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Every sales call requires an objective and decision

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

An average sales call can cost you or your company \$99 to \$452, and Hoover's puts the average cost at \$379. So it's important to maximize the return on your investment.

There are two principles to keep in mind:

First, have an objective for each sales call. Knowing your sales process allows you to identify where you are and what you need to do next. By following a process, you stand out from the crowd, and it's easier to set clear objectives that will shorten your selling cycle.

Second, every call should end with some type of decision.

Let's look at three categories of sales calls -- service, prospecting and face-to-face sales -- and some typical objectives and ending decisions.

- Service calls that begin with "Anything I can help you with today?" or "I just wanted to stop in and say hi" are weak, especially when everyone is busy. Let a card, note, e-mail or message take the place of some of these goodwill calls.

If you're going to make a service call, make the customer feel more important by saying, "I came over to see you." Let them know they're important enough for a specific visit.

Have a specific objective, such as finding a new need, protecting existing business, handling an objection or stall, determining any changes in the organization, or identifying competitive strategies and tactics.

Sales calls without clear-cut objectives are just a waste of your time and the company's money.

- Consider the call objectives for prospecting. Prospecting's purpose isn't to sell. Objectives for prospecting calls should be limited and related to their true purpose, such as:

(1) Qualifying new business opportunities.

(2) Identifying present or future needs, decision-makers, budgets, usage, volume and other situation criteria.

(3) Initiating communication and starting relationships.

- (4) Follow-up after trade show attendance, direct mailings and advertising campaigns
- (5) Identify current vendors, likes and dislikes of current vendors, challenges and goals.

- If you're sending information on an initial contact, it's reasonable to ask for a follow-up meeting (phone or face to face) for feedback.

Face-to-face meeting objectives generally cover three areas: Information you need to give, information you need to get, and decisions/actions that you and the prospect need to take at the end of the call.

Not all call objectives are to make the sale today. For example, in longer cycles and complex sales, it's realistic to have specific and limited objectives, such as establishing rapport, defining a prospect's specific problems or needs, discovering what the decision-making process is, what the decision criteria are, meeting new people within the organization, getting a referral to another department or qualifying the budget.

Usually there are only three possible decision objectives for the end of most calls: a decision to buy, a decision to move the sales process forward with a clearly defined next step, or to decide to end the process because there isn't a fit. A referral also would be an acceptable result.

Next-step calls are the biggest problem area, because they often are unclear. Typically, they define the action only for the seller and not the buyer.

If your prospect isn't willing to exert effort or take an action to further the sales process, they're probably not committed to tackling their stated needs. Asking the buyer to give a thumbs-up or thumbs-down decision, even on a part of the sale, is an example of a specific action to ask of the buyer.

Having an undefined objective occurs when agreeing to a meeting without specific topics and goals for it. Consider how often you find yourself researching answers, solutions or options only to have the buyer present more questions or another stall.

A good rule is to know what's going to happen next, before you do the work. Ask the customer, "If I can meet your deadline, change the specs, meet a special request, etc., what would happen next? What would you do?"

The answer would tell you if your investment of energy would be fruitful and helps define what would or should happen next.

Once you're clear on your objective for the call, prepare specific questions related to the objective. What information do you need and what questions do you need to ask? How do they need to be asked and in what order?

Eighty percent of salespeople don't prepare a list of carefully phrased questions before a sales call. They just show up and start talking.

In today's economy, getting information and understanding the key challenges your prospect

faces are far more important than presenting preconceived solutions.

Garry Duncan is principal of Denver-based Leadership Connections, a sales training company. Reach him at garry@leadershipconnections.com or 303-462-1277.

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