5 Ways to get GREAT results when prospecting by phone

By **Audrey Bodman**

Hi there,

I'm Audrey Bodman, founder of Outshine Ltd and passionate telephone sales trainer. For the last 20 years I've enjoyed a wonderful career helping organisations to transform their approach to telephone prospecting, enabling them to take control of their telephone sales system and convert more calls into customers.

In this free report I'm revealing the simple five step system that has enabled me to build both my own business and hundreds of my clients' organisations too. If you're serious about getting better results over the phone; if you want to develop better client relationships and/or win more business, then these tips will set you and your team on the road to success.

These five simple steps will quickly enable you to:

- Analyse your results to discover strengths and weaknesses
- Keep control when faced with a determined gatekeeper
- Qualify prospects quickly, without using a hard sell approach
- Book appointments based on feel good benefits, not sleazy sales techniques
- Develop techniques to draw prospects in and make a commitment

Times have changed. Prospects are smarter and savvier than ever before, which means we have to develop new and insightful ways to communicate the benefits of our products and services. The concepts in this system are techniques I've developed first-hand and have helped my clients to develop quality calls. Now you can learn the same techniques.

Audrey

P.S. Look out for the 'reader exercises' I've included throughout the report. These short, simple tasks reinforce the learning in this report and are a great way for you and your staff to try out your new techniques.

TIP 1
ANALYSE YOUR NUMBERS

Can you answer the following questions instantly?

- How many calls am I making in one hour?
- Of those calls, how many decision makers am I reaching per hour?

Sales may be a numbers game, but consistency is a key driver for cold calling success. If you're serious about getting great results from making first calls then you need to start analysing your ratios and acting on the results.

Here's how:

Divide the number of actual CONVERSATIONS with decision makers (not influencers) by the results achieved (e.g. appointments booked or leads gained). This gives you your conversion rate.

For example: Speaking to 10 decision makers and gaining two appointments gives you a conversion rate of 1:5.

By monitoring your activity in this way, you can avoid the classic ups and downs of the sales cycle. You know what I mean: Good month, bad month, horrible month, no appointments, no leads, no job outcomes, rubbish leads... sound familiar?

Once you've worked out your numbers, you can start to compare weekly results, identify any weak spots and start creating solutions.

If your ratio of presentations to positive results is poor, then work out how many extra calls (dial spins) you need to make to generate more positive outcomes. If you are struggling to reach decision-makers, work on your ability to keep control of the conversation when speaking to receptionists.

Reader exercise: Work out your success ratios using the formula above. Can you identify any weak spots in your call technique? If so, act to create a solution.

Real Results/Case Study

When a Sales Director approached me to develop an individual in their team who was struggling to meet the benchmark of 15 calls per hour, I began by observing her behaviour. I quickly identified a lack of routine and reluctance to make calls. Much of her time was spent doing research and recording the results of calls rather than picking up the phone.

A one-to-one coaching session revealed that the individual was phone shy and felt intimidated by the open plan office. Failing to get past gatekeepers on regular occasions was impacting on her confidence and as a result, if a prospect claimed they weren't interested, she would avoid calling them back. She also admitted to using her admin tasks as a distraction and an excuse not to pick up the phone.

Based on these results I created a plan of action to improve her productivity.
This included:

- Arranging a session where she could observe me making calls on her behalf, to demonstrate the speed and structure of a good call.

- Setting a new hourly benchmark based on the number of decision makers she reached, rather than the number of calls made.

- Scheduling her calls between 9.30- 12.30 and 1.30-4.30.

After learning how to address her problems and create structure in her call technique, I was thrilled when she went on to achieve great success, winning several new clients for her organisation.

TIP 2

KEEP CONTROL WHEN QUESTIONED BY GATEKEEPERS

Gatekeepers... Their job is to assess every caller and decide if they should or should not get through to the person they are asking for. It's important to remember (and respect) that a Receptionist or Personal Assistants job is often to protect the decision maker; with this in mind there are some obvious and not-so-obvious mistakes that we make which can prevent us from achieving our goal.

Problem: Not finding out the name of the person you need to speak to before you get through.

Solution: Having a name always gives you a head start. Getting the name of the right person to talk to about your products and services should be your first goal.
This ensures that even if you don't get past the gatekeeper, you have a name for future reference. There is nothing worse than presenting to a decision maker, having a conversation for five minutes and then having to say: "By the way I didn't catch your name, what is it?" Get the name first so you can use it during the call in order to build rapport.

If your target organisation has a website, they may have contact details for staff online. If your intended decision maker is fairly high up, there may even be a short biography on them. Spending five minutes on getting the right name can save you hours further down the line.

Problem: Waffling on about why you're ringing.

Solution: Focus on asking for the person you want to talk to. If you have a name, a polite and confident: "Good morning, Mr Wallis please." will often result in success. Don't feel the need to explain yourself; if you start talking about your products or services, there is a strong chance you'll hear those dreaded words: "We're not interested."

Gatekeepers want to get you off the phone as quickly as they can, so make their job easier by getting straight to the point.

Problem: Using submissive phrases like: "Is it possible to speak to", "Would you mind telling me the name of..." and speaking with a lack of knowledge and confidence.

Solution: Gatekeepers will often have received specific instructions regarding cold calls – they are used to taking direction from others. Therefore, coming across as authoritative can boost your chances of success. An authoritative person doesn't mutter: "Is it possible to speak to the person responsible for?" they state with confidence: "What's the name of the person responsible for?", or "I'm after the name of the person responsible for... who would that be?"

Once you've asked the question, wait for the answer, don't start filling the gap with the reason you're calling. Once you get the answer, confidently follow up with: "Many thanks, can you put me through please?" Or "Thank you, is he/she in today?" Avoid saying, is he/she available.

Remember, if you have the name of your contact, just ask for them directly.

Problem: Not being prepared for questions and stumbling over your words when you reply.

Solution: "What's it in connection with?" A dreaded phrase that we hear and eight times out of 10 are unsure on how to respond. The result? You lose control of the call and the opportunity.

It's no secret that gatekeepers are likely to ask questions regarding your call. The problem is that most people don't know how to answer them in the right way. Ideally, your response should use the decision makers job title to create relevance and then you should ask to be put through to them. For example:

"It's with regards to finance, specifically around the accounts function within the business. I understand Mr Stuart is responsible for that?"

"It's with regards to recruitment and I understand that Sarah Miles has that responsibility within the HR department, is he/she in today please?"

Or, if you haven't got a name:

"From past experience it's normally the Sales Director we'd speak to about this; who would that be please?"

If your gatekeeper responds with something like: "We don't need any training", or "We're not recruiting", then it's time get assertive. Respond with something along the lines of: "That's fine, I appreciate you might not (be recruiting/need training), however, for future reference it would be good to get the correct name of the person; who would that be?"

Problem: Being rude and aggressive to a gatekeeper. The person you are speaking to could have a lot of influence on the person you want to talk to. Be rude and be prepared to fail.

Solution: Treat people how you want to be treated. A phrase I adhere to at all times. Look, you will inevitably meet some real 'Rottweiler's' during your career, but that doesn't mean to say you have to stoop to their level. Just professionally get what you can from them and try again on another day. Don't give up!

Reader Exercise: Identify your most recognisable problem from the list above and use the information to devise a solution that fits with your call style. Use it the next time you reach a gatekeeper.

TIP 3

ENGAGE WITH YOUR PROSPECTS

Professionals at cold calling qualify their prospects normally within a minute.
How do they manage so quickly? They engage with their prospect.

How would you react if you heard these words at the beginning of a phone call?
"Hi, I want to talk about myself, my company and my products and services."

I'd probably hang up.

90% of individuals fail to engage with their prospect. They don't start a conversation that means anything to that person. Instead they open up the call by telling the prospect who they are and why they are calling. They then reel off information about their products and services before the person on the other end of the line even has a chance to speak.

That's not a great way to start a business relationship.

Within the first 15 seconds of a call you should ask a question - something logical - that highlights 'what's in it' for your prospect. In other words, show them the benefits.

In our telephone training workshops, we spend time with participants tailoring their openings and questions. If they are your own, they become much more natural and engage prospects more readily. For example:

"Good morning, my name's Andrea Williams calling from ABA web specialists. I understand you are responsible for marketing in your business, is that right?" (Prospect answers yes) "The reason I'm calling today Mr Wilson is that I notice you have a website. Having had extensive experience in generating more income through the web with businesses similar to yours, I am keen to find out today what % of your business is attracted from your website?"

Notice how this approach achieves three things:

1. By using a question, it clarifies within a few seconds that you are talking to the right person.

2. It maintains interest by showing that you know something about them (in this case, that they have a website)

3. It finishes with an open question which gives the prospect the opportunity to talk. Of course they might not give you the answer you want, but at least you are engaging them and if nothing else, getting feedback.

Reader Exercise: On your next call, aim to engage with your prospect by asking them an open question within the first 30 seconds. Over time, try to shorten this time until you can comfortably start a credible conversation within the first 10-15 seconds of a call.

TIP 4

BOOK MORE APPOINTMENTS BY SELLING BENEFITS

The hard sell is dead. These days prospects can see through old school techniques like: “If I can show you how we could save you money, would you be interested in meeting?”

In fact, high-pressure sales tactics can often push affluent customers away.

The most effective way to secure a meeting with a potential client is to stop focussing on selling and start focussing on showing them why they should buy.

Engage your prospect and lead them into to an appointment by communicating the benefits of what you are offering.

Consider the E.D.P (Examination, Diagnosis, and Prescription) principle. If you went to the doctor with a bad back and he gave you a prescription without examining you or asking questions, you’d be seriously worried about his competency. In today’s society he’d probably be struck off. Yet we, as professionals, still try and arrange visits without any form of examination (questions).

Here’s a poor example: “Good morning, it’s Audrey Williams here calling from ABA, specialists in telephone training. I’m just wondering whether you would be free for a brief appointment week commencing 28th February?”

Why should someone agree to an appointment when they don’t know anything about your company, apart from the fact it’s a training company?

Instead try: “Good morning it’s Audrey Williams here calling from ABA, I understand you might be responsible for training; is that right? (Await a response). The reason for my call is we specialise in designing tailored training courses that are geared at increasing confidence in using the telephone in order to generate more sales, I’m keen to find out whether you employ staff who make outgoing calls to customers to make them aware of your services? (This is merely a qualifying question) Allow the prospect to respond… “How frequently do you look at carrying out refresher training for those?” Listen to the response.

Keep the engagement going

Now the really essential thing here is to be prepared for the response. If they say: “We never do refresher training.” I’d ask them why. If they say they already have a supplier I’d say: “That’s really good to hear. For future reference what is it you tend to look for when choosing a training provider?”

Regardless of what they say I have a question to help me continue the conversation. This is necessary planning. Aim to ask one or two more questions depending on how open your prospect is being. If you’re asking logical, open questions they should in fact do all the talking.

Gaining commitment

If the prospect remains open and chatty, move to schedule an appointment based the needs you have discovered on the call. For example:

"Based on what you mentioned about training your staff every two years, I'd like the opportunity to meet with you to demonstrate how we could develop your sales teams' skills further in order to increase sales. How's your diary looking week commencing the..."

Now the key thing here is that you have made an appointment based on two things:

1. You used questions to discover more about your prospect. This has helped you establish a need.

2. You've found something interesting they've said and used that as the reason you want to go and see them. So when you use the phrase 'based on what you said about... ' This will remind your prospect of why the appointment is necessary.

Reader Exercise: Try the techniques above on your next call and record the results. With practice, you should see your call length, engagement and success rate start to rise.

TIP 4

QUALIFY PROSPECTS BEFORE SENDING INFORMATION

Sending out emails is time consuming, so before you rush off to send out information to potential prospects, consider:

How many of those people have agreed to buy from you or agreed to commit to further action?

I was asked this question by an experienced manager early in my career. I came off the phone, delighted that several prospects that day had agreed to receive information and shared the achievement proudly. I was surprised by her reaction, but after giving it further thought, I had to admit, the answer was none.

The reality is there are a minority of people who like me would prefer to receive information before making any decisions. And of course we need to see this as an opportunity to build a relationship, however small.

If you believe that the prospect is a good lead and that sending an email or printed information is a worthwhile task, always confirm that it will be acceptable to follow up the call (and the information you send them) to get ‘feedback’. This will give you another opportunity to speak to them and win the business.

Following up quickly (within 1-2 days) is important if you want to ensure your prospect doesn’t forget about you. I’ve never understood why some individuals expect a prospect to remember an email they might have sent three weeks prior. Do you keep an email sent to you in your inbox for three weeks and if you do, could you find it if they rang you up to talk about it?

Try one of these techniques:

“Yes, I can certainly send you out some information Mr Smith. Regarding that, what I’d like to do is give you a call afterwards for some feedback, would that be ok? When’s the best time to do this?

Or

“Yes, I’ll arrange for some information to come out to you, just to make sure I am sending you the relevant information, may I ask…. (Ask another question)

Or to keep control of the call, try this one – the timing is crucial in this technique. The prospect says: “Can you please send me some information about this?” and without missing a beat you’re going to say: “Of course, but I’m just curious, what are you doing right now with regards to…

Reader Exercise: Think about the last call you made, after which you sent out information about your products or services via email or post. Ask yourself:

1. What did the prospect say that made you believe there is a genuine need to send them further information?

2. Was it you who suggested sending information because you were not sure what else to say, or did the prospect ask you to send it?

3. Did you qualify the prospect? Did you ask them if what you are offering is something they may be interested in?

4. Did you check which specific areas or parts of your sales literature would interest them? In most cases, it is a waste of their time (and yours) to send everything.

5. Did they agree to a follow up call to discuss the information you sent?

The next time you make a call, use the questions above to qualify your prospect before you send them your information.

KEEP IN TOUCH

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