

Cold Calling in a New York Minute

By Joe Rickard

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Selling print is not an easy task, but selling in Manhattan creates obstacles for even the most seasoned sales professionals. Salespeople who travel into New York City are amazed at how difficult it is to get appointments, and to be seen by non-customers. One could argue it's the culture of New York, and in the metro area that makes cold calling a challenging—and for new salespeople, often intimidating—experience.

In Manhattan, time is tight, and everyone is in a rush. Recently I heard about a salesperson and sales manager who could not get past the "screen," so they waited near the elevator for hours to talk to the president of a large software firm. They were convinced they had a "killer application" and could help the company. They chased him into the elevator and gave him a short pitch. They were successful and got an appointment. Great salespeople are not only convincing, but relentless.

The opportunities are large in New York City, and the payoff is big for salespeople who successfully prospect in large printing-intensive companies. Mastering effective prospecting techniques for new customers is a fundamental skill required of all successful printing salespeople. When a company is in a buying mode, the first person in has a much greater chance of winning. A key advantage of selling in Manhattan is that people change jobs so often, nobody remembers the last salesperson, or if that printer may have done a poor job in the past.

Perfecting the Pitch

Getting to see new customers is often a two-step process. Both steps require strong sales skills, patience, and practice.

Salespeople have seldom more than a "New York minute" to state their case. The first step is to get through the "screen". The screen can be voice mail, or a standard receptionist/administrative assistant. These are the people that ultimately may prevent a salesperson from getting their foot in the door with a new client.

Most telephone screens will do or say anything to just get you off the phone. They will make up almost anything to keep salespeople out (most screens know the salesperson will not call back) because it can often turn into more work for them. They also know if they let a printing rep in, they are doomed; they can never keep that person out again. I find it interesting that information, which could really help a company, is often left in the doorway by a nasty screen.

Successful salespeople enlist the screen as their partner. It is always better to have him or her on your side. If it is a large company, you may want to make an appointment with the administrative assistant with the expressed purpose of explaining why his or her boss would be intensely interested in what you have to say. When the assistant is enthusiastic about your presentation and impressed with you, your appointment is almost assured.

When you have the assistant on the phone, and he or she is hesitant about putting you through, ask searching questions, or make important statements having to do with the business and deserving the attention of your target. Customer references and sample applications are powerful door openers. Use them when you can.

Your opening statement is the most important part of the conversation. A good pitch is often called a value statement, initial benefit statement, positioning statement, or in New York, an elevator speech.

This statement should be short, clear, and to the point. Simply stated, they describe: Who are you? What do you do? To whom do you sell? What makes you unique? How do you bring value to customers?

A good opening statement after introducing yourself could be:
"We are a New York (N.J., Conn.) company that provides graphic design and printing services to (targeted market here). At (your company name), we work with organizations looking for ways to improve fund raising, by blending technology and high-quality communications. For instance, our company has helped (current customer) increase donations by 15 percent through creative use of merging databases into personalized letters of solicitation. Can I come in next Monday to share some of our ideas with you?"

On to Phase Two

Once you get past the screen, and have made an entrance into the account, life becomes easier. It's a truism that the higher up you contact in the company organization, the more the discussion will be focused on larger operational and strategic issues. As a rule, executives are easier to deal with than lower-level operational managers, who are constrained by budget and authority.

Once in, you have to convince an actual decision maker to agree to use your services. Customer references and appropriate sample applications are powerful tools to gain interest. I have a few tips to land that sale:

- Anticipate objections. Most salespeople in Manhattan do not have enough information or the right message to get the appointment easily. It can be achieved, but to be successful requires hard work, practice, and timing. Objections will take place at every step of the sale. One of the toughest heard at the beginning of the sales process is, "We're not interested in changing" or "We just made a decision." Here is where the salesperson concedes that virtually all of his or her present customers previously had existing vendors. Given the rapid change in innovation and

technology, this may be a good time to review what other companies are doing to gain a competitive advantage when it comes to printing.

- Practice makes perfect. There are some classic maneuvers such as, the FEEL, FELT, and FOUND method. I know how you FEEL Ms. Customer, many of my customers FELT the same way, after they just brought in a new printing company, but they FOUND after meeting with me, the time was well spent after I shared ideas with you about how other companies in your industry are using "print-on-demand."
- Don't give up. Most print salespeople attempting to gain time with non-customers call once and then never again. Assuming you have targeted an appropriate customer, a good rule to follow is the Rule of 5. Make contact via phone, in person, and online up to five times over six months, using a tailored pitch until you get the appointment. If you can't, move on to the next year.

Nico Brusco, president of EarthColor Business Solutions in Moonachie, N.J., advises salespeople to remember the importance of networking. "The best approach is to use personal referrals. People in the New York City metro area are busy, and often abrupt, but it is hard for anyone to brush you off when you use a personal or business relationship as a door opener."

It takes extra effort to place yourself in front of decision makers. But remember, no matter where your territory is located, a lot of people in a company can say "no", and only a few can say "yes." All it takes is one "yes" to gain some momentum.

Joe Rickard is a sales training leader and consultant who works with printing and technology companies in the graphic arts to improve their sales effectiveness. He is the founder of Intellectual Solutions, a provider of customized sales and sales management training material and services. Contact Rickard at (845) 753-6156, jrickard@intellectives.com, or visit www.intellectivesolutions.com.