

Denver Business Journal - May 14, 2007

<http://denver.bizjournals.com/denver/stories/2007/05/14/smallb3.html>

## DENVER BUSINESS JOURNAL

Friday, May 11, 2007

# Sharpen your approach to making follow-up calls

Denver Business Journal - by [Garry Duncan](#)

The client loves your killer presentation. Everything is positive, upbeat and promising. Then the bomb drops and you hear, "This is just great. Let us talk this over and we will get back to you."

Despite your best effort to prevent stalls, they still occur for a variety of reasons.

Some industries, such as home-repair contractors and high-dollar services, are just more prone, especially if the buyer has no initial concept of the investment required.

Follow-up is a required skill in selling and is just as important as making initial calls. Though most consider follow-up calls easier than initial ones, many sellers say experience proves them nonproductive, adding to the frustration of selling.

By following your established sales procedures, qualifying well and having a clear understanding of the buyer's decision process, you can reduce the necessity for follow-up calls. Reaching mutual agreement about when you can receive a decision before giving your presentation is good common sense.

Despite these preventive steps, events occur and follow-up is required. If this happens to you, here are some follow-up rules:

- Rule one: Know what you're going to say and what you're going to ask the prospect to do. This isn't the time to stumble and is just as important as the presentation.

Take the opportunity to gain credibility by referencing something from your presentation or better yet, something specific from your conversation with the prospect.

Remember the words of Neil Armstrong, when he said, "One small step for man, one giant leap for mankind." What most don't remember is his follow-up comment, which was, "It was just like the drill." Preparedness can pay handsomely.

- Rule two: Make the call a two-way conversation by gaining proper permission before starting and listening carefully. Nothing kills your efforts faster than engaging in a conversation when the prospect is in a meeting, expecting another call or is under a deadline.

Have some thought-provoking questions to engage your prospect and get them thinking. Use known concerns or needs for these questions. Listen closely and clarify comments that are ambivalent.

Think about when you were leaning toward making a purchase but still somewhat unsure. Chances are good you made many positive comments short of saying, "Yes, I'll buy it."

Words that are vague yet promising are one of the most common techniques buyers use to keep sellers at bay. "We really like it," and "Things are moving forward internally," or "We are almost there," are just a few you may have heard or used personally. Ask, "Help me understand what that means," to get specific information.

- Rule three: Have a clear reason for the follow-up call. "I am just touching base," or "The reason for my call is to see if you received the information I sent you last week," is a waste of both the buyer's and your time.

Make the call valuable to the buyer whenever possible. For example, say, "I thought about our conversation and I have some new ideas for you" or "I have a different option you may want to consider."

You might share a testimonial about how another client in a similar situation benefited from your proposed solution, and offer to have him or her contact your prospect.

Don't forget to update your prospect with product changes or enhancements that could be of benefit. Use follow-up calls to move the sale forward or to obtain a decision.

Take a few minutes to get clear on the purpose of your follow-up call to produce a better result.

It's hard enough to catch prospects in the office and engage them in a conversation, and even harder to get someone to return a voice mail. It's always best to make repeated attempts to reach someone, but if you feel it's necessary to leave a message, use a product benefit that is compelling enough to call you.

What benefit could that be? Only your product knowledge and previous information can answer that. Benefits are in the mind of the buyer, so they're meaningful only if the customer thinks so. Relating them to a stated need or problem is the best bet.

A seller recently reported making 10 follow-up calls and closing two deals he otherwise wouldn't have had.

Remember, if you're not making effective follow-up calls, the person you're probably helping the most is your competition.

*Garry Duncan is principal of Denver-based Leadership Connections, a sales training company. Reach him at 303-462-1277 or [garry@leadershipconnections.com](mailto:garry@leadershipconnections.com).*

*All contents of this site © American City Business Journals Inc. All rights reserved.*