

ANATOMY OF A SUCCESSFUL COLD CALL

by Maxine Dunn

First, let's just get clear: What is a "cold call?" A cold call is a telephone call that you make to someone you do not know to ask for information, make a request, or offer a product or service.

For some reason the term "cold call" has received a bum rap as of late. While it's true that your website should be pre-qualifying leads (customers and clients) for you, I firmly believe that reaching out to people by phone should be an integral part of any entrepreneur's marketing strategy.

Some of my biggest-grossing client relationships - clients for whom I've been working steadily for years - started off with a cold call from me.

Even if you're not interested in creating a branch of your marketing strategy that includes calling prospective clients on the phone, there will still be times in your life where you have to pick up the phone and call someone you don't know to ask for information or help. Knowing how to handle yourself in that situation will be an asset to your business and subsequently to your bottom line.

First, I want you to let go of the idea that the purpose of a cold call is to get an appointment. Forget the "sales objective" training modules that lead you through a step-by-step trajectory to "get the sale."

People do business with people they know, like, and trust, and your cold call is opening the door and initiating that relationship. My techniques will make your cold-calling experience easy and fun. You'll be amazed at how much better your prospective clients respond as a result of following these guidelines.

1. Adjust your expectations

Make your cold-calling expectations easy-to-meet. If your expectations are to "make a sale" or actually even reach the person you're calling, you may well be disappointed.

Decide that your #1 goal for the call is simply to have a pleasant conversation with whoever you get on the phone. That's it! Even if you just speak to the receptionist for thirty seconds, your sole objective is to make the conversation pleasant and enjoyable. See how much easier the call is already?

2. Be prepared – part A

Know a lot about who you're calling. Research their website. Watch every demo reel. Read every bio. Read reviews. Know their company's history. What products they make. If they use your type of products or services. Their business hours. Their location. Everything.

Being knowledgeable about the person and company you're calling is not only respectful and professional, you'll be able to ask intelligent, spontaneous questions and give informed responses in your conversation.

3. Be prepared – part B

Write out an outline or a brief "script" of what information you'd like to share and what information you're calling to discover. This is not a "pitch" that you read. Having an outline of the important points you'd like to convey will help keep you succinct, on track, and prevent too many of those fumbling-for-words moments you might experience if nerves take over.

4. Be respectful

If you hear phones ringing in the background or get put on hold immediately by a hurried-sounding receptionist, pay attention! If you can tell it's not a good time to call then get off the phone. You can simply say, "I was calling for Bill Russell but it sounds like you're super busy right now. Would it be better if I call back later?"

You will be amazed at how showing empathy for the person on the other end of the phone will immediately soften their tone of voice, allow them to relax momentarily, and will very probably get you transferred right away.

5. Be sincere

I want you to talk into the phone as if your best friend is sitting in front of you. I want you to be totally engaged and present.

Do not multi-task when you are on the phone. Listen. Care. People can sense when you're just politely listening and waiting for them to finish so you can speak.

They can tell when you're reading from a script and not being sincere. Really, really, listen and respond as if you're responding to a friend you care deeply about.

6. Ask for what you want

After following the previously mentioned steps, simply ask for what you want. Simple. Clear. No hidden agenda. Direct, short sentences are best. "Would you prefer to receive my CD in the mail or would you like me to email you the link to my site?" "What do you suggest is the best way to submit my article to your office?"

People (even big, C-level corporate types) like short, honest, direct questions with no "salesy" agenda.

7. Get off the phone first

This is self-explanatory. Do not be rambling on so long that your client finally has to say, "...well, I really have to get back to work here..." Make **certain** you end the call first. That way they'll be more likely to take your calls in the future when they know you won't be taking up too much of their time.

8. Stay organized

During or after your conversation, take detailed notes: The name of the person who answered the phone. The date and time of your call. Details that were mentioned in the call. Did they just get back from vacation?

Is the office being remodeled? Did they mention they had a project coming up in six weeks that could use your services? Keep extremely detailed records of your call so you can refer back to talking points if you need to.

When you get your prospective client on the phone the second time and you remember to ask how his son's soccer game went, they'll practically faint. Rarely do people remember important information. Stand out. Be organized. And pay attention to the smallest details.

9. Follow up

The fortune is in the follow-up. Remember, you are developing a relationship. And be very patient. Sometimes it can take a couple of weeks or five or more phone calls to reach the person you want to talk to.

Make sure you factor in marketing time in your business day for your follow-ups. Keep in touch with your prospective clients by mail, e-mail, fax or phone. If you say you're going to call back next Tuesday at 10:00 am, then call back next Tuesday at 10:00 am.

Touch base to see if they have received what you sent, have any questions, or would like any additional information. Send a thank-you note with a Starbucks gift-card to the receptionist who was so helpful on those five different occasions. Keep in touch!

Making phone calls to prospective clients can be fun, exciting, and rewarding – it's all in how you approach it. So remember to:

- change your expectations – make it about having great conversations, not making a sale
- be prepared, Part A – know a lot about who you're calling
- be prepared, Part B – write out an outline or brief pitch so you can stay on track and not ramble
- soften your approach – be sincere and respectful
- be patient and gently persistent – know that relationship building takes time and be okay with that
- keep highly detailed records – your conversations are gold-mines of information
- follow up, follow up, and then follow up again

I guarantee that if you follow my guidelines you'll discover that not only can cold calls be a wonderful way to introduce yourself to new clients and customers, they are a great way to get you out of your comfort zone while developing a very important entrepreneurial skill-set.