

Fast Track your Prospecting Cycle for 2009

New Business Prospecting-

Effective prospecting is a crucial element of any business development. However prospecting is not selling, it is creating and nurturing opportunities that generate leads. All businesses need sales leads in order to survive and flourish.

In the current economic down turn how do you know who to prospect and how, without stretching budgets and neglecting existing clients?

The Prospecting Stages

Effective prospecting should not be just about big marketing drives to meet immediate revenue targets. It should be about short term and long term goals that can be measured consistently and incorporated as part of your wider sales strategy. Quite simply many fledging businesses struggle to get the balance right, either getting so caught up in delivering work that the marketing falls by the wayside, or focusing so much on the initial stage of prospecting that there is insufficient time left for following through and ultimately 'closing deals'.

“You must regularly sow the right prospecting activities to reap the rewards” So think of your prospecting as three harvesting stages: sowing, cultivating and reaping.

To ensure your prospecting cycle continuously works for you - allocate equal time to all three stages!

Prospecting (Sowing) Activities

This is the first stage of getting your name and message out there. Email marketing, exhibiting, telemarketing, text marketing, direct mail and networking to name but a few are all proven approaches to generate leads. The approach you choose depends on what you feel is the best approach to reach your target audience. Perhaps you have had previous success with a particular prospecting approach? If not then a good place to start is to research your potential market, potential customer needs and also take a look at what prospecting works well for your competitors!

Cultivation (Follow up)

A quick word of caution, it is staggering how many businesses invest considerable time and resources in getting their prospecting right, only to then not follow up on any leads! I have seen the most alluring and successful exhibitors eagerly working a crowd and gaining leads, only to not follow up on the leads. What a waste of money! And what a lost sense of purpose!

A timely follow up -whether you arrange a meeting, send an email, or make a telephone call is crucial to cultivate your new relationships and bring the prospect a step closer towards buying.

Reaping (Winning the business)

This is the reward for all your efforts -You win business, you get paid!

If you endeavour to make things happen in all stages of your prospecting cycle then you will always be reaping (getting paid) as well as sowing the seeds for sales that

will come. You must of course allocate sufficient time still to existing clients as well, as they are the foundation of your business.

Essential Prospecting Plan

So now we have looked at the different prospecting stages and why you should split your time equally, here are some essential tips to help you plan your prospecting activity.

1. Know your Target Audience

Are you targeting more of the same type of client? Are you looking at trialling new vertical markets to ascertain potential level of interest?

Or do you ultimately only want to target larger organisations? To leverage for e.g. 10% of your biggest client base?

What are your defined geographical regions?

Build a list of your desired customers, and decide how you will reach them?

Have a concise compelling message for each different target group.

2. Data

Buying and maintaining good quality data is a crucial part of any direct mail, e-marketing or telemarketing campaign.

The data you source or agree to use needs to be as accurate and targeted as possible. If the data has come from a variety of different sources other than a data company you can ask a data company to carry out data hygiene so that they can cross reference and delete any that are CTPS (corporate telephone preference service) registered (opted out of receiving marketing calls or unsolicited emails) and duplications.

On average 25% of people change jobs /roles every year so data will have some inaccuracies. It is advisable that you clean data every time you use it for any telemarketing or direct mail campaigns in order to keep it as up to date and effective as possible.

If you decide to outsource any telemarketing a good telemarketing company will be able to advise you on data sourcing, data compliance, and utilise any data they are given and clean it as they make the calls.

3 Recognise what constitutes a 'quality lead to you'

Prospecting should focus on quality over quantity; after all wouldn't you rather generate a lower volume of leads but of a higher quality with consistent conversions?

A lead these days can come from so many sources you need to be clear on what constitutes a 'hot lead', a 'warm lead', a 'luke warm lead' and a 'cold lead' for your business?

For e.g. a website enquiry looking to purchase from you in the next few days would be viewed as warmer than a postcard left in a box at your exhibition stand with no timescales for buying.

Only when your business agrees on what constitutes a 'quality lead' can you then set up a process for recording level of interest and following the interest through to hopefully a sale.

Quality Qualification

In order to give your prospective clients what they want, you need to understand their exact needs. In other words when you follow up your hot or warm lead you need to be clear on how you are going to further qualify and progress their level of interest. For

instance a 'quality qualification' may include finding out what the prospective clients exact requirements are, level of urgency, budget and concerns are.

What gets measured gets done

Any telemarketing efforts should be logged onto an in house reporting system showing all call activity and level of conversions.

Direct mail is 3 times more successful if followed up by a call afterwards. Contact names and addresses should be cleaned and updated prior to posting each direct mail batch. Direct mail campaigns and e-marketing campaigns should be tracked from when they were sent to when they were followed up and concluded.

The success of any prospecting can only be determined if it is monitored and measured at every stage, with a full evaluation at the end of each campaign.

Prospecting checklist

Where and how does your offering best fit? In which companies, markets and locations?

Do you know from past experience which prospecting approach works best? For e.g telemarketing, exhibitions, direct mail or something else?
If not then research your target audience and competitors.

How many leads on average does it take you to create one sale?

How much market share do you have? And how much do you want?

Set targets for each prospecting campaign

Measure

Remember successful prospecting in the longer term should make you money not cost you money.

Next time you are reviewing your sales growth and lead generation strategies-whether you want to prospect for new business, trial a couple of new verticals? Follow up on a recent mail shot or exhibition? win back lapsed accounts? understand your clients better? or simply to just discuss data compliance or seek advice we are always happy to advise and assist where possible.

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