
The Five Don'ts of Cold Calling

by Judy Carlough

Sales professionals who say they love cold calling are like pro athletes who say they love sit-ups, weight training and wind sprints.

Liars.

Even sales pros who excel at new business development will admit they prefer referrals to flat-out cold calling.

No wonder. It's torture to pick up the phone, get past the dragon gatekeeper, stumble onto an unsuspecting decision-maker, then blurt out a desperate *Got-a-minute-to-learn-about-my-new/improved/unique- widget?*

We hate doing it all the more because we've been on the receiving end of toxic cold calls, usually the *Dinnerus Interruptus* variety from sleazy, over-scripted, telemarketers.

Good news: You don't have to do that.

But what should you do? First, see cold calling as a game, one you can improve with techniques that quickly connect you with a stranger.

Second, remember that the goal of most cold calling is to get *qualified* appointments, a percentage of which will turn into business and referrals. That's the home run: referrals and repeat business mean never having to cold call again. Toward that end, here are five things I teach sales pros to avoid.

1. **Sounding like a cold call.** If your standard opening is "Hi, I'm Herb Schlabotnik from Mega Care Co., with 71 exciting ways to improve your employee benefit plan", you're toast. No gatekeeper will admit you; no CEO will let you get to the next sentence. Even Heidi Klum cold-calling to offer swimsuit modeling couldn't get started with a lame opening like that.
Alternative: Sound different. Very different. Even "This is a cold call, and I hate making them maybe as much as you hate receiving them, so do you ant to hang up now?" Anything that interrupts the cold-call pattern and grabs their attention will help nail the appointment
2. **Doing an information dump.** You finally get through to someone (even a blind squirrel finds an acorn now and then) and what happens? You start babbling about features and benefits. Who cares? Not the ambushed prospect. The cold call is not the time to *give* info; it's to *get* something (an appointment, an introduction to the decision-maker, etc.)
Alternative: Prepare simple, compelling questions guaranteed to hook your prospect's interest. Like "What if I could decrease your electric costs by 10%? Would it be worth a half hour meeting to find out?" Or "How much time and money could you save if you cut your assembly line turnover by 50%, something we did recently for ABC Company?"

3. **Ignoring what you SOUND like.** Your Mom was right, sometimes it's not *what* you say, it's *how* you say it. On the phone, 87% of the impression you generate comes from the tone, pacing, and quality of your VOICE, only 13% from your WORDS. So if you speak a) fast, b) with a lot of ums and uhs, or c) have grating tonal qualities/accents (think The Nanny), your prospect won't hear a word you're saying.

Alternative: Record yourself, listen to the playback, and get help. If this seems like "too much trouble", consider that the best singers, actors and broadcasters swear by this exercise. Slow down. Speak clearly. Use short sentences. Sound confident to become confident.

4. **Beating yourself up.** When you strike out, do you put yourself down? "You idiot, why did you say "labor *slaving* device, instead of "labor *saving* device?! You couldn't sell Gucci shoes to Paris Hilton!" This psychology gets you nowhere but down. Cold calls are tough enough without adding bricks to your load by trash-talking yourself.

*Alternative: Accept that the failure rate is high (sometimes over 95%) and don't get discouraged. Look at every No as one step closer to a Yes. Be nurturing to yourself and figure out some way to make this \$@#(&! fun. Yes, **fun**. A guy who once worked for me—an excellent cold call warrior—used to get in the mood by wearing a beat-up fedora inspired by Indiana Jones in search of treasure.*

5. **Thinking you can become effective without a system and without practice.**

Cold calling is like any skill: don't practice, don't study, don't make corrections...don't expect improvement. The definition of insanity is to keep doing something the same old way but expecting better results.

Alternative: Learn a system. Maybe read books, maybe take classes or (if you're lucky) find a manager with spare time to nurse you along. Forget about quick fixes or magic bullet; even Tom Brady and Tiger Woods still practice hard, work with coaches, watch game films, dissect their weakness, tear down and rebuild. It's called 'work ethic'. It's the solo dedication that makes you great.

The payoff? Effective cold calling quickly builds a stable of qualified prospects, which turns into your portfolio of clients, which--*ta-dah*—generates lifetime repeat business and referrals, requiring no more cold calls!

So the sooner you start to love the idea of getting great at cold calling, the fewer you'll ever have to make. *And you can't hate that.* ■



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