

Secrets To Successful Cold Calling

If you think cold calling is dead, you're doing it wrong. Gone are the days when you could pick up the phone and successfully pitch someone on your product or service cold. Gone are the days when a prospect will take 20–30 minutes out of their day, unannounced, to hear your presentation.

But if you think cold calling is dead, you're doing it wrong.

Calling new prospects still works, but the way you approach it has to be right. You can't call expecting to get much of their time. You can't call assuming they want a run-down of your features right away. And you can't call to talk about yourself.

Your prospects are busy. They don't have time for you. But that's exactly how you can approach cold calling to be effective. Make the call about them. Have something prepared to offer them, something that ties directly to a priority or initiative they care about and are working on right now.

Don't take a ton of their time, not right now. But an effective, modern cold call can get the engine running.

Following are some additional pieces published previously offering additional context and best practices on more effective, successful cold calling.

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The Four Cs Of Effective Cold Calling

The primary sources of call reluctance (and we all have it) are a lack of confidence and failure to adequately prepare. If you don't feel prepared, you won't feel confident.

So in an effort to address both, here are four focus areas that, combined, will help you not only feel more prepared and confident when you call, but will also significantly increase your response rate and engagement with new opportunities. Conveniently, they all start with C.

1. Contacts

It all start with who you're targeting in the first place. Who has a problem you can solve? Who cares more intensely about solving that problem? Talking to the right people usually doesn't come in a single answer. There are multiple individuals and roles in the buyer ecosystem that will care about what you're solving for.

And although you'd prefer to have a conversation with the C-level first, you might get more engagement, discover more context and urgency, and be better prepared to attack the opportunity by speaking with someone at a lower level. So, know who you need to talk to, and diversify a bit who that includes to increase your chances of breaking into the account.

2. Context

Knowing who to call is great, but without context you'll just sound like another salesperson. Why are you calling, based on reasons that have more to do with the prospect than with you? What are the compelling events or catalysts inside the organization that make your solution a "need to have" right now?

Leverage public news feeds, individual and social updates, and more to determine which of your targets are ripe for engaging right now. Use tools such as LinkedIn, Gist and SalesLoft to automate discovery of good context for those in your network and pipeline.

3. Content

Think carefully about how you convert context into your actual approach. What will your email say to bridge the gap between their interests and/or priorities, and how you can help? How will you craft a subject line for your follow-up email that compels an open? What is your 30–40 second voicemail script that separates you from the riffraff that clutters voicemail inboxes on a daily basis?

Spend the time you need enumerating these entry-point content pieces. Work with your marketing team to create templates that can be used on a regular basis, and across the sales floor.

4. CRM

The only way to scale your cold-calling efforts and drive effective follow-up is by using a good CRM system to automate the thinking and reminders for you. This can be something like Salesforce.com, but I've also seen successful salespeople use Microsoft Outlook and even Excel to do this. If you have a documented process, almost any set of tools can be used to help you track and follow up with your prospects to increase conversion rates.

Also worth investing in automated follow-up systems so you're maximizing your selling time and automating email follow-up, in particular. Not a requirement, but it can certainly make you more efficient and allow you to put more of your time back on the phone and in front of customers and prospects.

Six Reasons Cold Prospects Will Want To Take Your Call

Cold calling is hard enough, but it's worse when you're just dialing for dollars and going straight for the product pitch. Nobody wants to hear that, and if you actually get through to the prospect in the first place you're going to get shut down quickly.

Fortunately, there are several strategies you can use to increase cold prospect penetration, and accelerate their interest in both taking your call and spending time talking to you. Imagine, prospects interested in taking your call!

Here are six specific things to integrate into your own sales efforts.

1. Offer Something Of Value (Independent Of A Purchase)

Know your audience well enough that you can create and offer them something that immediately helps them in their current job. Make it something that's fast and easy to say yes to, and quick to digest as well. This isn't the entire sales process, but the beginning of your relationship-building and a great ice-breaker that demonstrates you're not just about getting the sale, but also helping someone solve a problem or get closer to an intended outcome. White papers, research reports, free samples. They all count.

2. Call At A Good Time

Calling your prospect in the middle of a busy workday isn't likely to get the phone answered. And if they do answer, they'll be harried, distracted, and short on time. Try to make more of your calls at the beginning and end of the day. Get in early and call before 8 a.m. local time, when prospects (executives in particular) may get in a little early too before their meetings start. Call at this time or after 5 p.m. and they're more likely to not be in meetings, and it's also likely that any gatekeeper or administrative assistant isn't at their desk and screening calls.

3. Schedule Them In Advance

Cold calls, by definition, are interruptions. You're calling someone who isn't expecting your call, and who at best might have a few minutes to spare but not be in the

mindset of thinking about what you're pitching. Get permission to have that call in advance (ideally including that offer of value from the first point above), and you'll have a more focused and prepared prospect. This won't always be the case, but it may increase the rate of qualified, successful conversations you're having to move leads into near-term opportunities.

4. Get Warm Introductions

There are too many tools available today (many for free) that can help you tap into the networks of your peers, colleagues, fellow sales reps, past employees, and more. Depending on what you're selling and to whom, you're likely no more than 2–3 connections away from the individual you want to speak with. Are you actively using those connections? Is your LinkedIn profile up to date and are you connected with everyone you know professionally? Are you using tools like IntroRocket to tap into the networks of everyone else at your company?

5. Get The Gatekeeper's Buy-In And Approval First

The decision maker, your primary prospect, is really busy. Their administrative assistant is busy too, but part of their job is to figure out what's most important to get through to their boss. Treat that individual not as a gatekeeper, but as an initial decision maker and advocate for the problem-solving and/or outcome you represent. If they think you can help them, their boss and/or their company, they're more likely to help you get the conversation you need.

6. Reference Something Important (And Recent) To Them

Show your prospect that you've done your homework, and that you can attach something you care about with something they care about. A recent product launch, a highly-publicized security breach, a round of funding. Something important that you can key in on and play to, that will make what you're talking about that much more relevant.

What works for you? What angles or information or insights do you use to earn conversations with your prospects?

Four Essential Steps Before Cold-Calling A New Prospect

Cold calling is really very simple. Primal. Pick up the phone and reach someone.

Of course, to do it well, there's far more nuance and skill required than that. Before your next cold call (whether you're dialing once or a few dozen times today), follow these four steps:

1. Do Your Homework

Who is it that you're calling? What do they care about? What are they thinking about right now, and what have they done recently? What clues can you gather—quickly—that can not only tell you that the prospect has an immediate problem you can solve, but also that can customize your message, pitch and angle so that you're directly aligned with what they care about right now? Much of this kind of research can be done with tools like Gist and InsideView.

Take a moment or two to find out what you may have in common with the prospect, as well as who you may have in common. Check their social profiles for interests, and look them up on LinkedIn to see which connections you may have in common one or two degrees away (check out IntroRocket for a great way to do this within your own organization too).

2. Prepare

Have your key messages handy (but don't read from them—you should know them well enough to sound natural). Use a headset. Make sure you have good energy. The prospect can hear whether you're smiling or not. Take a deep breath. Much of this is physical preparation, but it's extremely important (even though they can't see you).

3. Have An Offer

What's in it for them? Are you asking prospects to sleep with you on the first date, or do you have something more compelling to offer at this early stage that's enough to pique their interest and earn the right to share more? If you're calling to get demos vs. calling with something of inherent, independent value, your conversion rates will suffer commensurately.

4. Be Ready To Leave A Voicemail

The vast majority of cold-callers “wing it” in their voicemails. I'm not a fan of using call scripts once you have someone live, but voicemails are the exception. Here are some tips for how to craft a better voicemail that generates more interest and response.

Ten Best Practices For Better Cold Calling

Cold calling is hard, there's no getting around that. It can often feel like a machete in the jungle, but some of the most successful salespeople in the world have and continue to drive their own performance and results based on the cold call.

Here are 10 specific best practices to improve your cold calling approach, performance and results.

1. Have An Offer

Don't make the call with an ask, but call with an offer. Give something of value to the prospect, free of charge and with no strings attached. Make it something immediately relevant to their current business or priorities. Use it as a means of starting the conversation, breaking the ice, and building some quick early trust and credibility.

2. Stay Focused On Volume

Cold calling is either a numbers game or a ratio game, depending on who you ask. The numbers game implies focusing on a high volume of activities to reach interested prospects, and the ratio game implies driving a higher rate of success with the lists, offers and context in which you sell. Either way, results are driven by volume. As a cold caller, oftentimes the one and only thing you can control is the number of times you pick up the phone and dial again. Use volume to your advantage.

3. Get In The Zone And Avoid Distractions

It's all too easy to make a couple calls and find an excuse to get up. Refresh your coffee, chat with your manager, do a victory lap, whatever. Ignore the temptation to get up so often, and stay focused on more activity. Turn off your Facebook, put your phone away, put on your headset and keep working.

4. Get Comfortable With Rejection And Have A Short Memory

The majority of the time you're cold-calling, you're hearing rejection. You will hear "no" far more than "yes," and the best reps in the world push right through to that and into the next call. The best professionals in the world—athletes, inventors, innovators—all face failure constantly, but know that their next success is just one at-bat or idea or cold call away.

5. Learn From Those Around You

If your organization has a formal best practice-sharing focus (via a library or team meetings or otherwise), soak it up like a sponge. Find the other sales reps on your team who are successful cold callers and take them to lunch or

coffee. Learn their best practices directly. Read books, blogs, newsletters. Constantly improve based on what's already working around you.

6. Dress Up

There is a big difference between cold-calling in ratty blue jeans and in nice dress pants. You may only be on the phone, but you will feel far more professional and your work product will relay that. Dress the part.

7. Use A Wireless Headset

I'm surprised at how many inside sales reps still prefer the handset phone. Anything that gets in the way of keeping a rhythm and staying in the zone when you're calling is a distraction. With a headset, you're also much more likely to evoke passion into your voice when speaking with a prospect, since your hands and body are more free to move naturally as you speak.

8. Your Lists Are Always Going To Suck

It's not marketing's fault. Lists, inherently, aren't perfect. You're going to call someone who isn't at the company anymore, or who isn't the right contact. You're going to call a company that's not in your target market. Know that the quality of your list is part of the process. Work with your sales manager (and marketing team) to constantly improve list quality based on call results and conversion rates, but know when to quickly move on from a bad contact or number to the next one.

9. Set Goals And Mini-Rewards Throughout The Day

You're motivated by closed sales and commission checks, obviously. But also give yourself mini-rewards to work towards throughout the day as motivation to keep activity high. It could be a latte run after XX number of dials, or an afternoon treat once you hit a particular activity milestone. Find the tactical, tangible ways to motivate yourself throughout the day to keep going.

10. Use A Disposition Process And Move On

Just because you make one call and leave a voicemail doesn't mean you're done with that prospect. Create and/or use a disposition process to effectively work through each prospect—with a short sequence of calls, voicemails and follow-up emails over the course of several business days. If you don't have any response after this disposition sequence, mark the lead as "nurture" and move on. There's a short point of diminishing returns with a prospect who hasn't responded to your advances, and you'll be much more likely to reach a qualified prospect live if you play the numbers this way.

How To Prepare For Your Next Sales Call

Whether you're making outbound cold calls or preparing for a scheduled discussion with a new prospect, the last thing you want to do is sit down and dial without any preparation. Successful selling, primarily over the phone but in field sales environments as well, has as much to do with preparation as it does with your natural skills in reacting to the situation unfolding before you.

The good news is that, with practice and the right tools, preparing for your next sales tool can take just a few minutes, and will have a significant impact on your conversion rate and success. Here are a few tips.

What Does Success Look Like?

Have a clear image of what success looks like at the end of the call, both for you and for your prospect. What next steps do you want from the call? Based on your knowledge of the prospect (or at minimum your expectation of their needs if they're indeed qualified), what do you anticipate they would consider a successful outcome of your conversation? This includes both progress made during the call as well as expectations and an anticipation of what's to happen after the call (including next steps, promises and deliverables on either end). With this success explicitly in mind, you can ensure your call is always focused or getting back on track to meet that outcome.

Have You Done Your Homework?

What do you know about your prospect? What they're thinking, what they care about, what they've recently done or written, who they know that you might also know? Take advantage of tools such as LinkedIn and Gist to quickly do your homework and customize parts of your pitch to improve the likelihood that you'll achieve that mutually-successful outcome.

Why Would The Prospect Take Your Call?

Your prospect is busy, and either didn't anticipate your call (if you're cold calling) or was nice enough to give you a few minutes out of their busy schedule (in anticipation of something you might give them of value). For the qualified prospect, knowing what's keeping them so busy (what their primary focus areas are right now) and what you

have to contribute to that is key to getting and keeping their attention. If you can't answer this question, or you identify early in the call that you don't have something to contribute to their priorities, the prospect is likely not qualified. Politely end the call so you can both give yourselves back the valuable time.

What Does Your First 10 Seconds Sound Like?

You can't script a sales call word for word, but you can script the first 10 seconds. It's what you say immediately to get the prospect's attention and earn the right to continue. Especially when cold calling, your prospect is more likely to blow you off than give you a couple minutes. Those first few seconds are critical to not only determining if the prospect is worth your continued time, but also to ensure what you're talking about is important enough for the prospect to continue the conversation.

How Will You Immediately Follow-Up?

The conversation goes well, and next steps have been planned. Do you follow-up right away, or wait until later? There's value in batching follow-up activities together after multiple sales calls, but I believe the value of immediate follow-up outweighs the efficiency of batching. Getting the next meeting on the prospect's calendar, or sending the follow-up information immediately (when they're likely still at their desk and in their email), gives you a higher likelihood that next steps on the prospect's end will be followed. It also shows the prospect that you're on the ball, a professional, someone they can take seriously.

How Quickly Can You Get Ready For The Next Call?

Cold calling is hard. Grinding through a slug of calls, cold or planned, takes focus and discipline. It's extremely easy to get off of your last call, especially if it went well, and defocus. It's easy to get up, get some more coffee, do a victory lap and tell others or your manager about your progress. But the best thing to do is complete your next steps, then start the whole process over again. Get back on the phone, and keep building your pipeline. Promise yourself a break, or some small reward, after staying focused for the next 60 minutes. I guarantee you'll be far more productive and happy with your results.

Do You Expect Sales Prospects To Sleep With You On The First Date?

We ask so much of our prospects. They download a white paper and we think they're ready to buy. They attend a Webinar and we wonder why they won't return our calls.

You don't know me, we just met, but do you want to go away for the weekend? Wanna come home with me? The answer is usually no. Not so fast.

But we expect our sales prospects to move quickly. We expect them to make commitments before we really get to know them, and they get to know us.

When you're cold calling, do you really ask for 30 minutes of their time? Do you ask for an appointment or try to schedule a demo without context, without some conversation, without foreplay?

Shouldn't you offer something first?

Give them something that they value. Woo them a little. Take time to get to know them, figure out what makes them tick, and respond in kind. Yes, this requires patience.

It doesn't move nearly as fast as you want it to. But you're not in control. The buyer is.

Expecting a brand new list of prospects, a cold list, to attend a seminar next week isn't reasonable. Three months from now, maybe. But first, they need to get to know you. Recognize you. Associate you with something of significant enough value, pertinent to what they value and care about, that they're willing to take the next step and spend more time with you.

That seminar may be just another step towards a deeper relationship, a paying relationship, but that too sometimes takes time to earn and convert.

Sales is a process. You're in control of the steps, but not necessarily the velocity. The more you push, the more likely you'll end up turning good prospects away. But respect the process, and the buyer, and you'll close the deals you're looking for.

Five Tips To Avoid Call Reluctance And Reach New Prospects

Most sales professionals hate cold calling. Following up with existing leads sometimes isn't much better or easier. Even the best salespeople often have a strong case of call reluctance that's difficult to shake.

But once successful salespeople get rolling, they often find it easy to keep that momentum and generate results—live contacts, interested prospects, new sources of closeable pipeline.

Here are five ways to get past that case of call reluctance and get more of your leads moving towards a sale.

1. Script The First 30 Seconds

Oftentimes call reluctance comes from a concern that the beginning of a conversation may be awkward. Get past that fear by writing down, visualizing and even practicing the first 20–30 seconds of the call. Have a specific script you will use printed out and next to your phone. It'll give you confidence that each call will be easier to warm up, and get right to the conversation you want to be having.

2. Have A Great Voicemail Script Ready

Let's face it, most of the calls you make will result in a voicemail. Many sales pros leave a long, rambling voicemail with no direction, no urgency and no call to action. Have a great voicemail script ready beforehand, and use it every time. Leave something that's no longer than 40–45 seconds, had a good pace, a sense of urgency, and a strong offer or call to action to get your prospect to call back quickly. When you have a voicemail script like this, that you know works, it's easier and faster to get through more of your calls (because you know those prospects will be calling back).

3. Turn Off All Other Distractions

You've done it too—you make the first couple calls, get a kernel of momentum, then check your email or Facebook page and it's all gone. When you're ready to make those calls, turn off everything—email, your Web browser, RSS feeds, notifications, everything. Get yourself into a zone where you're making those calls and nothing else. You'll be surprised how quickly you get through the list, and drive results for yourself.

4. Get Momentum, And Keep Going

On a related note, have a strong list to call and keep going until you're through it. Do it at a set time, perhaps the same time of the day every day, and make sure those around you know you're staying focused. This can take discipline, even if you don't have distractions. You leave a couple good voicemails, maybe have a good conversation that moves a prospect along, and you want to get some more coffee. Tell your manager. Avoid these things, and make the next call.

5. Do It Early, Or Do It Late

When you first get into the office in the morning, make those calls. There won't be firedrills, you won't know what's awaiting you in your email, and you're more likely to get call-backs later that day from the voicemails you've left in the morning. Next best strategy is to schedule those calls late in the day. After 4 p.m., you're more likely to catch your prospect in their office, doing their own catch-up before leaving for the day. You'll either reach more people live, or leave voicemails that will be returned first-thing the next day (getting your *next* sales day off to a great start).

More Information About Us



About Matt Heinz

Matt Heinz is the Founder and President of Heinz Marketing Inc. Matt brings more than 12 years of marketing, business development and sales experience from a variety of organizations, vertical industries and company sizes. His career has focused on delivering measurable results for his employers and clients in the way of greater sales, revenue growth, product success and customer loyalty.

About Heinz Marketing

Heinz Marketing is a Seattle marketing agency focused on sales acceleration. Heinz Marketing helps clients achieve sustained sales success by growing revenue from existing customers and cost effectively identifying and winning new customers.

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