

Getting the fish on the line

How to Get Prospects to Find You

By
John Graham

The prospecting problem

“I am looking to further my prospecting techniques,” the salesperson wrote in his email. “It seems I need to increase my ratios by the end of the quarter.” The story isn’t new.

Twenty years ago, salespeople were expected to get in front of prospects. Today, those doors are sealed shut. Voice mail and email messages are ignored. If all that isn’t enough, few customers are willing to stick their neck out and make referrals.

All of which makes prospecting frustrating and, unfortunately, bordering on useless. No wonder salespeople across the board plead for leads and, hoping to get lucky, keep their fingers crossed.

If you’re looking for an easy, quick way to find prospects, forget it. No matter what anyone may say, it doesn’t exist. Nevertheless, hope springs eternal, which is why there are 17,300,000 hits in .25 seconds when you Google “prospecting in sales.”

Here’s the problem: how is a salesperson to go about finding prospects who are not only interested in buying, but who are also willing to do business with someone they don’t know, let alone trust?

Getting negligible results from searching for prospects takes a lot of effort—wasted effort. Salespeople are often told, “It takes 10 calls to get one appointment.” They are also told that out of 10 appointments they can expect to make one sale. That means it will take 100 actual appointments to make 10 sales. Whether you do a little better or worse, the message is clear: finding prospects who are interested and ready to buy is so inefficient it doesn’t work.

The prospecting possibility

It should come as no surprise why there’s so much resistance to getting out and finding new customers. Even if we know who and where the prospects are, the obstacles to access thwart our efforts.

It’s time to step back and take a careful look at how selling and prospecting differ. When you think about it, they require two different types of skills: *prospecting is all about getting the fish on the line and selling is getting it in the boat.*

In other words, successful prospecting depends on getting customers to find you. Specifically, those who want to do business with you. If you're thinking this takes work, you're right. *It does*. But if you're investing time and energy and not getting the results you want, that's a lot of work, too. Besides, if prospects don't know you and trust you, it's easy for them to ignore you or say no.

So, why keep on doing what doesn't work? Why not take a different approach, one that's consistent with how prospects think and what they expect from today's sales professionals?

The task is helping prospects find you, getting them to recognize that it's in their best interest to seek you out and learn more so they can make informed decisions. This is how savvy restaurants, businesses, insurance advisors, and real estate agents, for example, attract the customers they want. They use carefully crafted messaging, ratings and recommendations, testimonials and blog posts on social media, advertising, promotional campaigns, and, of course, word-of-mouth to attract prospects.

Instead of trying to get through a prospect's door, the job of salespeople is shaping the way prospects think about them. No matter what you're selling, it's all about pulling prospects into your orbit so they're "sold" even before meeting you.

Four principles that pull prospects to you

Here are the four basic principles that attract prospects and bring prospects closer to you:

1. *Never stop building your prospect and customer cultivation database and keep it up to date.* Why is this so important? It's your pot of gold at the end of the rainbow so never neglect it. Without this database, picture yourself in a darkened room with no windows or doors.
2. *Develop a prospect mindset.* Here's why: less than 24% of prospects open sales emails, according to TOPCO Associates. So, if you want to engage them, it's essential to let them know you understand their issues. They don't care about what you sell; frankly, they tune it out. Always stay focused on what prospects want or need.
3. *Share your competence.* To do this, salespeople must answer one critical question that's on every prospect's mind: "Why should I believe you?" or to put it another way, "Why should I give you my money?" Selling is all about sharing what you know. To become customers, prospects must believe that your knowledge and experience will benefit them.
4. *Cultivate prospects constantly.* No salesperson is wise enough to know when a prospect is ready to buy. If you're not top-of-mind, the chances are a competitor will get the sale. Prospects need reminding why they should do business with you. By staying in touch regularly with helpful information (not sales pitches) by email and social media, blogs, and presentations, you're there when they have

questions and are ready to buy. Staying in contact sends the message that you care enough to stay in touch. When they're ready, the chances are they will pay you back by becoming customers.

Those in sales spend considerable time talking about getting the fish in the boat, closing the sale. But something important needs to happen before that can occur and that's getting the fish on the hook.

John Graham of GrahamComm is a marketing and sales strategy consultant and business writer. He is the creator of "Magnet Marketing," and publishes a free monthly eBulletin, "No Nonsense Marketing & Sales Ideas." Contact him at jgraham@grahamcomm.com or johnrgraham.com.