

How do you prospect?

Tips to keep in mind for different types of outreach:



By phone:

When cold calling a prospect by phone, it can take upwards of eight calls to get

a response. And 80% of calls go to voicemail, so have a script prepared for what you want to say and keep your message under 15 seconds. Experts say that 93% of cold call success depends on your tone of voice, so keep it upbeat each time you call – and you'll need to call more than once, always leaving your name and reason for reaching out.



By email:

Email can be an effective outreach tool, even to prospects like farmers who aren't at

a computer all day. At least 40% of emails are opened on a mobile device, so create emails assuming they'll be opened on a cell phone or tablet. Keep subject lines brief – 4-7 words – and personalized – it increases the likelihood of a prospect opening the email by 22%. Like voicemail, keep it brief and plan to send more than one message.



In person:

Many seed salespeople prefer to just stop by farms in their territory and ask to talk to

growers. When you do, be respectful of the farmer's time and try to keep the conversation to 10-15 minutes on the first call.

Don't forget about other potential sources for prospecting, such as meeting people at tradeshow or searching county directories to learn about farms in your sales territory.

SALES:

Prospecting: The art of reaching out

As you begin your selling season, it's a great time to think about how you approach prospecting for new customers. Has your previous approach been effective? Or are there some ways to refine your prospecting tactics to better reach potential customers and build those relationships? We talked with Joe Bannon, Senior Vice President, Global Marketing and Brand Strategy at 5MetaCom, about some things to consider as you begin the prospecting process.

While nearly all salespeople love the relationship-building part of their job, Joe says that prospecting is often one of their least favorite tasks. However, it's necessary in order to reach potential customers.

Reaching out by email, phone/voicemail or in person to set up a meeting can all be effective for initiating contact with a potential customer. Stopping by in person is the most expensive way, so Joe suggests asking existing customers for referrals to help make those calls more fruitful. We all know how important relationships are in the seed business – that's why you work so hard to cultivate and keep them – and the relationships you already have can be a great source for prospecting. After all, your customers know how well the products you sell perform, and they likely know other farmers who would like to see those same yields and get great customer service. Plus, studies show that nearly half of referrals (47%) become top performers. In a business-to-business selling environment like ours, 91% of customers say they would give a referral, but only 8% of sales reps ask for them. "If you're talking to a farmer who has seen success, ask them who else they think would have great success with the products," Joe advises. "Ask if you can use their name when contacting a prospect. Most farmers are much more willing to give you 10

or 15 minutes when someone they know suggested that you call."

The first step in prospecting is just to introduce yourself and try to get an opportunity to have another interaction. The second step is to build rapport and start a conversation. Joe says that you do that through a dialog with the prospect – a combination of questions and sharing relevant information. Ask questions about a farmer's current situation and future goals. Joe says, "I would say, 'Tell me a little bit about your farm and how things are working for you.' Then look for gaps – they may be satisfied now, but most folks want better yields in two or three years. That's where there's an opening and a chance to try to win their business." As you learn about their business and satisfaction levels with their current seed company, you can share information such as success stories from nearby farms, FIRST Trials results or other information that could be helpful in making a connection with the farmer.

As you head out to try to build your business, remember that the key to prospecting is building relationships. Reach out, learn about a potential customer's needs and wants, build a rapport, share information and hopefully those relationships will change from "prospect" to "customer."



Joe Bannon, Senior Vice President, Global Marketing and Brand Strategy at 5MetaCom, has over 40 years of experience in agricultural sales and marketing, and currently works with B2B companies on brand strategy, internal alignment and sales training.