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Nobody likes cold calls, but they have a place in business.



Strategies

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Please don't take this as an invitation to call me. But today, I'm going to discuss a way to increase your business that you probably don't want to hear about: cold calling.

What exactly is a "cold call?" It's a sales call — on the phone or in person — to someone who has neither approached you nor expressed interest in your products or services.

I know you hate making cold calls, and we all certainly hate getting them. Who wants another call from a mortgage company, phone service or credit card company, especially at dinnertime? But have you ever stopped and wondered why telemarketers keep calling when we all hate them?

Here's the dirty little secret: Cold calls work.

In our own businesses, we may neglect cold calls because we don't have time. Perhaps we think they wouldn't be effective in our type of business. More likely, we don't make them because we hate the prospect of selling, especially to strangers. And who likes having all those people tell us "No"?

But cold calls can be effective, especially if you spend time to find appropriate potential leads. And if your business is stagnant or you're developing a new product or service line, they can be a relatively inexpensive way to attract new customers.

You probably already do cold calling already. You just don't think of it as a sales call. When you call a big company about forming a strategic partnership or exhibit at a trade show, you're out there looking for new business from prospects that aren't yet interested in your company. Viewed that way, cold calling doesn't seem distasteful.

What's the secret of cold call success?

•**Change your perspective.** Most of us think of a sales call as "bothering" the other person. But if you offer something you truly believe meets a real need at a good value, then you're not a bother but a help. If you don't believe in what you're selling, don't sell it.

• **"Qualify" your leads.** We really hate sales calls that don't relate to us. Find ways to narrow down your target list. That saves you time and increases your success rate. Identify the characteristics that your customers have in common and concentrate on new prospects with those same characteristics.

• **Listen.** Find out what your prospect wants and needs before you start your sales pitch. Make sure your product or service is a good fit. Otherwise, you're not only imposing on your prospect, you're wasting your time.

• **Develop a great pitch.** Be clear about what you're offering and the benefits to the customer. Write out your pitch and the most important points well before you make your first call, but don't read it. Think about the objections you're likely to hear and have responses ready.

• **Take people literally.** If a prospect says, "I'm not interested right now," believe he means now. Perhaps he'll be interested another time. Ask if you can call later.

• **Don't be obnoxious.** Take "No" for an answer. If someone's not interested, why waste your time or hers? Be polite. The prospect may know someone else who's interested.

• **Mind your manners.** If you walk in on someone who is on the phone, wait. If you're phoning, and the person says, "Now's not a good time," ask when a good time would be, then get off the phone.

• **Give yourself a quota.** Set a minimum, but realistic, number of calls you have to make before you can call it quits for the day. Stick to it.

• **Stay in practice.** Cold calling is difficult, and it's easy to forget how to do it well. So make calls from time to time even when you aren't looking for a lot of new work.

Finally, don't take rejection personally and don't get discouraged. Remember, you've got to kiss a lot of frogs before you find a prince.

Rhonda Abrams is author of The Successful Business Plan: Secrets & Strategies and president of The Planning Shop, publishers of books and other tools for business plans. Register for Rhonda's free business planning newsletter at www.PlanningShop.com. For an index of her columns, [click here](#). Copyright Rhonda Abrams 2005.