

Overcoming Call Reluctance

Everyone in marketing faces it at one time or another - reluctance to pick up the phone and make calls. Logically, it makes no sense to feel that way. We believe in our product or service. We have a script that's either been given to us or one that we've carefully written out. We have a list of prospects that are at least somewhat targeted. We know that when someone says "No", it's not directed at us. And still... the phone weighs a ton.

OK. You decide that the pain of being broke is greater than the pain of "cold" calling, so you commit to making calls each and every day. Or at least commit to try. Or try at least some days each week. For a while anyway...

We've all been through all of this before, and guess what? IT DOESN'T WORK! We're still reluctant to make the calls we know we need to. So what's the deal? Are you just "bad" at calling? Is it that calling only works for some but not most of us?

The answer, of course, is that calling can work for any one of us. It's a matter of finding the right "key"(s) to open that door of calling success. We need to address why the typical "cold" call isn't effective. We'll start with the obvious issue. Calling strangers causes most people some amount of anxiety. Why does it make us feel so anxious and apprehensive? I've found that there are four reasons that cause people feel anxious about calling. If any one of them exists, anyone would feel anxious about making a call. Here they are:

- 1) We feel that we sound like a telemarketer. Somewhat unprofessional and/or insincere.
- 2) We aren't sure how to effectively start the call.
- 3) We aren't sure how to effectively steer the conversation.
- 4) We aren't sure how to comfortably and professionally end the conversation.

Let look at each one of these issues separately and find out how to put them behind us.

1) We feel that we sound like a telemarketer

What makes a telemarketer sound like a telemarketer? Think about it for a moment. You know the drill - we've all received telemarketing calls both at home and at work. What is it about that call that marks it as a telemarketing call? There are several factors that make us cringe at these calls. First off, telemarketers are either overly friendly to start with or they sound completely disinterested. Both make the caller sound insincere. Secondly, telemarketers talk and rarely ask. The call is all about their product and service and not about the person who received the call. Thirdly, they usually plow through their script, not allowing us to get a word in edgewise. And fourth, it's always evident that they're reading a script to you rather than speaking to you as a person. Those four factors generally mark the call as a telemarketing call.

How do you keep people from viewing you as a telemarketer? Simple. Don't do those things!

- a) When you call, don't be overly enthusiastic and don't be disinterested or matter-of-fact in your tone. Speak in an appropriate, natural tone and manner.
- b) As you get into your conversation, ask questions. Be consultative. Remember, this is about your prospect, not about you.
- c) & d) Practice your script so it is as conversational as possible. I always write out my script so it reads as naturally as possible. It's usually not perfect writing but it is always natural and easy to say.

2) We aren't sure how to start the call

The thing that annoys most of us when a telemarketer calls is that they dive right into some sales pitch without even knowing whether we have the time or interest in hearing about what they have to say. The most effective way to be viewed as a professional is to act like one. As an example, here is the way I start my marketing calls:

"Bob? Good Morning. This is Michael Beck. How are you today? (pause) Bob, I'm an executive coach (pause - I want to make sure they understood what I just said) and have worked with insurance managers for a number of years. Do you have a few minutes to chat?"

As simple as the above exchange is, it serves a number of important purposes:

- a) In short order, I've told him who I am and what I do.
- b) I said his name two times. (People love to hear their own name. Read "How to Win Friends and Influence People")
- c) I began to establish credibility. ("I've worked with insurance managers for a number of years.")
- d) I asked permission to take some of his time.

3) We aren't sure how to steer the conversation

We ended the start of our phone call with a question: "Do you have a few minutes to chat?" There can only be three answers to that question - "Yes", "No", or "What is this about?"

- If the answer is Yes, you're off and running.
- If the answer is No, you could say you'll call back or ask when a good time to call back would be, but why not use the opportunity to get more information? Since you've already told him who you are and what you do, why not ask: "Would you like me to call back?" The answer will either be Yes or No! Either way you should be happy. Either you'll know not to waste your time trying to reach a disinterested prospect or you'll have a somewhat pre-qualified prospect on your list!
- If the response is, "What is this about?", have a short explanation of why you've called prepared, something like: "I wanted to share some of what I do, find out what your initiatives are, and see whether what I do could help you reach your goals faster and easier."

Pretty straightforward isn't it? ...

If you approach the meat of your conversation in a way to see if you can help your prospect, rather than sell them something, it's quite easy to have a stress-free, effective conversation.

No matter what the goal of your call is, at some point the discussion needs to draw to a close with a "trigger" question. "Can we set up an appointment to go over this in more detail?" or "Here's what we should do next..."

4) We aren't sure how to end the conversation

How you handle the end of your conversation will determine how well you protect your attitude. We ended the middle of our conversation with a question (see a pattern here?). There can only be three answers to your question - "Yes", "I need more information", or "No"

- If the answer is Yes, again you're off and running.
- If the answer is a request for more information, have a simple process ready to provide prospects with additional information and/or credibility-building materials, get a

commitment for a follow-up call, and set it up as an appointment in both your calendar and theirs. Don't leave the follow-up as a vague process. In other words get a phone appointment and avoid endless voicemails and phone tag.

- If the answer is No, my preference is to thank them for their time and candor, ask them if they'd like me to give them a call back in 6-12 months, and then hang up!

Let me close with a couple of perspectives that have served me and others well over the years.

One perspective is that if you find that any one prospect means a great deal to you, it's a sure sign that you aren't finding enough prospects. Put in more effort. Then everything else takes care of itself.

The other perspective that I have found helpful pertains to rejection, and is illustrated in this story:

Imagine you have a recipe for fantastic chocolate chip cookies and bake them to perfection. They're absolutely delicious! You take a tray of these cookies around to people, asking them whether they would like one. The first person takes one and loves it. The next person you offer the cookies to declines - they are full, don't like chocolate, or don't want sweets. Here is the key question: "Does the fact that the second person didn't want your cookies affect the quality of the cookies or the skill of the baker?" Clearly the answer is no. Their decision doesn't have anything to do with the cookies or the baker. Their decision was about what's going on in your their life, not yours.

When you create an effective phone process - knowing how to get into and out of conversations - and understand that a "No" truly is not about you at all, calling becomes more comfortable and it becomes easier to make many more calls. The result? Financial Success!

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