. The fact is that engaging the prospect on the phone (or in most cases, by face-to-face) is really the second phase of the selling steps. It is your level of expertise initially that will help determine your ability to grow a pipeline, sell consistently, and earn what you are worth. Bear in mind expertise comes from proven experience, not trying and trying to get a result with minimal results. It has to be part of an iterative learning experience.

That said, what is the essential process that is being referred to here is what has been called pre-call planning, positioning, and prospecting; commonly called in sales circles the three (3) P's[!]. Without your ability to invest sufficient time in pre-call planning, positioning yourself and your organization well, and prospecting effectively, you will, in effect, have your chances for success in the face-to-face or second phase of the sale neutralized at best and totally destroyed at worst.

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REVENUE ACCELERATORS

The top three principals to Prospecting

“Instead of thinking about value-added think about knowledge-added. What knowledge can you add to your service, or communicate about your service, that will make you more attractive to...business partners and customers?”

Harry Beckwith in
The invisible
Touch

P1= Pre-call planning involves customizing each and every set of prospect activities to specific markets, verticals, and prospects. You must learn their issues or PAINS, not the features that will interest them the most. These PAINS have to be linked to the prospects title and job responsibilities. That way, your approach hits home and has some sense of urgency to it. It is the value your solution brings that creates interest on a cold call, not a product set of unique features, as promising as that sounds.

P2= Positioning involves you being seen as an expert, a specialist who can guide a prospect into a new form of information that can have a positive impact (create revenues: lower costs) on their business and job responsibilities. Generalists cannot do this and the prospect rapidly will see that. That is why the way you position your title, message, client references, call to actions...all need to be in unison to helping the prospect fix a problem. At best, you want to fix a problem that the prospect is not readily aware of, bringing to the surface a latent problem. These environments will often have little to no competition for you, and will more quickly engage a new prospect with your company and its solutions.

P3= Prospecting, the third in the process is simply picking up the phone. This means having goals for the activity, scripts, objection handling scripts, controlling call reluctance, and eliminating the distractions so you can do what is not commonly enjoyed, often loathed, but critical to your success as a sales person. The disciplined sales person will prosper the most. If you lack discipline, seek out a coach, internal or external, to help you stay focused and positive. Reward your self for a job well done each time you prospect.

What are the main beliefs in Phone Prospecting?

Knowing all sale professionals must be very prepared for their day-to-day, it is helpful to review and look at the 3 main beliefs that are held by all prospects when they receive a cold call from a vendor. These beliefs will help determine or destroy your effectiveness when phone or face-to-face selling to prospects. Strong in their axiom positions, these beliefs are well established in the field of selling and signify the basis for cold calling a new book of business, clients, or simply a new roster of business. They are:

- A) You only have 15-20 seconds to establish your credibility and convince a prospect that time spent with you will be of value.
- B) Without trust you can only sell price. With trust, you sell value.
- C) The prospect's first fear point in any sale is when you first call.

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“The traditional self-focused selling approach is no longer effective because today’s new buyers are unwilling to follow you. They don’t want to be ‘sold’. They want to make educated buying decisions. To make a sale, you must join them on a buying path.”

Kevin Davis in Getting Your Customer’s Head

“The average person is attacked by about three thousand marketing messages every day, compared with the few hundred our parents endured. And that’s just consumer messages ---bizfolk are subjected to even more creative and noncreative intrusions than their parents by an exponential factor.”

Seth Godin’s in Permission Marketing

Let’s look at the ramifications of each of these with the **first principal**. In today’s highly competitive marketplace, especially in the technology arena, it is essential that people and organizations maximize their time. This is especially relevant with any/all time invested with salespeople.

That is why it is so essential for you to be well prepared, know exactly what you’re trying to accomplish with each call and to know precisely what to say and how to say it early in the sales process. Most of all this needs to be communicated directly and succinctly to the prospect. That is why scripting and writing it down makes this easy to do and secure as a process, which can be timed and practiced to deliver naturally.

Salespeople need to approach in neutral but common terms, be non-threatening, and issue what we call a statement of intention (why you’re there and what you’d like to accomplish) followed by a primary bonding statement – a declaration of the type of experience and buying environment to expect. This latter technique is, of course, specific to each buyer’s emotional agenda but is quite easy to learn.

Prospects needs to immediately know *you are not there to waste their time* and related to their specific business issues or commonly called pains. Most salespeople fail to do this out of internal fear...and that is an unfounded fear when analyzed correctly. Sales people often want to be comfortable, so they do what have been perceived as effective from their predecessors...though most of the time, it does not work. That is why re-titling your self as a specialist is so powerful. It readily communicates your ability to be a problem-solver, and that you are representing yourself as an expert, not just another vendor.

With regard to the **second principle**, it is interesting that far too many salespeople worry about being liked at the expense of being trusted! Remember, you are not selling yourself or even your product or service. Instead, you are selling your sincere interest in your prospect coupled with a solution. A solution to fulfill a need, solve a problem or help your prospect improve their business and more importantly, their personal circumstance. All of this is accomplished much more easily through an attitude of trust than through any other way. The fastest way to build trust is via the reference sell. It diffuses the tension and quickly helps the prospect relate to another peer that had a similar problem and received a viable solution.

Prospects can not only hear trust, they can “feel” trust. That is why it is paramount to “consistently” practice using scripts, to speak and act sincerely, and with confidence. What that means to you is that you need to understand how essential it is to be an authentic voice for what it is you are and what you represent. And this is accomplished early in the sales process. One of the best ways to develop this is from phone recording.

Another way to gain this type of credibility to constantly rehearse and practice your message or what is commonly called your value proposition. And this is one that has been tested time and time again and knows that your prospects will respond to it. Keep in mind, ALL value propositions have to deliver how you create revenues “or” lower costs...

In dealing with the **third principle**...the prospect's initial, fearful reaction, you need to first understand that this reaction does, in fact, exist and you need to do your best to neutralize it. Never forget that prospects, no matter how sophisticated, have several things that cross their mind when you first approach them. Things like, "What is this person going to try to sell me?" or "Will I be placed in a corner?" or "Will I be forced to make a decision?"

It is a fundamental axiom that all people like to buy but no one, and I mean no one, likes to be sold. It is due to the person feeling they are giving up control of their environment, and that is a universal insecurity of all people. To be in control is what we are taught early on in life and school; especially in college and business. The skilled salesperson lets the prospect retain their control while gently influencing their thought process, agreeing with them, and empathizing there need to not wanting to be sold. Again, this comes from many years of practice.

Conclusion

It is essential that you appear as non-threatening, non-confrontational and as helpful as possible. It is also essential that you are (a) sincerely interested in your prospect's welfare, (b) willing to walk away if the prospect cannot feel comfortable with you or your product, and (c) capable of emotionally connecting with prospects in a totally non-threatening way.

There is no secret that people buy from people they like, trust and have confidence in dealing with. Incorporate these 3 principles into your sales effort and you will sell better.

About the Author

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