

Promiscuous Prospecting

By Jill Konrath

"How many prospecting calls did you make last week?" That's the first thing my sales manager asked me every single Monday morning. I dreaded those meetings because they put me in a no-win position.

I hated to lie, but if I told the truth I'd get in big trouble. My numbers were significantly and consistently below the sacrosanct corporate standards which were established to help us be more successful.

Behind these expectations was the pervasive belief that the more calls you make, the more sales you'll get. Selling was simply a numbers game and I was clearly failing to do my job.

Yet month after month, despite my abysmal prospecting statistics, I outperformed and outsold my colleagues. This paradox confounded me. My manager was stymied as well since it went against everything he'd been taught. But he didn't stop too long to examine what was happening. Instead, he pushed me out the door to make more calls.

All this happened a long time ago when I first started selling. Sometimes I'm amazed at how little has changed.

I was working late in my office one night last year when the phone rang. When I answered, the voice on the other end of the line stammered, totally surprised to find me at my desk. He'd just read my article on voicemails and was checking to see if the phone number in the sample message was really mine. (It was!)

We got to talking about prospecting. He told me that he made 300+ phone calls a day. At first I thought he'd misspoken. No one could possibly make that many calls every single day. But when I double-checked with him, he reiterated that he called 300 prospects each day of the week.

Actually he was quite proud of this achievement. When he first got this job, he was in a large class of new hires. Now he was the only one left. No one else was "tough enough" to keep dialing despite the never-ending rejection.

I wasn't quite so impressed. I told him I thought it was insane and that his company needed to rethink their sales process.

Promiscuous prospecting does NOT work. It never has and it never will. Follow these guidelines to get out of the "More is Better" trap which is absolutely ineffective for selling to big companies in today's marketplace.

BE CHOOSY

To be successful in corporate sales be more selective. Calling indiscriminately on every prospective buyer is a total waste of your time.

Some firms are significantly more likely to buy your products or services than others since your offering has a greater impact on their business than others.

Figure out what it is. Perhaps professional services firms benefit most. Maybe you do best with rapidly growing companies. Possibly your best prospects are going through mergers.

Identify companies that meet your best client profile and then pursue business with them. Target those firms where you have the highest likelihood of success and forget calling everyone else.

BE PREPARED

If you want to work with large corporations, don't ever wing it. To get your foot in the door, it's essential to research the organization.

Corporate decision makers expect you to have a general understanding of their business. They expect you to be up-to-date on trends in their industry and knowledgeable about how other firms are addressing the critical challenges relevant to your offering.

Figure out ahead of time what you're going to say if you get voicemail or if you talk to a real person. Determine how you'll address the common obstacles you invariably encounter. Practice saying these things.

Under the pressure of an actual conversation with a prospective client, I can assure you that you'll sound like a blathering idiot unless you're fully prepared.

BE REFLECTIVE

In my opinion, the biggest error with the "make more calls" theory is the assumption that your sales approach is perfect. If it really was, every time you connect with a decision maker should yield an appointment.

Since that doesn't happen, it's imperative to analyze the multiple variables that influence your success. As such, you might want to evaluate if you've targeted the right companies or identified the appropriate decision makers.

Take a look at what you're saying in your voicemails, written correspondence or phone

conversations. If you're not getting in, experiment with different approaches.

If you encounter objections and obstacles when you do connect with a decision maker, consider what you might be doing to create them. In my experience, nearly all of them can be eliminated upfront by changing your approach.

Now back for a final moment to my own story. Unlike the seller who made 300 calls per day, I focused on finding those opportunities where I had a better chance of getting in.

I was intent on learning what it took capture a decision maker's interest and gain an appointment. Everything was examined through the eyes and ears of my prospects.

This approach required me to continually change what I did. It required me to invest hours in preparation. I viewed it all as a grand experiment. Effectiveness was what counted, not numbers.

As I said earlier, being a promiscuous prospector doesn't work. You have to get smart about it. When you start out, you'll make more calls because you're new at it and making more than your share of mistakes.

Focus on learning. It's the only way you'll ever get yourself out of the numbers game.

Jill Konrath, author of *Selling to Big Companies*, helps sellers get their foot in the door of large corporations, create demand and win profitable contracts. Get a free Sales Call Planning Guide (\$19.95 value) when you sign up for the *Selling to Big Companies* e-newsletter. Just send an email with "subscribe" in the subject line to jill@sellingtobigcompanies.com . For more info, visit <http://www.SellingtoBigCompanies.com> .