

Cold Calling Isn't Dead

By Jeff Josephson

Despite what you read in the press, cold calling isn't dead. To paraphrase the Monty Python skit, it's not even resting.



A recent piece in Forbes magazine claimed that LinkedIn makes cold calling obsolete because its contact and networking capabilities enable marketers to make warm introductions. And it lets salespeople establish rapport on the basis of carefully researched interests instead of asking how the weather is.

Marketing solution vendors then jump onto the "Cold Calling is Dead" bandwagon by pandering to salespeople's fear of rejection. Or they cite mythical but self-serving studies about how executives hate receiving cold calls, or how much of the buy-cycle is complete before the salesperson even gets up in

the morning.

As an organization that not only believes in the value of cold calling, but one that makes its living by doing it, we say "Malarkey!"

Cold calling isn't dead. It may be suffering from terminal silliness, but it certainly isn't dead.

Take these examples of cold calls we recently received, and see if you don't think that cold calling is alive and well and living in denial.

1. The Baseball Pitch

This is a call-type that I get from at least 2-3 salespeople a month, and it's one of my favorites.

[Ring, ring]

Me: Hello?

Him: Hi, my name is Joe Smith from Holder's Insurance, and I'm the new rep for your area. And I was just calling to touch base with you to find out if you have any insurance needs. How are you today?

At this point I usually say something like "Fine, thank you." But the fact is that I'm insulted. Am I a "base" to be touched? I imagine that this guy's Sales Manager told him to call through his list, and see if anyone has any insurance policies that are coming up for renewal soon. But after a few calls he must have forgotten why he's calling, and

“touching base” has become an end in itself. Either way, I prefer that he not touch my “base,” or anything else in my office, or on my body, for that matter.

I’ve often wondered if the telemarketer who makes these calls recognizes how little respect this shows for the prospect’s time. But I suspect that the insult is lost in this misguided attempt to minimize the perceived inconvenience of meeting.

2. The Travel Agent Technique

Some telemarketers seem to be charged with solving the “Traveling Salesman Problem,” like this one that I get every week or so.

[Ring, ring]

Me: Hello?

Him: Hi, my name is Harry Jones from CGI Telecom. We provide VoIP and other networking solutions that can cut your telephone bill in half. Our rep is going to be in your area next week on Tuesday, and I was wondering if it would be okay if he stopped by to introduce himself, and maybe tell you a little bit about some of our services. Do you have a few minutes around 10:00 Tuesday morning?

Few things can make me feel less special than being a convenient stop on a salesperson’s route, so I always demur.

We’ve certainly had instances where we made an appointment for a sales rep, and we need to fill up the rest of his “dance card” to make the trip worthwhile. But we would *never* tell that prospect that, as it is almost as insulting as, well, touching someone’s base.

3. The Conversation Stopper

After sitting on both sides of the desk for so long, I can’t be blamed for being a little obtuse once in a while. So when a caller ends his opening with a declarative statement, I often just don’t say anything.

[Ring, ring]

Me: Hello?

Him: Hi, my name is Jerry Stevens from ABC Technologies. How are you today?

Me: Very well, thank you. What can I do for you?

Him: Great! Well, as I said, my name is Jerry, and I’m with ABC Technologies. And we can save you 30% on your computer and networking systems.

Since the caller didn't ask me a question, I have nothing to say, so I don't say anything. Am I supposed to say, "Wow! That's great! Where have you been all my life?" Or perhaps I should point out that I don't need any computer or networking systems. But I'm not sure what he wants, so I keep my mouth shut. Instead, I wait until the caller breaks the silence.

Even though it seems like it would be uncomfortable, this call can really be fun. Sometimes the caller breaks the silence and asks if I'm the right person to be talking to about technology. Other times they don't get the joke, and after about 10 seconds of silence they say "Hello?"

Either way, they don't get the appointment.

4. The Warm Call

Citing a commonality with the prospect, or using a reference, is traditionally taught in telemarketing school as a way to break the ice. And it's the basis of LinkedIn's entire value proposition. But a "reference sell" doesn't work any better today than it did when we were both members of the same Chamber of Commerce, or the fact that they're doing business with someone down the street.

[Ring, ring]

Me: Hello?

Her: Hi, my name is Susan Harris from Page Rank Marketing Solutions. How are you today?

Me: Very well, thank you. How are you?

Her: Good. Thank you for asking. We are a local SEO company, and we're helping some of the biggest companies in your area get a number one page rank on Google. I see here on LinkedIn that your company sells Cold Calling Training. How are you doing with respect to getting a high page rank on the search results for your industry?

When someone mentions to me that they read my profile on LinkedIn, I immediately think "Stalker!" It's just creepy; consequently they don't get the appointment – even if I need the help.

It may be hypocritical of me to want my prospects to read and cite my LinkedIn profile, but not potential vendors. But as they say, "a foolish consistency is the hobgoblin of little minds."

At least if she's going to try to leverage what she found on LinkedIn, she shouldn't tell me about it.

5. The Email Excuse

One of the most common techniques is to refer to an email or letter that the caller previously sent – whether they actually sent it or not.

[Ring, ring]

Me: Hello?

Him: Hi. My name is John from Basic Systems, and I'm calling in regard to an email we recently sent you about how we can save you thousands of dollars on your framastats. Do you remember getting the email?

Me: No. I'm afraid not.

Him: Oh, that's okay. I can re-send it if you want. But basically, we provide framastats that can dramatically reduce the cost of your whatchamacallit process. Are you the person responsible for buying your company's framastats?

Now, to be clear, he knows full well that, even if he did send the email, and even if I got it, I wouldn't remember it. And so therefore the only reason he referred to it had to be as an "ice breaker."

The problem is that my immediate thought is not the confusion he intends to sow as a result of my searching my memory. Rather, it's "Is that the best you can do?"

Most people though will obsess about the lost email, trying to recall receiving it, while John prattles on about his framastats. And it is precisely that moment of confusion that opens the door for the appointment – one that inevitably ends up not closing because the prospect ultimately doesn't need any framastats.

6. The Bro

My favorite technique, of course, is the caller whose enthusiasm and faux familiarity are as off-putting as a brother-in-law looking for a couch to crash on.

[Ring, ring]

Me: Hello?

Him: Hey, Jeff! How're you doin' buddy?

Me: [Click]

Clearly this caller learned his craft from working the phone banks over at the Fraternal Order of Police – an organization I stopped donating to once I found out that having their sticker on my car wasn't going to prevent me from getting a speeding ticket.

There Are No Short-Cuts in Cold Calling

There are effective techniques for making appointments. But in our experience, none of them involve the use of the word “Great!” They don’t use objections handles like “Feel, felt, found.” And you aren’t going to improve your results by using the “3 Tips for Better Cold Calling” click bait method, the ever-popular “4 Tips for Better Cold Calling” technique, or the more comprehensive “5 Tips for Better Cold Calling.” This is because getting past a gatekeeper, or stimulating the interest of a busy executive, isn’t going to lend itself to tricks-of-the-trade.

In other words, since most executives value their time more than their money, do you really think that a real decision maker is going to grant you an appointment simply because you’re going to have a rep in the area? Of course not.

There Is a Right Way

Almost 100 years ago Elias St. Elmo Lewis published the seminal work on effective advertising with his development of the “AIDA” model, an acronym that stands for:

- Attention
- Interest
- Desire
- Action

In short, it says that if you can’t get the prospect’s attention, if you can’t stimulate his or her interest, if you can’t get them to want to buy your product (or, in the case of cold calling, to meet,) and if you can’t get them to actually pull the trigger, you’re going to fail.

As simple as this model is, the problem is that each of these steps requires actual work to get through. Each step requires that you say, ask and do specific things in order to be effective, and to be able to move onto the next step.

For example, if the prospect isn’t really listening (i.e. if you don’t have their attention,) how can you possibly stimulate their interest?

And if they’re not really interested, do you really think they’re going to agree to a meeting? Of course not.

Finally, getting a prospect to take action, i.e. to actually meet, requires that you create in their mind the perception that the value of meeting is greater than its cost. And that the cost gets greater the longer they put it off – otherwise they’re simply going to postpone the meeting.

Simple in concept, but perhaps not so simple in practice.

Denial Is More than a River in Egypt

Evidently the people who think that warming up a prospect (by referring to something you found on their LinkedIn page) is going to get you more appointments. But adding “creepiness” to the process makes it worse, not better.

Others think that the solution is in the technology. But keeping better track of your failures doesn’t turn them into successes; it just clutters up your database.

At the same time, the people who tell you that “cold calling is dead” appear to have simply given up. Many will tell you that all you have to do is “throw enough stuff against the wall and see what sticks.” While others will simply put content out there, and hope something works before they get fired. But if there are more digits to the right of the decimal point than the left, then your response rate is simply too low.

The Most Powerful Weapon in Your Marketing Arsenal

Despite all the advances in technology, the telephone is still the most powerful weapon in your marketing arsenal. Cold calling works – if you know what you’re doing.

It’s just that most people don’t take the time to learn.

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