



BECAUSE THE FUNDAMENTALS ARE NOT OPTIONAL.

JV/M, Inc.
Need Sales?

How to Find Qualified B2B Telemarketers: Pre-Screening for Sales Perspective (Part 2 of 4)

Introduction

One of the major challenges for companies that want to generate new sales in the business-to-business (B2B) market is finding salespeople who are willing and able to make cold calls. But because most field salespeople don't like making cold calls, many salespeople are ineffective at it, and good cold-calling behaviors often contradict good field-selling behaviors, many companies have come to the conclusion that segregating the cold-calling function from the other sales functions (such as covering your bases and closing,) is a cost-effective solution. It frees up experienced salespeople to focus on making presentations and closing business, while it theoretically cost-reduces the lead generation function by using less expensive telemarketers.

Once the decision is made to segregate the functions, however, the challenge then becomes one of finding telemarketers who are truly qualified to make cold-calls to business executives and other decision makers, which always includes getting past gatekeepers and voice mail, and often includes uncovering needs. But while there are over 2.5 million telemarketers in the US according to the US Department of Labor, in attempting to recruit qualified "bird dogs," JV/M has found that over 95% of applicants are *unqualified* for the job. This is because of a lack of business knowledge, a lack of appropriate sales skills, and the presence of an inappropriate perspective or motivation, among other issues. The impact of the scarcity of qualified B2B telemarketers on recruiting costs, training and development costs, and sales results, however, can be catastrophic – going far beyond high failure rates and an excessive cost-per-lead. A poorly performing telemarketing staff can demotivate their outside sales representatives by sending them out on bad appointments, generate excessive field sales costs, and even deposition the company and its products in entire market segments.

JV/M regularly recruits professional B2B telemarketers for its outsourced B2B telemarketing, lead generation and executive appointment-setting services. Because of the high number of applicants and the low percentage of qualified applicants in the applicant pool, JV/M had to develop an online test to screen out unqualified applicants before the resume review and interview in order to reduce the cost of recruiting, interviewing and selection, as well as to reduce the failure rate of new hires. The test has been validated over the years as being able to predict success on the job in excess of 80% of the time, while providing excellent insight into the attributes of the candidate population.

Three of the nine areas tested by JV/M's Telemarketing Skills Assessment are business knowledge, sales skills and sales perspective. This series presents an analysis of the prevalence of appropriate and inappropriate attributes in these areas in the population of over 800 applicants over the course of two years in order to show how an online test can reduce recruiting costs when there is a predominance of unqualified candidates.

Methodology

The Telemarketing Skills Assessment is a test consisting of 45 multiple-choice questions that is given to prospective Lead Generations Specialists applying for a professional B2B telemarketing position at JV/M. The test has been validated as being able to predict that a candidate will be successful on the job over 80% of the time. Combined with a subsequent interview and reference checks, the success rate for new hires exceeds 80% at JV/M, while using the test has reduced interviewing costs by over 90%, and reduced recruiting costs by over 70%.

JV/M has found that there are nine attributes that can and should be screened using an online test, and presents in this series of articles the results for three of them to illustrate the methodology. The attributes covered in this series are:

- Business knowledge
- Sales perspective
- Sales skills

Results for Sales Perspective

Several questions on the test attempt to identify gaps in the applicant’s sales perspective that can be used to predict failure on the phones. Sales perspective is how the telemarketer views the job, which can have a significant influence on how the telemarketer manages himself or herself. The questions include the following, along with the answer choices, and the explanation of the correct and incorrect answers.

I Hate My Job!

It is remarkable that someone who is applying for a position would declare that they dislike the job for which they are applying, but the results of the Telemarketing Skills Assessment reveal that it occurs frequently. Even more bizarre is that these applicants usually have had multiple telemarketing positions – which, if one didn’t know their opinion of the job, would be interpreted as their having experience.

One question that reveals the negative opinion that many candidates have about the telemarketing job:

1. Which statement below best expresses your view of cold calling (i.e. cold telephone solicitation)?
 - a. Cold calling is a necessary evil. I find it to be difficult to do, but it's a necessary part of successful selling.
 - b. I enjoy cold calling. It's a fun and cost-effective way to generate new business.
 - c. I dislike cold calling, and avoid it, if possible.
 - d. Cold calling is best preceded by a letter or other introduction so that it's easier to get through to the prospect.
 - e. Cold calling is not an effective way to generate sales.

While the answers one would expect from a person who is applying for a telemarketing job would be “(b) I enjoy cold calling,” or perhaps “(d) Cold calling is best preceded by a letter,” the distribution of results over 813 candidates taking the test was as follows:

Answer	Count	Percent
a	90	11.07%
b	304	37.39%
c	186	22.88%
d	167	20.54%
e	66	8.12%
Total	813	100.00%

In other words, a total of 42% of the candidates had a negative view of the job. Either they thought it, at best, was a “necessary evil” and that they “find it difficult to do,” they outright dislike it, or they thought it didn’t work. And yet most of these candidates had previous telemarketing jobs, and were applying for a new one. Certainly, one could guess that the reason they have had multiple jobs is because they failed previously, but without knowing their opinion it would be impossible to know that the experience was negative. Instead, a significant minority of candidates hold a hostile opinion of the job.

One can make many inferences about these candidates, such as their applying for the job just for the money, or that they don't take pride in their work. But hiring candidates who harbor such negative opinions about the job would seem unwise.

Beyond the candidates who are hostile to the job is a group that feels that cold calling is ineffective. This group, representing an additional 20.54% of the candidates, felt that cold calling is best preceded by a letter. But purists would argue that calls that are preceded by a letter are, by definition, no longer cold. Certainly, a candidate who prefers to use an introduction such as "The reason I'm calling is in regard to a letter we recently sent you" is relying on a crutch that substitutes a lame opening for an effective one. But this question clearly demonstrates that only 37% of the candidates should be considered.

Tell Me a Story

Another question helps identify candidates who are true professionals, and eliminate candidates who are not:

2. Of the following, which is most important ingredient for success in B2B telemarketing?
 - a. Being provided with a good list.
 - b. Being provided with a good lead.
 - c. Being provided with a good story to tell.
 - d. Being provided with a good work environment.
 - e. Being provided with incentives.

The distribution of answers in the candidate population was as follows:

Answer	Count	Pct
a	233	28.66%
b	227	27.92%
c	153	18.82%
d	121	14.88%
e	79	9.72%
Total	813	100.00%

The correct answer is "(c) Being provided with a good story to tell." This can be arrived at if someone "knows" the right answer by virtue of real experience, or by process of elimination. Let's start with the latter.

As discussed in Part I of this series, many businesses that sell into the B2B market have a limited target population available. An engineering firm may legitimately only go after manufacturers. Or an educational software company may only realistically sell to school systems. So the question of having a good list is often not something over which there is much control. The typical B2B professional would recognize answer (a) as "true," but not sufficient compared to the correct answer (i.e. having a good story to tell.) On the other hand, a telemarketer with only consumer experience, or failed B2B experience, is very likely to blame the list for their failure – which can doom a B2B campaign. Yet 28.66% of candidates thought that the list was the most important ingredient, a subset of candidates that should be assiduously avoided.

Another 27.92% thought that the most important thing was to have a "good lead." This response mystified us, since the purpose of telemarketing is lead generation. If the purpose of the job is to generate leads, why would a company pay people to generate leads if they already had them? It turns out that there are two answers. First, one subset of candidates really only wanted to work on warm leads – which should instantly disqualify them for the job. The second group simply had a misunderstanding about the definition of a lead – thinking it was a name on a list, and that their job was to turn it into a "real lead" (i.e. an appointment.) This latter group may be okay to hire, but it is necessary to checkpoint their answer.

The 14.88% of candidates who felt that the most important ingredient for success in B2B telemarketing is a good work environment demonstrate no marketable sensibilities or understanding of the job. They may feel that the other choices are important, and that, for them, the difference between being successful and failing is their work environment – and it may, in fact, be true – but they would have to score extremely well elsewhere on the test to justify hiring, no less considering, them.

The candidates who selected incentives as critical may be considered, but one should note that they represent less than 10% of the population.

Having a good story to tell is what sales is all about, and an experienced telemarketer would know that. Just as case histories are the most compelling sales aids, and referrals from previous satisfied customers are stronger than any ad, stories are what sells in the B2B market. They involve the prospect emotionally, and they help the prospect visualize how great life will be if and when they buy from the vendor. Unfortunately, only 18.82% of the candidates knew that. More than 81% of the candidates, by that definition, weren't qualified for the job.

Please Don't Hire Me

Perhaps somewhat more charitably, a question on attitude revealed that only 22% of the candidates don't actually want the job for which they are applying. But more than half of the candidates shouldn't be considered, according to the following question.

3. What best describes your attitude towards a job in business-to-business telemarketing?
 - a. It's something to do until something better comes along.
 - b. It's what I do; I enjoy the challenge.
 - c. I haven't done it, but I know I can be successful.

The distribution of answers was:

Answer	Count	Percent
a	185	22.76%
b	394	48.46%
c	205	25.22%
Total	813	100.00%

Clearly, one should be grateful that almost half of the candidates responding to a job ad for “professional B2B telemarketers” declare that they actually do and enjoy the job, as this is a better percentage than 37.39% who said “I enjoy cold calling. It's a fun and cost-effective way to generate new business” previously. But is the 11% difference explained as people who think it's ineffective, but do it anyway? It makes for cold comfort.

But the real intelligence is gained from the 22.76% of candidates who view the job as a way to kill time, and the 25.22% of candidates who admittedly have no experience for a job that requires it. Why would someone bother interviewing them?

Analysis

Of the 813 candidates who took the Telemarketing Skills Assessment, only 45, or 5.5%, answered the three questions discussed above “correctly.” And while the test is scored on a weighted basis, and one should take other factors into account, it is clear that a significant majority of applicants have a wholly inappropriate view of the job. These candidates cannot be recognized by looking at their resumes either, since job failure can easily masquerade as experience.

Conclusions

Having the proper perspective can be a critical factor in success on the job. B2B telemarketing can be a highly stressful job (although good B2B telemarketers do not generally find it to be negatively stressful,) and it requires that the telemarketer have the proper temperament. Many candidates come from consumer telemarketing jobs that require script reading, and have unlimited lists, that enable the telemarketer to succeed simply by showing up. However the B2B job requires sales skills, creativity, and an understanding of what one is doing, as well as conscious competence. Weeding out unqualified candidates based on their lack of proper perspective about the job quickly and efficiently is needed in order to minimize recruiting selection costs, as well as minimizing the failure rate.

Recommendations

In recruiting telemarketers for business-to-business applications, it is recommended that candidates be questioned about their view of the B2B telemarketing job before being interviewed as a means of eliminating patently unqualified candidates at the lowest possible cost. While the specific questions asked in the Telemarketing Skills Assessment may not be appropriate for other firms or programs, avoiding interviewing or hiring candidates who do not want or like the job, or feel it can be effective, can prevent high failure rates of both the candidates and the programs.