

GETTING THROUGH TO DECISION MAKERS

WHAT'S
REALLY
WORKING

ART SOBCZAK

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What's Really Working

By Art Sobczak

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Welcome!



As a sales trainer, the biggest challenge I see with new business development for salespeople is getting to buyers. Obviously we can't sell if no one is getting our message. (Of course, there are plenty of reps who blow it if they **do** get to speak with a buyer... that's another story).

In this brief book I'm going to share with you what is working to get to buyers.

These ideas and tips are a combination of my own—those I practice, test, and teach to my clients—and those that have been submitted to me from people like you out in the trenches.

I posed a question to the over 55,000 subscribers to my weekly sales tips newsletter. <http://businessbyphone.com/free-sales-tips/> I asked them what was working for them. I was overwhelmed with responses. I'm going to share some of those with you. There was a lot of overlap, as expected, so we tried for not too much repetition.

Bottom line, these techniques and processes work. Adapt them to your own calls and you'll find yourself getting through and speaking with interested buyers more often.

Let's get started!

Today's Environment Forces Ignorance

We live in an ignorance environment.

In that people ignore most messages that come their way. I saw studies ranging from 300 to 3000 messages daily, emails, texts, banner ads, TV and radio and media ads of all types, billboards, the person spinning sign on the street corner. We ignore most of them.

So, what to do?

Have Possible Value

The first strategy, or requirement for everything related to getting to buyers is having some possible, targeted and customized value.

I call it possible value, since we can't TELL someone what is valuable, value is what **they** think it is. Every attempt to connect and message to your prospect has got to contain something in it for the buyer. The reason most messages are ignored, why most people are screened out is that they do not appeal to something the listener is interested in, at that very moment.

There is no value in a salesperson talking about how good he feels his company is... a buyer doesn't care if you want to get together and explore mutually beneficial opportunities. They don't have time for that. Here's a very important point about value. I suggest you write this down, and feel free to tweet it out.

“Value is not the thing or stuff you sell, it is the result the buyer gets.”



In my training programs we invest a lot of time working on this area since it is the foundation for your strategy, messaging, and ultimately your success.

A buyer doesn't want to purchase software because he wants to own more marketing software. He wants the result of having more qualified buyers visiting his site, entering his sales funnel, and ultimately purchasing in a shorter amount of time, at a lower cost per customer than he's paying now.

Value Is Not the Same for Everyone

Next, your value needs to be targeted, personalized, and tailored. Generic messages are like bulk direct mail addressed to Occupant. As long as I've been in sales I've been teaching that we need to answer the "What In It for Them?" question. The good news is that we have more sales intelligence available to us than at any time in history.

The premise of my Smart Call methodology is that we must individualize our messaging to prospects in order to be relevant and gain their attention. In fact, buyers today EXPECT salespeople to have done their research, otherwise they are blown off quickly. You should never ask questions about things that are readily available on someone's website.

There are so many sources of sales intel, many free, such as simple Google searches, and social media, and some you can invest in that save you time by aggregating information for you.

Social Engineering: The Best Source of Real-Time Sales Intelligence

Now I'm going to share what top sellers are doing to get some of their best, real-time intel. And that comes from people in your prospect's organization. This is called **Social Engineering**. It's simply asking questions of anyone in the organization.

If you're not doing this now, it might sound unusual. An objection I sometimes hear is, "People are busy. They won't answer questions." To that I answer, true, some don't. But

many more do. People are conditioned to help and answer a question if asked, and asked in the right way.

You can ask some basic factual questions at the lower levels of an organization, and more specific situational and need-type questions the higher up you go. Be sure to talk to users of your product or service who might not be a decision maker. Personally, I like to call into sales departments and talk to sales reps. I ask if they do prospecting, how much of an emphasis is placed on it, how well they do it, training and coaching they're received, if they are successful and if it's something they enjoy or dread doing. This is valuable intel that helps me tailor a message to a person who manages sales and buys training.

Not Gatekeepers. Not Screeners. Assistants

Now let's talk about another great source of help and information. The salespeople who are getting through understand that assistants are assistants to the buyer, and can provide assistance to them as well.

Personally, I avoid using the negative terms screeners and gatekeepers. And methodologies like getting past the gatekeeper, and "...avoid giving them information." These words and attitudes result in adversarial approaches—not a good strategy when they hold the key to the door.

Assistants are there for a reason: to protect the decision maker's time. They do indeed get rid of salespeople. In fact, they are pros at it. They are getting rid of the self-interested salespeople who play the cat and mouse game and aren't able to communicate that they might have something of value for the buyer.

I've got files of success stories of how assistants have helped salespeople get their message to the buyer, arranged meetings, and even influenced purchases.

The "Two Things" Technique

Here's a quick tip with assistants that I've just implemented with a client to get messages replied to. It's the Two Things technique.

We all know that an assistant is not going to write down a long message for their boss. So let's simplify it, and strengthen it in the process. If the assistant offers to take a message, or you can ask even if they don't offer, ask them to write down Two Things.

Make them results-oriented and brief, and something that piques curiosity.

"Pat could you please just write down two things for the doctor. First, more new patients, and second, no increase in marketing expense."

We're finding that this increases call backs, and the likelihood the person will take the call next time, if they are available.

Using LinkedIn Extensively



Something else that sales pros who are getting in are doing is using LinkedIn extensively. Not just having an account, but really leveraging it. It's really no longer an option if you are serious about prospecting professionally.

There are so many ways LinkedIn is utilized. Of course it helps to facilitate what is the best and most successful form of new business, referrals.

It can help you build your targeted prospect lists, get sales intelligence, and it provides a method to contact buyers that gets responded to with much greater frequency than emails.

But, there's a wrong way to use LinkedIn. A bad salesperson will still be a bad salesperson, even if they are using LinkedIn. To have success, you still need to do the other things we talked about, namely having possible value when you are looking to connect or get an introduction.

There are lots of LinkedIn resources online and we do regular webinars on the 7 LinkedIn Mistakes that Kill sales, what to do instead, and what you can say in your messaging. See dates and times and register here. <http://LinkedinSales.Training>

Ok, on to a few more quick tips and then the success stories from fellow sales pros.

The "Quick Question"

Many people use email at their first attempt to connect. That's fine. What doesn't work is generic blasts that give a sale pitch. The email, like an opening statement or voice mail should pique curiosity and plant a question they want the answer to.

The subject line is the key to getting your email opened, and the reason most are ignored. One that we've used successfully and others tell me works for them is putting "Quick question" in the subject line.

This serves to get your email opened. It does NOT do the selling for you. Nor should the email do the selling. It should simply pique enough curiosity to get a response so you can have a conversation.

The key is hinting at some value so they want to hear more.

Geoff Wiebe with Sprague Pest Control shared that he uses a shorter variation of this. He just puts "Question" in the subject line. He tracks his numbers and says it ALWAYS

gets his emails opened. Even though he is not successful with everyone in terms of selling to them, it opens up communication with more people so he has more chances.

“Just reply with yes or no”

Another technique is the “Just reply with yes or no.” This is usually the final step in a process after repeated attempts. You leave it on a voice mail, first again stating your possible value, and letting them know that if this is not something that would be a priority for them right now, if they could just please hit Reply and say yes or no in the email you’ll be sending. You can add that if Yes, if they could give a couple times they would be available.

I have sales reps who tell me this does get replies, yes and no, which is great. Since a decision is better than wasting your time.

Getting Physical

In our electronic messaging society, what I’m seeing working well is sending something physical to prospects.

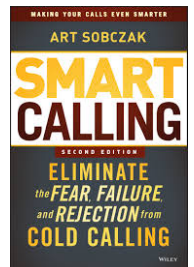
Here’s something that works today as well as ever, and it is about as low tech as you can get. It’s a personalized handwritten note with a live stamp. These get opened. This sets you apart from the masses. And they’re cheap. Your note shouldn’t be long...again you are just trying to pique curiosity and pave the way for your follow up call.

Sending Books

Here’s an idea that requires a bit of an investment, the key word meaning investment, which also provides a return. Sending books to prospects. You can send a popular or niche business book relevant to the prospect’s business. Put an inscription on the inside... it doesn’t matter that you didn’t write it. If you know the person’s interests and hobbies from their LinkedIn profile, send a book about that.

I’m a competition barbecue cook, and a sales rep sent me a new book on barbecue. I took his follow up call.

Personally I send copies of my Smart Calling book, which always gets me in when I say, I’m the guy who sent the book on prospecting.



A Unique and Elaborate Book Idea That Get Results





Now, you might not have written a book, but listen to this next story, and perhaps you can. 5 years ago Chuck Hamman started a company called Sleepyhead. They make a powdered drink that helps you sleep.

Chuck felt that hotels would be a perfect target market for them to make it available for their patrons who couldn't sleep.

He needed to get through to GM's and Operations Managers. That was a challenge since those buyers are tough to reach. Cold calls, drop in's and emails just weren't working.

So he wrote a book. A children's book to be exact. It depicted a stick figure character who can't sleep at hotels. The hotel manager in the story provides Sleepyhead and everyone lives happily ever after.

Chuck put together a box containing:

-  his book
-  an MP3 player narration of the book
-  a hand-written letter
-  samples of Sleepyhead

Cooper's Quest for Sleep



It worked like crazy. He got through to 80% of my prospects – compared to 7% before. They were *excited* to speak with him. It was like a dream come true, he said.

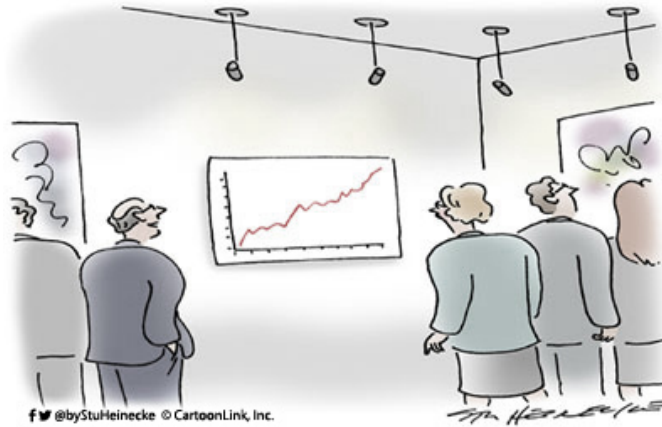
So, this might not be for everyone, but how might you make it work? Chuck actually has a site where he details how he did it, and, he now even offers the service, to create the book and all of the packaging. It's a low investment and I'm actually considering it myself. By the way, I'm not getting anything for sharing this with you, I just think it is a great idea. It's at <http://LittleBookThatSells.com>

Cartoons

Here's another unusual, and fun way to set yourself apart, and personalize your message. Use Cartoons.

That's right. Who doesn't love to read cartoons. Readership surveys show they are almost always the best read and remembered part of magazines and newspapers.

Here's one I received in my email. The subject line said, "Here's a cartoon with your name."



"That would look really good in Art Sobczak's office."

Of course I opened it. How cool is that. Well, it was from internationally known cartoonist Stu Heinecke, who wanted to interview me for his new book. Of course I called him right away and agreed.

Here's how you can use this. Stu's company <http://CartoonLink.com> has email and post card programs you can use to get attention and get in. Most people show an open rate with their emails that is double what they typically get.

I was blown away when I heard some of their case studies and success stories. Stu has a high end service where they create their Big Board cartoons, usually personalized and sent to CEOs. A sales trainer targeted a group of Fortune 1000 CEOs. The Big Boards were hand-delivered by courier. Before the trainer could pick up the phone to follow up, each of the CEOs called *him*. And every one of them agreed to meet. Two bought starter training programs on the spot, each worth about \$50,000. Overall he got a 100% response and an 8,000% ROI on a campaign that cost \$5,000.

Ok, so, to summarize, people who are getting through

- have a personalized, tailored possible value proposition
- they do their homework
- they do Social Engineering to gather intel
- they view assistants as assistants, not screeners or gatekeepers

- they are excellent at using LinkedIn
- they use unique, memorable techniques to set themselves apart

It's not rocket science, and it shouldn't be.

What's Working in the Field. Responses from My Readers

Ok, now it's time to share the submissions from my readers. Many of these follow a common theme, and follow the principles I have mentioned earlier. Let's get started!

Work with the Assistant

My favorite technique in getting to the decision maker is using the gatekeeper as much as possible. I initially ask them exactly for help, just like you just did with us, and look, I am responding! I ask them to help me or for a favor. Immediately, their guard comes down and most of them really try to help me. Human nature ultimately wants to help others!

Thanks.

Linda J. Grothe
Stevens West, Inc

Ask for Help

I've found if I ask for help, such as "I have a question (or problem), and I'm hoping you can help...", I get a much better response rate. People love to be in the position of having the information you need and by simply asking for it, more than likely, they will bend over backwards to give it to you. Most people of position lord it over the gatekeepers and there is an abundance of that personality type. Attempting a more humble approach goes a long way and is more respectful than making demands or attempting to bypass the gatekeeper.

Kay Krause
Sullivan Gift

A Variety of Suggestions

- Voicemail: I rarely pitch via voice mail and am more likely to leave a voice mail as a result of a face to face meeting at an event, i.e., as a follow up. I also use Voicemail for follow-ups to emails that seem to have been lost in Junk Mail or Spam but I wait a few days, ie, if sent on Monday, leave a voicemail late on Wed or on Thurs or Fri and follow up the next Monday.

- Email: Think of the email as a proposal and use the Subject Line as your Tag Line or Pitch Line == make whatever your pitching stand out and be noticed. This is important in the EMAIL weary world of an executive or decision maker. If you want someone to notice your email then give it a Headline! If I want someone to notice me because of my book, I put the title in the Subject Line: Wounded Warriors: A Soldier's Story of Healing...

If I want to suggest a programming idea, I use the Subject Line to generate excitement or emotional buy in: "Two Cooks and Critic coming soon to a station run by you!" It is so very important to ensure the Subject Line is not mundane, too esoteric or a pale façade for what you are pitching

-Screeners: Or Congressional schedulers: Exude confidence, poise, and succinctness; know your subject and ask directly for what you want the elected official/s to do for you. I have had a Senator join me on 3 occasions in her home state on behalf of a disabled veteran because I knew my cause was a just one, the subject of vets is critical to this Senator, and I knew she was in place every Friday- Sunday to attend in state events. So, I never asked her scheduler for any other dates than these 3. I am impassioned myself about assisting our veterans, did my homework and knew she was too, visited her on the Hill in her office during a "Coffee with the Senator" event and could talk sincerely about the state she was representing. So, to sum it up, be sincere, know what you are asking for and know your topic, know the person to whom you would like to make contact (in my case a Senator) and be cordial, complementary and find commonality with the scheduler or screener by asking questions that illicit a more personal and intimate response (but not too intimate). Examples could include "How's your weather up there, out there, down there?" "I love your name and what an interesting spelling..."and that leads into a more personal conversation), "Do you know if the Senator likes...?", Could I bring something to give to the Senator, manager, TV Station owner, etc. I also sometimes can get at where the Scheduler went to school and what he or she studied, where the Senator or other principal went to school and then segue into talking about sports or other aspect of the school.

Best way to get someone's attention is to be yourself first, find common ground (a hobby, a school attended, a favorite city, sports team, or current event) and say something that will be remembered. And, ALWAYS follow up a good deed done on your behalf by another with a thank you...a short, sincere

and incredibly grateful note expressing how much the Scheduler or Screener did for you to make your meeting or event happen.

Jacquelyn M Howard
Proposal Specialist

A Voice Mail Example with Value

Mostly it's making sure you understand the potential problems of the prospect and how your product or service might offer them value.

Often in a voice mail or introduction I use the following.

"This is Lee Stocking with Prairie Sky Group. You and I haven't been introduced (or I was referred by) <statement keeps them from wondering who I am>. I've been working with other senior <insert role not title> to help them <insert business problem> I'd like an opportunity to tell you about how I helped another company <insert numbers \$, Time, %>. <this is the reason for the call>

Have I caught you at a bad time? <negative question yields tendency to say no>

This would take about three minutes and then we can make a mutual <we each have an equal amount of power here... you are speaking to a peer> decision as to whether we want to take a next step.

I used this with a CEO when I caught him taking a break in the middle of an acquisition. We scheduled a time to talk.

If there is any interest, I often ask early on..."Who else in your organization besides yourself would be involved in making a decision...?"

Lastly, when I meet resistance from a contact or champion with whom I've had a conversation who is preventing access to power, I often say something like... Well, I've found that most successful implementations of X,Y, or Z require the involvement of <insert title>. It wouldn't be fair to ask you to introduce a subject on a conversation we've just started to have. If they refuse, it's an indication that I haven't earned trust. So then I ask directly... what proof would you need to convince you to.... Finally, I make a decision if I can't get access to power that the offering I have may not provide the value they need. In that case, I use a statement something like... Well, it seems to me that you may not be ready for the product or services we offer. This is wait or walk time.

Lee Hobart Stocking
Principal and Chief Provocateur
Prairie Sky Group

Calling After Hours

To get through I will call after hours and leave a message for the decision makers. Other times I will ride the bull until I get to the decision maker, asking the gatekeeper or someone else to see if anyone might have an office that is in close proximity to the person I am trying to reach and ask them if they wouldn't mind leaving a note on their desk that I am trying to reach them. I generally send email as the last result but will often times use both to my full advantage.

-Mike Cook

Calling from a Different Number

Create a couple different Google voice numbers with different area codes consisting of the same state you are in. Reason for the same state is so the customer won't think you're a telemarketer calling. Then make sure you set them up on your cell phone and or tablet.

If the customer hasn't been responding or answering your calls, then call from one of your Google voice numbers and leave a message saying:

"Good Morning/Afternoon/Evening Mr./Mrs. Customer, This is Kristen (only say first name) with XX Company. I have some very important information for you, however not urgent. Please call me as soon as possible (or you can say 'at your earliest convenience') at (insert Google voice number). Thank you and have a wonderful day. "

It is very ambiguous/like tossing out bait; therefore, they almost always call back wanting to know what's so important.

Kristen

An After-Trade Show Approach

I went to a trade show and saw a booth with lots of product packaged in printed folding cartons (My company, Rohrer, is a manufacturer of printed folding cartons). They seemed busy and I understand that sales people hate talking with roaming suppliers at trade shows. I wrote down the company name and did some research when I returned from the show. My best research program for finding appropriate contacts is LinkedIn, so I went on and searched for "Company Name" and saw a name pop up for a person in Purchasing. Perfect! I connected with her on LinkedIn and she accepted my request. Note- LinkedIn will ask you how you know this person in order to connect. I just click on the option that says I currently do business with this company and most people accept the invite.

After she accepted my request I followed up with a phone call to the company's headquarters and asked for her by name. I got voicemail 3 times. On my 3rd voicemail I let her know that I will be in her area on a certain date and told her I'd be stopping in at 10am to drop off some samples... and said hopefully she would be there so we could meet in person. No response. On the morning of the appointment, I called an hour before and got her voicemail again. I reminded her I'd be coming by at 10am on the voicemail, and I received a call back within 5 minutes. She was very sorry she had not returned my phone calls, but she was looking forward to seeing me that morning. Turns out she was very glad I stopped by because we are a great fit for their packaging needs, and now they are a customer.

April Bonfanti
Rohrer Corporation

“Outside the Box” Techniques

I have two different "outside the box" examples I will share with you. The first, more conventional, the second a little risky, but I had nothing to loose.

- After many calls, literature sent, and multiple voice-mails not returned, I was ready to give up on a Sr. Buyer and decision maker at a major pharmaceutical company. I figured I would try to send a LinkedIn message as a last result but was unable to send the person an in-mail. Additionally, the person would not respond to my Linked In connection request. While on LinkedIn I noticed the buyer was connected to an HR manager, who I once worked with and was a connection of mine. I was able to send an in-mail message to the HR manager through Linked In asking him to send a Linked In message to the buyer I was pursuing introducing me. The message was sent and the next day I received a call from the buyer. I was able to set up a meeting and pursue new business.

- After chasing a (female) buyer at Crayola for many months using all conventional methods (phone call, email, mailing literature)I was getting nowhere. Even after speaking with industry professionals who put in a good word for me with the buyer, I had no luck making contact. Around the holiday time things were slow and I was trying to figure out a way to get the buyers attention. Here is what I decided to do: I typed up a letter of introduction and put it in a fancy envelope. I then went to a flower shop and bought a poinsettia plant. I personally delivered the plant with letter to the lobby where the buyer worked. I went to the front desk, acted like a delivery person, and dropped off the plant/letter. I simply asked the receptionist to make sure the buyer received the holiday gift. Rohrer was never mentioned nor did it appear anywhere until the plant was received and the letter was read. I called the buyer the following day and left one final message asking for a return call. Note, I did not mention the plant in my voice-mail. Shortly after my final message I got an email from the buyer asking when I could come in and make a presentation to her company. The presentation was successful and Rohrer has since received an RFQ from Crayola.

David Phillippe
Rohrer Corporation

Several Techniques that Work

In my recent years of reaching the right person I have used the following techniques:

- * of course, make sure you Smart Call by utilizing Social Media for pre-call research
- * should the gatekeeper ask what's it concerning, be as honest as possible, just tell them that you're researching their Wifi infrastructure (my industry) and have some interesting results to share with Mr. Buyer
- * Use first names if you have called the company before, it makes you sound like a household name/regular caller
- * Regarding voicemails; I have a post-it with my written out voicemail script, thereby ensuring I will not get caught off guard when the famous beep sounds

Jorge Ober

Calling to Help, Not Sell

My best tactic is using voice mail to indicate I am calling to help them and avoid coming across as a typical sales person. I also ask to get on their calendar for 5-10 minutes -- this is helping me as I ASK for their time and then I show appreciation of their valuable time by only taking a small piece of their day.

This has been working well for me the past few months.

Matt Frondorf
HRPROFILE.Com

Tailored Email, then a Call

First, thank you for conducting the webinar "Seven LinkedIn Mistakes that Kills Sales." <http://linkedinsales.training> I found it very informative and it has helped me a lot to optimize my strategy to reach out to prospects.

Here is what I do.

Emails: Typically, what I have observed is that many sales reps prefer sending out long and generic emails (marketing campaign). This never appeals the buyers to engage in a conversation unless they are in dire need. Initially, I followed the same process but it didn't yield me great results. Now, before reaching out to a prospect, I research thoroughly about their role and their business and highlight how my services would help their business making my email more customer-centric.

Calls: Rather than being submissive on the calls, I try to have a conversation with the prospect. It's about them and their business, not about me or my business. If I listen to their pain, I will be able to put forth a solution to their problem. People buy from people they trust and feel comfortable with, and you can only achieve that by listening to them and not pushing your services onto them.

Saheb Kung
Account Manager
Eternus Solutions Pvt Ltd

Getting Technical

What works for me is telling the screener (in very confident voice) that the call is about something rather **specific or technical** (and then state something rather specific and/or technical as it relates to the call). Often times, the receptionist will not be so knowledgeable to decipher and more likely to put one through (eg, *"Betty, this is regarding the new transmission & distribution requirements for the compact data loggers by ConEdison "...)*.

In this case, it would be true, as we'd be selling the person / company on attending or sponsoring our Utilities conference. The technical phrase above WILL IN FACT be discussed in the conference, so I am in fact telling the truth.

(Name not provided)

"Should I stay or should I go?"

When I have tried to reach a potential client 3 - 5 times by phone and email over a period of 4-6 weeks, I send them an email with the subject line below and it reads something like the following:

Should I stay or should I go?

Hello _____,

I can't help but notice that there has been no response to my efforts to correspond with you, as suggested by _____. I'm imagining:

1. You'd really like to get to this, but it hasn't yet migrated to the top of your lengthy to do list.
2. You are enjoying a long, warm and rain-free holiday in Mexico without phone or internet access.

3. You've fallen and can't get up, and in that case please let me know immediately and I'll call 911 for help...

Please let me know which one it is because I'm starting to worry.

All kidding aside, I understand you're very busy and the last thing I want to do is be a distraction when I call or email. Whether you've been busy or you just won't have time, maybe you could just let me know?

Thank you in advance and I look forward to your response.

Kind regards,
Carol Ann

The items can of course be changed, but 80% - 90% of the time I get a response - go figure!

Carol Ann Fried

Sending Valuable Information First

In advance of my telephone call, I mail something that will WOW the decision maker. Maybe the results of a survey that has been done in his/her industry that he may not have been exposed to.

When I make the phone call, I refer to the information I sent in the mail. I try to telephone the decision maker one or two days after he/she received the information so it will be relatively fresh on their minds.

Bill Lee

Doing Homework First

Of course doing my homework prior to the meeting :-).

<http://www.yougotthenews.com> where I find an article about the other person and his/her company that I can talk about.

<http://www.linkedin.com> where I learn what's important to the other person.

Then the first words out of my mouth are always about something I know the other person cares about -- themselves!

Sam Richter, CSP

www.samrichter.com

Author of "Take the Cold Out of Cold Calling"

A Voice Mail Process

Most of the messages that I want returned include the following:

- I am very specific and speak clearly.
- I try to tailor each message to the specific customer and only talk in terms of things that will be of value to them. "I have some information that could be valuable to you." "I have a solution to the problem or concern WE were discussing the other day."
- I almost always end a message with the following phrase: "Please call me back WHEN you get this message."
- I do not say, "if you can," or "if you're not busy," or something in that vein.

If this all sounds familiar to you, it should. I learned most of this from going to one of your seminars in Chicago and your countless emails that I have received over the years. I really value what you have to say and I like your no-nonsense approach. Your information is real world tips that actually have made a difference in my career. I've worked in sales and technical support for almost 15 years, and it's all been via the telephone. I really enjoy building those relationships and your expertise has really helped me. (It's also cool that you like golf).

Mike True

Some Unconventional Techniques

Ok, sometimes we go to the extreme. First If I have a customer that is extremely hard to reach I will leave him/her a voicemail saying I am on my way and I need a ride from the airport. (almost everything we do is out of state)

Then I go to <http://omatic.musicairport.com/> and generate a fake airline ticket and send the customer a copy. They almost always know its fake but laugh and usually pick up the phone.

One of my favorite emails or voicemails I would leave would say something about if they see helicopters to not be alarmed but to wave their arms because I called out a search party to find him.

Another would be what I call the “milk carton.” I email an image of a milk carton and put the prospect’s photo on it. Then I’ll leave this message:

“Hey Bill I was eating my cheerios this morning and boom I finally saw you on a milk carton it been so long since we talked it only makes sense you were missing.”

These of course are humorous but a lot of times are effective.

On a more serious note we deal all over the country and our office is in Minnesota and lots of people in the south think we never warm up. I am a big ice fisherman and people love to talk about it and don’t understand how we can drive on the ice or sit in a 75 degree fishhouse without falling in . So I send pictures then I call within a day or 2. They want to know why were so crazy they don’t get it. It gets them on the phone, they show other people the pics then I get to talk to them.

Befriending the screener is always good we all know that but comments to a screener that are original and make them feel important are effective.

I will say to a screener “You always answer the phone you must be the one doing all the work” or “just asking them if they will ever get her/him help out there because you always sound so busy? They love it that someone recognized they are so busy.

Jay (Tim) McClintock
Sales Manager
Metropolitan Supply



The 1-2 Punch

I like to leave a voice message and follow it up with a quick email. I call it the 1 , 2 punch.

Konrad Brown
Wolters Kluwer Law and Business

Keeping It Simple and Brief

One simple trick is brevity.

“Good morning, (Use answers name if provided). Melvin Turner calling for Art Sobczak.”

I've found this simple statement will often have gatekeepers push me through to whom I was calling for.

It is important though to be prepared for the question “May I tell Art what this is regarding?”. You have to have a confident retort ready that represents your company's potential value and has the gatekeeper think “I should probably get this call to Mr. Sobczak.”

Melvin Turner
Field Environmental Instruments, Inc

Being Sure Your Messages are Actually Delivered

One strategy I employ to increase the likelihood that my voice mail messages will be delivered is always pressing the pound sign after leaving a voice mail and following the required prompts until the system confirms that my message was left.

Before I started doing this some years back, when I just hung up after leaving a message, my phone would ring immediately and it would be the auto-attendant I had just called. This suggested to me that maybe some of my voice mails weren't actually reaching the intended recipient.

Phil Berliner

Seven Voicemail Tips

Here's the recap from my 10 b2b Voicemail Case Studies program
<http://voicemailsucces.com>:

1. Unless you already have a strong, personal relationship with the person you're calling, always state your first and last names, and spell them out if they're the least bit unusual.
2. Don't just say you are "with" or "from" your company. State your role. If necessary, enhance your real role a bit or *create* a role if you don't have one to raise your perceived status.
3. State your company name slowly and spell it if it's the least bit unusual, then state why you're calling.
4. Don't use corporate-speak or encounter group language, such as "I wanted to reach out to you." And use active tense verbs.
5. Give people a compelling reason to call you back, such as a time-sensitive offer, special pricing or free value-based information.
6. State your phone number twice and slowly. Write it on a piece of paper as you're speaking to insure your pace is measured.
7. Don't thank people gratuitously, tell them you appreciate their time or say you're looking forward to hearing from them. This lowers your status and makes you sound needy. Neediness kills deals.

Nick Nichols
Dalfortmedia

An Email that Gets Replies

My best method to get to decision makers is to look for a person in the executive suite where I have some kind of connection with preferably previous work experience. In my line of work, there tends to be a lot of movement from company to company. Below is an example of an email I sent to a person last week that got replied to the next day:

Patti,

Through some of XYZ's acquisitions over the past few years, we service a few of your community's beverage vending. You may remember us from your ABC Residential days; we've handled the beverage service for them since 1998. Nationwide, we handle over 25,000 machines for multifamily clients. I wanted to see your level of interest in our program. Regardless of manager changes, ownership changes and management company changes, we provide

and report a consistent cash flow to you along with the required insurance.

If there is someone else I should speak with, I'd appreciate it if you could point me in their direction. If you'd like any references or additional information on my company, I'd be glad to send it to you or feel free to contact me at the number below. Thank you for your time.

Robert Cavanagh
Vending Group

What Works With this Decision Maker

It's a personal bent but I'm personally much more responsive to emails than to phone calls. (I answer my own line, so no screener.) If I don't know someone, I would much rather be approached at first via email. Handled well, email has the power to engage me. Like everyone I'm sure, I receive a lot of solicitation emails offering me services and products that have nothing to do with my role. Out of hundreds, there is only one company who has gotten my attention and that is because they email me consistently, probably quarterly if I had to guess, and each message is a little bit different. Plus it is a service that is in line with my role in the company. What gets my attention is:

- personalized, use my name, my company, my title or mention someone I know who suggested you connect with me
- show knowledge of my company and/or situation
- offer a tidbit of why you are reaching out, what is the value to me
- be low-key, not pushy
- stay in contact regularly so I can remember you (quarterly works for me)
- vary the message slightly, offer a new piece of information or a different angle on your value proposition
- keep emails brief, 4 or 5 sentences at the most

Does this tailored approach take more time than churning out boilerplate emails to a distribution list? Yes! But the effectiveness is well worth the extra time. Quality contacts, not quantity.

Jennifer Ingle, CASE
Associate Regional Vice President &
Director, Learning and Development
HelmsBriscoe

Two Methods that Work

I sell sun protection accessories, mostly to dermatologists. There are two things that work for me:

1. Send a letter with brochures and a sample directly to the doctor, hand written on a pink envelope. Even though I'm going to be working with the office manager, if I contact them first I run the chance of them deciding that the doctor won't be interested.
2. When calling the office for the first time I take the time to introduce myself to the receptionist and briefly describe my products to her/him. I ask for their help or opinion about who to talk to. They enjoy being included and help me get through to the right person. If I call and immediately ask for the office manager they don't give me any extra help getting "in".

Jeanne Iben

Voice Mail and Email Tips

Leaving voice mail or messages with screeners seems nearly pointless unless you know the individual is in the market for whatever it is you are pitching. However combining a targeted message with email, especially with a "Triggering Event" can occasionally elicit a response. Using your Smart Calling techniques is effective.

I'd say one of the best ways to reach a DM are to either call after 5:00PM or if you can get an extension try dialing close variations of the extension, but not the exact extension...ie, if the extension is 456, try 356, 457 etc. The hope is to reach someone internally who actually has to pick up the phone but is not accustomed to screening. Play dumb, say you miss dialed the ext and ask to be connected. Be confident and a little goofy about it and sometimes they will forward you without screening. The DM thinks it's someone internally trying to reach them and is far more likely to pick up the phone. It can work.

Another tip that can work with email is as follows: Leave a few VM's then try the following email. In the subject line put:

Art, trying to reach you... then:

Good Afternoon Art,

WOW! You must be an extremely busy guy. I have had no success trying to reach you by phone. I understand the hectic nature of your schedule and can appreciate your limited availability, so I thought email may be easier for you.

(Then just a BRIEF teaser.)

For whatever reason people seem to love the acknowledgment they are busy so it gets them feeling like you have a connection for a brief moment. I get more responses to this than any other.

Scott Davis

Cards, Asking for Help, and After Hours Calls

-Handwritten cards

Have a purpose. I like to have a specific purpose for the note, an extra special 'thank-you' or something of the like. It allows it to remain special, meaningful and purposeful.

-Asking whoever answers the phone to help you

In a very simple way, telling them you're not sure who to talk to, but maybe they could help. It's a common response around here, but it works great.

Sometimes, if they are in a chatty mood, they will answer many initial inquiries and get much of the baseline questions answered prior to actually speaking with the proper individual. In these instances, you have much more information heading into the 'real' conversation.

-Wait for Office to close

If the Buyer has made the initial inquiry and the screener is blocking my call back, I wait until the office is closed and the Buyer answers the phone.

Mike Cusick, Parishsoft

Mentioning a Specific Project Name

Probably not relevant for all industries but we supply a lot to large commercial builders. I find that if you mention a project name eg "Glenfern Primary School" or "Eastmond Apartments" you get put through to the right person, usually the person responsible for the job or the estimator for the project.

I usually just say I need a bit more info on the XYZ project and the gatekeeper puts you straight through. Once through to them, as long as you've done your homework on what the project involves they are normally more than happy to discuss.

Same approach works for voice mails. Maybe if you have a project name they assume you have something they want to hear or need to know.

Katie

A LinkedIn Prospecting Process

What's currently working for me with regards to connecting with DM's is LinkedIn prospecting.

Here's my process:

- search company name
- search for customer profile
- simply hit the connect button
(I use default message.. I know, not recommended)
- rinse,repeat~20x/week/company
- once connected, reply with short relevant note (promo, updates, news) w/ call to action
- follow up with smart call/voice mail
- if no response, follow up 1-2x over next 1-3 weeks. Move on.

That's it!

Stuart Neighbours

100% Success Rate With This

Although it may sound silly, I had a day recently where everyone, every single one of the voice mail messages that I left (and there were 9), were responded to.

After the first couple of returned calls, I realized that I was beginning my messages with *"I hope you're having as good of a day as I am"*.

I don't know if what I said had anything to do with why they returned my calls, or if it was the tone in my voice, because I really was having a good day, and either way it must have made them curious.

When they called back they were upbeat and happy sounding as well, and the calls went better than usual. One telling me that if he were any better he would be a twin, and another that he couldn't be better unless it was tomorrow.

Since then I haven't experienced 100% response, but I am still using the upbeat tone and the "line" (which can never get old), and the success rate is better than the past. Why wouldn't I be having a good day, working for this great company!!

Linda Mayo
INCOE Corporation

Nothing Fancy. It Just Works

I use the formula you provide in your book, Smart Calling. Targeted messages with true value proposal, I eliminate “uhm” and speak clearly. I also say my name and phone number very slow. I am very clear about why I am calling and what action I expect from the prospect/client.

Kristian Nilsen

Throw “Curve Balls”

What I do is throw curve balls --- they are much harder to hit right back to me. I learned a long time ago if you ask a question someone can just answer no to, that’s a ticket to looserville if you just throw batting practice all the time you will need a very big glove I am sure.

First, I Google the repair shop or business, or look it up on Yelp to drill down to find the buyer / owner/ estimator---for gold calls. I don’t say cold calls because everyone makes that sour patch face.

Then I will call up and be very nice always smiling while dialing to whom ever answers the phone. I get their name and remember it. If I have the buyer’s name I don’t use it yet until I gain the gatekeepers approval--remember this is the person who in most cases will answer the phone every time you call--everyone needs to be valued and if you steamroll over the gatekeeper I believe this is a huge mistake. Gates work much better with a little grease.

Here’s the curve. after I greet them and get them in the right mood—that’s a whole different story. I will ask them if our outside rep has dropped them off the 12 mouse pads with our phone # on it. If you don’t have an outside rep---you can verify their address and say you will be putting some on the snail mail today...no one has hung up on me ever when being asked if they got the free stuff we sent, then using that as a pry bar to open them up I just simply ask them where they buy parts from and who handles that. I thank them very much and don’t ask to be transferred to any one.

Why?

Because I am different. I am not like the other 1000000000000 people who have called them before. I care about what they do and it shows--they will learn this too--- it takes more than one call with this method. Just like farming. Plant seeds every day. But make damn sure you water them and take care of them--or someone else will.

I will then send out some mouse pads, pens, send them a box of paperclips, some tape, whatever. I once sent a customer a box of staples because they were whining that they saw someone with our company's t-shirt, I told them we were out of shirts but I had

something else they would like better and use more often. I did really follow up and they thought it was funny anyway and the entire shop was laughing their butts off. Make sure you send your cards of course, make sure they cannot forget you. Be the one with green hair.

Then do what 99% of all sales reps do never: follow up, call back. The telephone is a two- way communication device. Your new or existing customers will shi# themselves if you call them up and say, "Hey just wanted to wish you a happy Valentines Day. Make sure you get your honey something nice or you will get stung by the bees instead."

Rick Leibovitz

A 40% Return-Call Voice Mail Technique

I just showed my techniques to my colleagues at our national sales conference earlier this week.

Variations on this get me a return call of just under 41%. Admittedly Canadians are perceived to be courteous but selling fleet management is among the least sexiest things to offer anybody.

"Hello Art. It's Howard Rosenberg here. I'm calling from ABC leasing. I understand you're the person I should be speaking to about your company's fleet. We have a lengthy and successful track record of lowering costs and simplify operating fleets in XXX industry. My direct line is 999. I can appreciate you're swamped at the best of times so I'm going to make a note in my schedule to call you early- to mid-afternoon X days out. If you have a moment, I'd look forward to speaking with you. Otherwise, I'll call you. Thank you."

Howard Rosenberg

Suggestions from a CEO

(The following is from Dan Hoemke, formerly the CEO of Humana Healthcare's Western Region, and now a partner in his health care consulting firm. He has, and is still in on both sides of the sales desk.)

Here are my thoughts, practices, and recommendations that we use, and share with our clients.

- It's a hot topic given how difficult to connect with anyone these days, let alone, executive decision-makers.

-
- Problem is the result of several factors.
 - People have less time than ever given our electronic age of communication, and the multitude of social media and clutter of messaging bombarding business people, not to mention the perpetual meetings that most executives find themselves participating in.
 - There is also a sea change occurring in how buyers are educated on key subjects and buy products. Historically, sales people played a major role in educating buyers through meetings, presentations, demonstrations and the like. Today, most buyers seeking to learn, actively seek out what they are trying to learn about through the internet, and industry colleagues. They also proactively seek out information from prospective vendors, but on their terms, which may or may not involve sales people.
 - Given the limitation of time and bandwidth, and alternative sources of information and learning, executives are increasingly reluctant to get together with sales people because the need isn't as great as it used to be.
 - Competence or incompetence of salespeople. Executives have little interest in meeting with "product peddlers", who "show up and throw up" and are ill prepared with little knowledge of the companies they are calling on. Executive across most industries are have a strong preference for "solution-centric" reps who understand their organizational business, vision and goals and can readily identify ways in which they can contribute to the success of their core business by solving for problems or adding demonstrable value.
 - While there is admittedly one executive who ultimately authorizes the deal, very few executive make a decision in a vacuum. They rely heavily on their leadership teams, peers and/or functional experts who influence perception of business needs, vendor v. homegrown solution alternatives, vendor identification and , evaluation criteria and weighting and ultimately, the decision. But be clear, committees don't make decisions, nor do most effective business executives lead democracies. Old School thinking was that if you identify and connect with the "Executive Buyer", you've got it made. Reality, is that unless you are dealing with an autocrat, that doesn't work in today's environment.
 - Decision-makers come in many colors and breeds. Fact is, from afar, it's impossible to know who the decision-maker for your solution (strategic application of products and services in solving business problems or adding demonstrable value) without navigational support.
 - But before you get the impression that gaining access and selling to decision-makers is impossible given the quagmire, it's not.

- So, what's the algorithm or the formula for success in busting through to the decision-maker (while some sales people are effective at top down, most are effective through leverage of a senior/key business stakeholder to navigate up):
 1. Do the homework- Research target prospects (the intensity, of course, will vary by value and complexity of sale). Learn everything you can about:
 - Organizational, business, vision and goals (where are they going over the next 3-5 years)
 - Core business- what markets/segment and customers do they sell to and what value is derived from their products and services (interestingly most of our clients struggle with the same stuff we do, access to decision-makers, commoditization of products, services and value and cost as the top decision-making criteria)
 - Expected contribution from the products and services you sell (if they already are buying them) or prospective value that you can deliver.
 2. Identify chief stakeholders (usual business owners and functional business heads) or business ports of entry. Ultimately, what business/function and business owner has the most to gain from what you offer.
 3. Attack- Reaching out by phone call, email, Text or LinkedIn introductions- whatever methods that yield a connect. Fact is in today's messaging and communication environment, we seldom know how best to connect with people and capture their attention. For example, if you are reaching out to Generation Y, Millennials, or Generation Z, voicemail may be not only obsolete, but an indictment of your age, methods and ineffectuality. So, part of the challenge initially is to determine how to effectively communicate with stakeholders. Your effectiveness in solving of this will serve you well as you leverage them to navigate upward to the decision-maker. And, navigating upward is both a function of validating and/or uncovering business needs or opportunities to add value.
- Avoiding the Pitfalls- Regardless of whether working the top down or the stakeholder up approach, it is inevitable that you'll get blocked in voicemail or email hell or get insulated by an assistant block your access.
- Re: Voicemail Hell- Before you know any better as to whether voicemail is a waste of time, it's a meaningful venue. But don't ask for a call for action (i.e., call back) from someone you don't know and haven't the time to leave a strong enough message. If you're going to leave a voicemail, let your contact know who you are, who you are with, few words on why your calling and an indication of when you'll call back (i.e., "I'll give you a call first thing in the morning or end of day tomorrow to see if we connect for a few minutes."). Follow up accordingly, leave similar messages tailored the number of the call, infuse a little humor and always communicate sincerity)

- Re: Email Hell- Be very smart in your subject and brief in subject line, communicating prospective value or problem that you may be able to help with. The body of the email should be brief, not presumptuous and gracious in terms of you ask for help, desire to schedule a brief introductory call, desire to learn more about (what you've learned about their business that connects with yours and your value prop), and value of exploring synergies.
- Re: Blocked by Assistant- Most assistants are there to protect, organize and simplify the lives of the executives they support. Thus, be nice; they're just doing their jobs. That being said, most will actually help you if you ask for their help. The strongest play is to script out some very specific close-ended questions, along with preparing for the "No", "Maybe" (I.e. The brush off, "send me some information...blah blah blah) or the "Yes", by having a next close ended question. Essentially, you want their help in scheduling a call or identifying and providing a warm intro or contact information to an executive most appropriate to connect with.
- If all else fails, Bud's approach to getting access to Gordon Gecko in the first Wallstreet, still works. Find out something that they like and value, use it to get in the door, and be extraordinarily prepared for your 30 seconds of fame (FYI... what did Bud bring to Gordan, sitting outside his office for most of the day? A special box of cigars)

Daniel F. Hoemke
BaseHealth Inc.

Getting Through Using the "Pretty Ugly" Technique

(This was submitted by our long-time colleague and friend, Jim Domanski.)

This technique is something that I've been teaching for over 25 years. It is even more effective today than ever because of all the electronic communication we receive.

It's about sending physical prospecting letters and brochures, and adding sizzle to them.

By slicing through the clutter with letters and marketing materials that grab attention, chances are that your follow up call will be more successful. Prospects are more likely to take your call, listen to your message and respond more favorably.

Somewhere in life, perhaps through our teachers or parents or bosses, we were taught that a business letter should be like holy script: immaculate, clean, and neat. We have been conditioned that a business letter should have a certain look, appearance and uniformity.

Translated, our letters should look deadly dull and boring. And that's precisely the problem.

All business letters look the same, save for the letterhead. And even if you have a headline and opener that is effective (like we mentioned in last month's column) there is a darn good chance that your letter still looks like the other ten or twelve stacked on the prospect's desk.

Pretty Ugly

The point is, you cannot solely rely on well-written copy. You must leverage it further. To help you get through the clutter, you have to make your letters and brochures "pretty ugly."

By that I mean you must "desecrate" your letters and accompanying material to give it some character and life. Here are some ideas and tips for your letter:

1. Use a highlighter for key points. A nice splash of yellow, pink the prospect's eye. But be judicious: too much is confusing. Be selective when highlighting.
2. Attach a Post-It Note with a personal message. Use the prospect's first name and jot down a thought or two. It's kind of hard to miss and it is sure to be read.

3. Attach your business card with a paper clip (in lieu of a Post-It Note). Reverse it and write on the back. The prospect has a tendency to not only read the note but to remove the card and look at the front.

This reinforces who you are, meaning that you are more likely to be remembered when you make the follow up call.

4. Draw arrows to key points. This is a simple variation on the theme of the marker. The whole objective is to draw the prospect into the copy.

5. Make more marks. Similarly, use a different color pen to underline, circle or square words... particularly benefits. Same principle as number 4 above.

6. Write in the margins. A small note such as "Julie, this applies specifically to you" will draw the prospect's immediate attention like a magnet.

Brochures

I don't know about you but there are two things about brochures that have always struck me. The first is the vast majority of brochures are written not for me, the prospect, but rather for the glorification of the company itself. The second is that they are not overly effective. Many are long, and most times, it is difficult to discern what is being offered and why. Rarely does the brochure skip to the quick. It's a shame, really.

All of which is to say, the average decision making prospect rarely has the time or the inclination to wade through your brochures. Your job is to somehow leverage those precious seconds that the prospect devotes to glancing at your material. Here are some tips that can help draw the prospect into your brochure. Although these are similar to the suggestions for letters, think of how you can apply them specifically to your brochures.

- Know where the most important messages and benefits lie in your brochure and highlight them or draw circles, arrows or squares to attract attention.
- Most brochures have 4-6 pages. If so, use Post It Tape Flags that stick out from the brochure's sides, top or bottom. Write something like "Look Here." Most prospects cannot resist the temptation to flip to the marked pages. And, lo and behold, he or she should find your highlighted message! This saves your prospect time.
- As with your direct mail letters, use a Post It Note or a business card to write a personal note. For example, "Jerry, to save you some time wading through the brochure, I have highlighted the key points that might apply to your situation." Not only does this personalize the material but it also provides a direct benefit.
- Write in the margins. In a sea of typeset words and images, handwriting jumps out at the reader.

There is something about "uglying up" a neat and colorful brochure that really gets the client's attention. Do it with your own.

Summary

The ideas provided here are simple, but extremely effective. They can turn a mediocre letter or brochure into a more powerful selling aid.

Doing these things gives you a decided edge over the vast majority of your competitors who are just sending emails. Remember, your objective is nothing more than to get through the typical clutter that sits on your prospect's desk in order to prepare them for your next call.

Last thing: be careful not to overdo it. Making the letter or brochure look like a dog's breakfast can have the opposite effect. Be wise and strategic regarding your scrawls.

Jim Domanski
President, [TeleConcepts Consulting](http://TeleConceptsConsulting.com)

Contact Art About Your Own Customized Training

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