

Taking the Cold Out of Calls

Cold calls rarely produce positive responses, unless a seed for success is planted ahead of time.

By DON BEVERIDGE

No one can handle constant rejection. And salespeople get more than their share. Forced to make regular cold calls on prospects, salespeople get dejected and oftentimes quit their firms.

While there are hundreds of prospecting practices—including the scheduled appointment, which ranks top in terms of most desirable prospect contact—cold calls remain key in every selling program. Although they trigger more negative responses than any other type of customer contact, they must be included. What's needed is a system for ensuring positive responses to these necessary calls—a system that prepares the new prospect ahead of time for the salesperson's call. It

which starts the process off on a more positive note.

The first step in seeding is to label approximately 20 file folders with suspected customer needs. Profitability, safety, store traffic, return on investment and productivity are just a few of the possible needs. Difficulty in assessing these needs can be overcome easily. First, the salesperson lists five or six major types of businesses that represent the greatest potential for new business. Then he or she gets several publications related to that business. Trade publications write continually about the problems and challenges of specific industries.

The next step in seeding is to make it a habit to browse through business maga-

Four to five times prior to the initial call, the salesperson takes from the files an article suspected to be pertinent to the prospect's needs. He or she sends the prospect a copy of the article, attached to a business card and a note. The personal note says simply that the salesperson thought the prospect might be interested in the attached information. No promotional materials are enclosed, and none is sent as a follow-up.

This practice presents a customer-focused posture. It shows that the salesperson is prepared to talk needs from the client's point of view. It tells the prospect that this salesperson is empathetic, cognizant and concerned. It positions the salesperson to prove later the ability to satisfy—not just identify—a prospect's needs.

Four to eight seedings are done prior to the salesperson's call. Successful salespeople mail 15 to 25 seedings weekly to ensure continuous positive receptions for new calls.

Seeding is resisted by many sales departments because it's an administrative function that appears to pull time away from face-to-face selling. Here's the point that often is missed: Seeding prepares the prospect, upgrades the seller-buyer relationship, improves the environment of the sales call and demonstrates the salesperson's resourcefulness. It is well worth the time in terms of increased positive prospect responses, increased sales and increased job satisfaction.

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must be a system that lets the salesperson demonstrate expertise, empathy and problem-solving skills before he or she ever walks through the prospect's door.

There's a system of doing this that's called "seeding." Seedings are customer-focused activities salespeople should do on a continual basis. The activities prepare the prospect for a sales visit, to the benefit of both prospect and salesperson. In seeding, cold calls are referred to as "new calls,"

zines and the *Wall Street Journal*. The salesperson looks for articles on the suspected prospect needs and saves them in the appropriate file folders.

The next step is to target specific prospects. The salesperson finds out prospects' names and their companies' names—information that can be obtained through a variety of business reference books. Once the prospects are pinpointed, it's time to begin developing a positive impression of the salesperson and firm in the prospect's mind. Each prospect must be made to see value in consistent sales calls by the company representative.

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