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Sales Solutions

How to leave effective voice-mail messages

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Question: Often when making cold calls I am forced to leave a voice-mail message either because the prospect is unavailable to take my call, or because I am being screened by the receptionist. Only about 5 percent of the time do I actually get a call back after leaving a voice-mail message. How can I leave voice-mail messages that elicit a better response?

Answer: The key to leaving effective voice-mail messages is "less is more"-- in other words, the shorter your voice-mail message, the better, and the more likely you are to get a response from the prospect. The common mistake we salespeople make is that we consider voice-mail an opportunity to leave a three-minute commercial for the prospect, rather than the more appropriate use of voice-mail, to get the prospect to call us back.

Many times we leave voice-mail messages that are so detailed the prospects decide they are not interested and do not call us back. The better tactic is to leave a short, concise message that includes an element of curiosity so the prospect is intrigued and therefore has a reason to return the call.

For example, referring to a well-known company in the prospects industry with whom you currently do business creates curiosity with the prospect. Using this technique, my voice-mail message might sound something like this:

"Hi prospect, this is Andrea Sittig-Rolf with Sittig Northwest. I'm calling about ABC Company. Will you please return my call at 206-769-4886? Thank you."

That's it, nothing more, hang up. Now, the strategy to this technique working successfully is in the way you handle the conversation when the prospect calls you back. To avoid the prospect feeling tricked into calling you back, here is how the return call should be handled:

Prospect: "Yes, I'm just returning your call about ABC Company."

Salesperson: "Great! Thanks for calling me back. ABC Company is a client of ours for which we have provided sales training services that have increased sales team production by 27 percent. Because you are in a similar industry, I thought we might be able to help your company in the same way. Are you available to meet next Thursday at 10 a.m. for about 30 minutes to discuss this further?"

By immediately referring back to ABC Company as the reason why you called, you avoid the prospect feeling deceived into returning your call, and you are immediately showing the connection between your client ABC Company, and your prospect.

Another technique that works well is to refer to another salesperson who is no longer with your company. Using this technique, my voice-mail message might sound something like this:

"Hi prospect, this is Andrea Sittig-Rolf with Sittig Northwest. I'm calling about Bob Smith. Will you please return my call at 206-769-4886? Thank you."

Again, the success in this technique is in the way the call is handled on the call back. Here is how the return call should go:

Prospect: "Yes, I'm just returning your call about Bob Smith."

Salesperson: "Great! Thanks for calling me back. I see from our records that you were working with Bob and he is no longer with our company. I just wanted to follow up to be sure you're being taken care of and to learn more about your company so I'm sure we can best serve you. Are you available next Thursday at 10 a.m. to meet for about 30 minutes?"

Again, immediately showing the connection between Bob Smith, the salesperson who is no longer with my company, and the prospect is crucial in the success of this technique.

One last technique is to team up with another salesperson in your company and trade lists of prospects you have not had success in working with. Using this technique, my voice-mail message might sound something like this:

"Hi prospect, this is Andrea Sittig-Rolf with Sittig Northwest. I'm calling about Jane Jones. Will you please return my call at 206-769-4886? Thank you."

The conversation on the return call should go something like this:

Prospect: "Yes, I'm just returning your call about Jane Jones."

Salesperson: "Great! Thanks for calling me back. You had spoken with Jane from my company some time ago. The reason for my call is that we've had great success with ABC Company and I wanted to meet with you for about 30 minutes to determine if our sales training programs would increase sales production for your company as well. Are you available next Thursday at 10 a.m. to meet for about 30 minutes?"

Once again, showing the connection between Jane Jones, my teammate, and the prospect is critical to the success of this technique.

Try these techniques the next time you have the opportunity to leave voice-mail messages and be ready to handle the plethora of return calls!

(For more information on cold calling techniques, check out Stephan Schiffman's book "Cold Calling Techniques ... That Really Work!" fifth edition.)

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