

Four Steps to Turning More Leads Into Prospects Or Leveraging Your Lead Generation Investment

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I recently had a conversation with a VP of Sales for a technology company and he told me that his biggest challenge is getting enough quality leads for his sales team. "Where are the best lead list companies?" he asked. I asked him how many leads he thought his team could handle in a year. "More than they're getting," was the response. I asked him how many times a rep would attempt to contact someone before they gave up. He said, "Plenty." Realizing I wasn't getting anywhere with this course of discussion, I asked him if I could talk with three of his sales people and he agreed. Here's what I found out.

Marketing would supply the reps with a list. Some of those names would be warm, like those from a trade show, and some would be purely cold on a purchased list of those marketing thought met a demographic of their typical customer. The reps would attempt to make calls when they had time or their pipeline was empty (sporadic at best). Once I got them past the fear that I was a spy for the boss, they finally opened up and shared the following story.

First, they had no system to record their activity and progress. (They did it outside of their CRM software as they didn't want to 'clutter it' with useless names.) Since they wouldn't try those same names again in the future if they didn't get through this time, why put it in the CRM? Paradoxically, this is particularly prevalent when the names were 'warm' to begin with. "If they won't call me back after expressing some interest, they must no longer be interested," was the conclusion.

Second, they all estimated they would try to call someone within a company 'a few times'. When pressed for what that meant, I got answers anywhere from between two attempts and five attempts. Most of the time none of the three left voicemails (they never get returned anyway was the reason) and made no attempts to find someone else within the target organization to call if they couldn't get through (no time – it's why we get the lists).



Third, they described the frequency of their attempts as either multiple times that same day (because they had the time to prospect that particular day), or they probably wouldn't try again for more than a week or two (the next time they had time to prospect).

Fourth, when I asked them what they said when they did get someone on the phone, all three gave me the, "Well, I kind of tell them...". When I asked them to role play it so I could hear exactly what they said, none of them could do it. In other words, they would wing it so when they did get someone on the phone, the result was consistently poor. The conclusion was therefore that the list was bad as the targets weren't interested in talking with them.

When pressed by management as to, "How it was going?" they all said they would report back that they'd tried everyone on the list (and although these three did not say it, I've had others admit that was not always true) and there was little success. "As usual, those guys over in marketing gave us another bad list. How am I supposed to do my job? I just don't have enough good prospects."

This is not unusual. As a matter of fact, trust me; it is typical. Way too many companies waste a lot of money on marketing programs designed to generate leads and then not track the progress of those leads nor hold the reps accountable for the results. The end result is often a rift between sales and marketing as well as a lot of wasted money and time. The problem is not (most of the time) in marketing. It's in sales. (And, hey, I'm a sales guy.)

What is the problem?

The story I related above talks about symptoms. The real problem is twofold: the concept of timing and your targets, and your processes and the money they cost.

The Challenge of Timing

In discussions with our clients across many markets, we've concluded that on average, less than five percent of the typical universe of targets is in the market for what you sell when you call them. That means they don't think they **need** to talk with you when you call.

Anyone with buying capability is busy and is being called by a lot of sales people. When you call, you are practicing what I like to call 'interruptive marketing'. That means that even if there was some interest (they might have even inquired about your solution), they don't **want** to talk with you **when** you call. If you're in the B2C market, this is



even more prevalent. They may have wanted (and even needed) information, they just didn't want to talk to a sales person.

The result is that when you call, even that small percentage of those that are 'in the market' might not be available exactly when you call, so they might not return your calls. Those that you do speak with you, believing they are not in the market at that moment will do anything, include lie to you, to get you off the phone.

The Challenge of Your Processes

Very few companies have an effective process in place to prospect. As a matter of fact, very few companies have been able to tell me the following:

1. How many leads can a prospecting sales rep handle in a year? How many times should a lead be called, how often, and over what period of time?
2. Which lead generation campaigns are more effective than others?
3. What is an effective set of 'Best Practices' for pursuing leads?
4. What are the sales reps actually doing with the leads they get? Are the leads really called or not? If so, how many times, how often, and what are the results?
5. Are the leads that are not pursued abandoned because the target was truly not qualified, we never talked to them, or was it our own ineffectiveness?
6. Is a given territory actually becoming more defined in terms of the list of potential future customers each year? (The prospecting effort should be cumulative.)
7. Where do the leads go after they're given to the reps? What is the shelf life of a lead? When does the law of diminishing returns kick in?
8. How do you take someone who doesn't believe they are in the market for what you're selling when you call and get them to open their minds to how your solution might actually help them when called?

Add together the challenge of your target's timing with the ongoing cost of your marketing and sales teams; you can't just depend on the ready, willing and able.

What is the Solution?

The answer is a holistic approach. Just installing a tracking system; for instance a CRM solution, won't do it. Nor will just implementing a good automation tool. Just improving your team's skills at turning a conversation into an appointment won't do it. It takes a holistic view of both the efficiencies and the effectiveness of the process. The result of a holistic approach on your sales can be phenomenal, though. The answer is a combination of four components:

1. Invest in 'Art' – the skills necessary to improve effectiveness in terms of an increase in the ratio of Dials to Conversations and Conversations to Appointments which reduces the 'fear' associated with the process



2. Invest in 'Science' – the automated mechanics necessary to improve the efficiency of the process which reduces the 'pain' of the process
3. Make the time to develop 'Best Practices' – the repeatable process which includes both the appropriate 'Art' and 'Science' that works best in your environment to leverage both efficiency and effectiveness
4. Management Commitment – including front line sales management adoption of a process and the techniques to help reps improve their results
 1. Make the time to practice the 'Art' that is taught on an ongoing basis. Just investing in a one time sales skills improvement workshop is not enough
 2. Monitor, measure and manage your progress through the implementation of the appropriate 'Science'

If you would like to read more on this topic, go to our website and download our White Paper entitled, *Is Cold Calling Really Dead? Searching for the Elusive 'Silver Bullet'*. Or give us a call, we'd love to discuss your challenges with you.

