
SECTION 4

PROFESSIONAL'S SELLING
PROCESS

**Gaining Access
to Decision
Makers**

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REACHING DECISION MAKERS

When making initial contact with the people who make or influence decisions, we have two key tactics to consider before the approach: 1) Will we make a warm or a cold contact? and 2) Which decision influencer will we target first?

Warm Calls

When making a first contact, the openness of the prospect will be improved if you are able to make a warm contact. Warm means that the prospect already knows something about you from one of her trusted friends or advisors. It means the prospect's interest has been warmed up before you meet.

In The Rainmaker Academy we teach students that a good way to warm up a lead is to ask one of your mutual friends to introduce you and tell the prospect something positive about you. If the friend has a strong advisory relationship with the prospect, all the better. Another way would be to have someone you know inside the company introduce you.

Ask Permission

There are still many prospects where you cannot find a mutual acquaintance to introduce you. You can still warm up the lead with a permission marketing campaign. Seth Godin's book, *Permission Marketing*, describes most marketing as "interruption marketing." Commercials that interrupt your

television program, ads that break up the flow of reading your magazine, or the telephone interrupting your evening dinner are all examples of interruption marketing. Godin recommends asking permission to make an offer, or promising a reward for the prospect's response as a more respectful way to build a relationship with a prospect before you meet. Godin likens permission marketing to dating—when dating you make incremental advances toward a relationship.

Multiple Contacts

As you target larger businesses, the decision making power is not as clear as in smaller units. As the decision-making becomes more complex, decision power is spread among more people.

When your prospect is a larger business, you are often better off starting your sales approach with a person who is more accessible or approachable than the CEO. With an approachable and receptive person, you will be able to gather important information about the business, its problems and politics. Building a strong relationship with the receptive insider can lead to a strong introduction to the ultimate decision maker. Armed with valuable information coupled with an insider's introduction, you will make the time you have with the CEO more valuable.

Conclusion

When possible, start with warm leads. Ask for referrals when they are available. Otherwise, start relationships by asking permission.

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TIPS TO HELP YOU GAIN ACCESS TO DECISION MAKERS

The best way to gain access to decision makers is through warm referrals, but you can use nonreferral prospecting to build a cadre of great clients. Use the following techniques to gain access to those key decision makers.

Use Local News

Clip photos and news articles about your prospects and send them to the prospect with a note. This will gain you receptivity points once you meet.

For big impact, take the clipping to a professional framer and have the material placed under glass in an attractive frame. Then deliver the framed news article to the prospect with a congratulatory note. Such an unusual approach will likely get you a phone call thank you.

Take a Celebrity to Meet the Prospect

Will you have an out of town expert visiting you this year? Ask the celebrity to make some visits with you to important prospects. You could arrange a luncheon or breakfast with several clients and prospects together and have private meetings for your top few prospects.

Short on celebrities? Take the managing partner or a niche expert or a tax expert to visit several of your top prospects.

You could say something like this, “ Our managing partner will be working with me on Tuesday and Wednesday next week and he would like to meet you. Which day would be good for a meeting?”

Take Advantage of Turnover

Whenever you hear about impending staff change in one of your top prospects’ businesses, brainstorm ways you could help. Call the key decision maker and ask if the person leaving will be replaced. If the response is “yes,” offer to be of help. If the position is a financial or legal position, offer to provide assistance with one of your associates until the new hire is in place.

Snow Days are Good Access Times

Do you live in an area that gets snowed in? Decision makers are usually the last ones to leave the office. When the boss is in his office without receptionists and screeners, your phone call will likely get through. Your chances of getting decision-making prospects on the phone during off business hours, such as snow days, are very good.

Leave Enticing Voice Mails at Odd Hours

When you have solved a problem for a top client or learn of a unique method for making more profits, call those prospects who would benefit from the information at 11 PM and say something like, “Bill, I have an interesting idea to help you make more profits from your business this year. I just helped another client with this and he saved \$120,000 in taxes. Call me at 555-1212 and let’s get together and see if you can benefit too.”

Your prospect will hear the voice mail the next morning and will think, “This person left a message on my system at 11 pm. What kind of crazy person is thinking of me at 11 pm? He had some ideas. Maybe I’d better call and get with him.”

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**YOUR MESSAGE IS THE LURE,
YOUR PROMISE IS THE HOOK**

Crafting a message that will appeal to your best prospects' emotional interests will stimulate interest in your services. Every day, prospects are bombarded by sales messages. A strong emotional message will help you attract good prospects to your firm.

How do you craft such a message? Most clients want a relationship of trust with their accountant, consultant, or attorney. In their book, *The Discipline of Market Leaders*, Michael Treacy and Fred Wiersema explained that you can't be all things to all people. You must first understand what your best customers value. Do your clients engage you because you are the lowest priced? Because you have the best technical skills or software? Or, do your clients most value the relationship with you because you solve their problems? For many professional firms, the last question is the appropriate one.

If you perform traditional research you might learn that your clients want fast, accurate, reasonably priced work. But it is important to dig below the surface to learn what clients want that is different, better, or special.

Start the Relationship With a Promise

Once you have a good message in place, then find a way to make a promise and keep it. For example, you should have about 20 articles, newsletters or brochures that address the common issues that interest your best clients. Then when you meet a solid qualified prospect, offer to send one of the articles relevant to the concerns of the person you have just met. By keeping your promise, you now have the basis for a solid telephone follow up. During the telephone follow-up call, make another promise and keep it.

What if the prospect doesn't say "come on over and let's talk?" What if your offers are rebuked? Then you must develop a better offer. Too many professionals are rebuffed when they offer to meet with the prospect for a free hour. It is not the job of the prospect to give you his time. It is your job to make such an irresistible offer that he wants it.

Conclusion

One of the keys to successful selling is to market to people who desire communication. So invest some time to craft your message and create your offers. Make the good prospects offers they can't refuse.

SPEAKING HELPS OPEN DOORS

A few years ago, I heard Brian Tracy say that people perceive how much you know on a subject by the way you communicate. If you write well on a subject, people infer that you know four times what you really may know whereas if you speak to groups, people think that you know ten times as much.

You Can Be a Communicator

The computer takes care of much of the mundane number and contract crunching. Lawyers are becoming contract communicators. Accountants are becoming number communicators rather than number crunchers. Clients want to know, “How does this affect me?”

Speaking to groups will hone your oral communication skills and will help position you as an expert on the topic. When you develop a reputation as an expert, you will be more welcome in the executive offices of many of your best prospects. Speaking will help open many doors for you.

Small meetings and seminars have proven over the years to be great venues for meeting and following up with decision makers and influencers in important prospects. It just makes good sense, a small meeting allows you to give more one-on-one time to a prospect and speak directly to her issues.

Getting prospects to your meeting starts with a good title. A topic like “The legal implications of labor contracts” is boring. Try a more interesting title like one of the following:

- “Increase your profits NOW by giving your employees a raise”
- “The IRS wants your money: How the Self-Employed Can Keep Taxes Low”
- “Raise Millions in New Capital: How to Attract Money in the Capital Markets”
- “Right-Sizing Your Work force Without Inviting Litigation”

Running the Seminar

Before giving a seminar, make sure the room is comfortable. You can have a stellar performance, but if your prospects are physically uncomfortable, it will negatively impact your response.

The best way to stimulate enthusiasm in the room is to create a dialogue among the participants. You should speak no longer than about 20 minutes, then ask for table discussions and feedback. Make certain that your associates are strategically placed at the participant’s tables, not standing in the back of the room like birds on a telephone wire.

Build In Follow Up

During your presentation, make reference to materials you have available for those interested. Don’t pass the materials out at the meeting, ask people to give you their business cards and you will get the material to them. Your follow up to these requests can vary. For example, you could mail the material requested to low level prospects and hand deliver the material to top prospects.

(Appendix 2 contains a checklist for deciding on a seminar, workshop or training program.)