

Cold Isn't Bold, It's Old!

The receptionist dialed the extension of the printing buyer and said: "There's an invisible printing salesman in the lobby."

The printing buyer replied: "Tell him I can't see him today."

Losing Proposition

When I first heard that joke, it was a doctor and an invisible patient, but it occurred to me that it's a better joke with a printing buyer and a printing salesperson. The point, of course, is that cold calling—defined as walking into a building without an appointment and expecting to meet with a printing buyer—is a losing proposition.

Cold calling on the telephone may have more potential, but only if it's done correctly and with the right expectations in mind (more on that to follow). I think it's fair to say, though, that *cold* is always bad in selling, at least when compared to *warm*. The top achievers in printing sales avoid *cold* any time they can.

I expressed that idea in a seminar recently, and an attendee told me that it conflicted with something he was taught many years ago. "My first sales manager used to say that 'cold is bold,' and that you had to have that kind of guts to make it in sales," he said. When I asked how far back that went, he answered: "Oh, the late 60's, or maybe the early 70's."

"Back in those days," I replied, "cold calling was an accepted practice, and part of the reason was that buyers had more time to spend with sellers. Think about all of the layoffs and downsizing that's gone on since then, especially during the last 20 years. Did any actual work disappear during those years? No, all that disappeared was people, and what 'lean and mean' means in American business is that most of the people in today's white-collar workforce are doing the same amount of work that 3-4 people were doing back then."

"Cold isn't bold," I continued, "it's old!"

Cold On The Phone

As noted earlier, cold calling on the telephone may have more potential than walking into a building expecting to meet with a decision-maker, but you really do have to have the right strategy and expectations. I've been saying for years that the only thing a printing salesperson can sell over the telephone is an appointment, and that's also consistent with my overall definition of prospecting, which goes like this: *Prospecting is an activity chain which begins with the identification of suspect companies and ends with the first face-to-face meeting*. In other words, the goal of all prospecting activities is to get face-to-face with potential customers.

Here's how I'd start a telephone cold call: "Mr. Smith, my name is Dave Fellman, and I'm a salesperson for Fellman Printing. We're a local, full-service printing company, and I'd like to sit down with you and talk about your printing needs. Can we schedule a day and time for that meeting right now, or would it be more appropriate to talk on the phone a little bit to explore how close a match there is between your needs and our capabilities?"

The answer I'm hoping for is "Let's set up a time to get together." I almost started that sentence with the word "Obviously," but I'm not sure that it is obvious. So let me make this clear. You *really* want to meet face-to-face. The *only* reason to have any part of that conversation over the telephone is to convince a printing buyer that there is enough of a match to justify a meeting. *Do not* use this as an opportunity to tell a printing buyer all about your capabilities. Try and limit it to a short discussion to determine that they do buy exactly the kind of printing and related services that you're best equipped to sell, and then go for the close: "OK Mr. Smith, it sure sounds like your needs match up pretty well with our capabilities. I think setting up an appointment to take this to the next step would be a good move for both of us. How does your schedule look for (later this week/early next week/a specific day and time)?"

Low Probability

The main drawback to this strategy is the probability—low!—that you'll find yourself talking to the decision-maker. Far more likely is that you'll find yourself talking to his/her voicemail. OK, you can certainly leave the first part of that conversation as a message, but I'm not sure that's enough of a reason for the printing buyer to call you back.

I teach a strategy which avoids cold calls in the first place by sending an introductory letter. The letter carries the same message that makes up the first part of the cold call conversation I recommend, but instead of asking for a return phone call, it takes advantage of the opportunity to make a promise and then keep it, and paves the way for what I've found to be a more effective first phone contact. "Hello, Mr. Smith, this is Dave Fellman from Fellman

Printing. I wrote to you the other day, and I promised that I'd be calling to see if we can set up an appointment. How does your schedule look for (later this week/early next week/a specific day and time)?"

I guess it comes down to this, would you rather make cold calls or warm calls?

Targeting Titles

Please look back at my opening joke and note the capitalization on the term "printing buyer"—all lower case to reflect a responsibility rather than a title. In the old days, there were certainly individuals titled "Printing Buyer," especially in large companies. And while there are undoubtedly still some spread across the current business landscape, the vast majority of printing buyers wear titles like Marketing Manager, Human Resources Manager, Office Manager, etc.

As I've written before, ("Targeting Titles" *QP*, December 2002—also available in the article archives at www.davefellman.com), knowing the actual titles of your current customers makes it easier to identify the right contacts when you're prospecting for new business. If the gatekeeper/receptionist isn't sure who you should be talking to, you can simply suggest one of your targeted titles, and that should at least provide you with a starting point.

I still suggest asking an open-ended question first: "Who's the person most involved in buying printing for your company?" It's been my experience that some companies operate far differently than others, and I don't want to miss out on an opportunity because I made an incorrect assumption. As an example, a gatekeeper recently told one of my clients that most of the printing at her company was purchased by the Plant Safety Officer. A letter, a follow-up phone call, two face-to-face meetings and several more phone calls and e-mails later, this Plant Safety Officer has ordered more than \$6,000 worth of printing from my client—and provided a referral and introduction to the Human Resources Manager!