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Why Prospecting Fails And What To Do About It

Engaging prospects so they want to find you

By
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Prospecting is arguably the #1 hot topic in sales. In spite of all the seminars, podcasts, training programs, books, and pressure from managers, most salespeople are prospecting excuse experts. Even when cajoled, pushed, and incentivized, salespeople have a tough time getting their prospecting engine to run on one cylinder—at most.

Why is there so much resistance to getting out and finding new customers? Why do people who enjoy selling find it so difficult to sell themselves to prospects? The answer may be that selling and prospecting require two different skill sets. Even those who are good at closing sales never have enough leads. They balk at prospecting. This may seem strange, but it isn't.

Think about it. Ask salespeople what they want most and most will say, "Referrals." If that's true, then why do so few ask for them? *Here's the point: salespeople are most confident when the path is prepared for them, whether it's a referral or some other qualified lead.*

This tells us that instead of spending time trying to find prospects, it's much more productive if prospects find the salesperson. Now, keep on going: *you must make the impression before you give your presentation.* In other words, prospects must have a positive picture of you before a meeting takes place.

While many salespeople may consider this counter-intuitive or even nonsense, it makes sense to customers. They want to know, trust and feel comfortable with a salesperson *before* they buy.

It's easy to understand why some of those in sales say that getting customers to find them sounds like a lot of work. And they're right, it is. But wait a minute. Spending time trying to find prospects and getting negligible results is also a lot of work—wasted work. Even if you get in front of a few, the chances are that the timing is wrong, they're not interested, or "something came up."

If a prospect doesn't know the salesperson, it's so easy to say "no thanks." To illustrate the point, three emails arrived while writing this article. Two asked for an appointment, and the other was a follow up to a previous request for a meeting. *No one has time to meet with someone they don't know.* That's not all. It doesn't make sense for a salesperson to use valuable time being turned down—and probably for the wrong reasons.

It's easy to blow it, so don't make the deadly mistake of asking for an appointment or, if that doesn't work, the name of someone they may know that you can contact. If you do, you're just another salesperson looking for a quick hit. *This is how good prospects are lost.*

So, why not take a different approach—one that's more consistent with how prospects think and what they expect from salespeople. It's *Pull Prospecting, making it possible for them to find you.*

Here's how to go about it:

First, get your head straight. In one sentence, describe why someone should do business with you. Why it's in their best interest to spend their money with you, and why should they trust you? Now, read it out loud—slowly. Are you satisfied with it? Would you do business with someone who said the same thing?

This isn't about an "elevator speech," and it's not about what you sell. It's what you do for your customers that keeps them coming back. It's what sets you apart from the competition. Or, are you just another salesperson?

Second, develop a mindset for creating customers. What do you want to accomplish? Find someone who will listen to your spiel? Get through the door? Sell something? If that's what you want, then you're in trouble; selling isn't about the salesperson, it's about the customer.

Here's what happens. No matter how genuine you may be or how much you try to avoid sounding like a "salesperson," prospects see you differently. *What they hear is not what you're saying.* They sense you want to sell them something, and they get their guard up.

Takeaway: your primary job as a salesperson is to create customers who know, understand, and trust you, so they want to buy from you.

Third, get inside your prospects' heads. It's a salesperson's workspace, figuring out what prospects want, what they worry about, and the challenges they face. This is where you do the work of wooing them. It's also where salespeople come to life and where they're understood and valued.

What's the picture prospects have of you? Is it fuzzy, confused or negative or even neutral? Or is it positive and compelling? If it isn't—if there's nothing special about you—you're just another salesperson trying to get an order.

Prospecting isn't about getting through the door; it's about shaping the way prospects think of you, so they will want to do business with you. It's all about pulling them into your orbit. You can use these six Prospecting Principles to bring them closer to you:

- Focus on what prospects want and need, not what you want
- Demonstrate your competence by sharing your knowledge
- Cultivate prospects by staying in touch with them regularly
- Maximize your visibility by seeking presentation opportunities, authoring blogs, and acquiring testimonials
- Never stop building your prospect database
- Communicate regularly by email, LinkedIn, and Facebook

Prospecting is all about creating customers—those who want to do business with you. No matter who you are or where you work, constant prospecting is your future in sales. More than anything else, it's what makes you valuable.

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