

7 Proven Ways to Become a Sales Prospecting Superstar



You probably always thought that prospecting came before closing, but to create an opportunity, you must be able to ask for and gain the first two commitments you need to move a lead into true prospect status: the commitment of your prospect's time and the commitment to explore working together. Unfortunately, both are becoming more and more difficult to get.

The business environment has changed radically over the past two decades, thanks to globalization, the Internet, and some major recessions. As a result, we have had to make drastic alterations in the way we sell.

Globalization has forced us to become competitors in the world marketplace. You can no longer be "the only game in town" when the "town" is the whole world.

The Internet has shifted the balance of power. Whereas sellers used to control information, the Internet has given buyers access to more information and more choices than ever. And it is easier for buyers to find someone who looks a lot like you to sell them what they need if they don't believe you are treating them fairly.

Making matters worse, the United States has just suffered through a decade that began and ended with major recessions. During these downturns, companies focused on cost cutting as a means to survive -- a practice that continues unabated. Purchasing departments and chief financial officers have gained power, and salespeople now face buyers who are more concerned about price than they previously were. I call this new

buyer psychology "post recessionary stress disorder." It causes everyone to focus on price rather than cost.

It's harder to create opportunities -- yet without opportunities, you can't produce results. That's why you need a prospecting plan. But even the best plan is useless if you don't put it to work. Here's how to make prospecting a priority:

1) Put prospecting first.

You can't cram prospecting. It must be a daily discipline. Block out time every day for this activity.

2) Be consistent in your efforts.

You don't control when your dream client might become dissatisfied enough with his current situation to make a change. You might call every week for years, only to have your meeting requests refused every time.

But as soon as the prospect becomes even slightly unhappy, your request will suddenly be granted. You can't predict when that might happen, so you can never go away. Keep calling your dream clients, no matter what.

3) Vary your approach.

Most salespeople prospect using the one method that feels most comfortable to them. But that's not necessarily the method of communication your prospective clients prefer.

They pick the channel that they respond to, so you need to use all of them. This includes the telephone, even if you are young and hate cold calling. This also includes LinkedIn and other social media, even if you have a few gray hairs and aren't all that interested in these new tools for communication. Use all of the tools at your disposal until you find what's best for each prospect.

4) Separate research from prospecting.

Research is one type of work and prospecting is another; blending the two slows your prospecting. Speed your progress by doing research separately from prospecting. Take the time to build your list of dream clients and all of the potential contacts you need within those companies. Then, and only then, should you do your prospecting. If you need to do more research, invest the time required, and then get back to the work of connecting.

5) Eliminate distractions.

When it's time for you to do your prospecting, turn off your e-mail, the Internet, and your smartphone. Focus. Tell your peers that you have a newfound discipline and you need their support; you'll catch up with them later.

Hang a sign on your door that says, "DO NOT DISTURB! PROSPECTING!" If you do not have a door, use string to hang this sign over your desk. The more focused you are on prospecting, the greater your results will be, and the faster they will occur.

6) Make the plan your own.

Don't gauge the amount of effort you need to put into prospecting by looking at what other salespeople do. I know a salesperson who easily books 40 percent of the contacts she connects with. Yet if someone else made as few calls as she did, he would probably fail because her combination of approach/product/price and other factors is not the same as his.

You have to invest the time necessary for you. Do what you need to do and stick to your plan. Never mind what somebody else is doing.

7) Focus on the outcome.

Through all the ups and downs of prospecting, always keep your eye on the prize: a meeting. Know that you'll get those meetings if you persevere.

There's always something you can do that seems more important than prospecting. The work that shows up on your desk or streams in via your telephone and e-mail in-box always feels more urgent. That's because prospecting never really appears urgent -- until it is. Unfortunately, once you urgently need to prospect, it's already too late to do anything about it. Prospecting requires a lot of discipline, no doubt about it. But self-discipline is the cornerstone of success -- in sales and in life.

You must do enough prospecting to create the opportunities you need to make your quota. You also need to prospect enough to build a pipeline that allows you to lose opportunities and still make your number based on your close rate. Prospecting is the discipline of sales champions.