

Following Up On Sales Leads

Staying in touch with prospects after an initial sales pitch can be tricky. You don't want to be intrusive and pushy, yet you want to maintain contact. How do you strike a balance? It is rare that a sale is made after an initial contact with a prospect, especially for any large ticket item or service. Customers buy on their schedule and it is the job of the sales person to stay in touch with the prospect during the sales cycle. Here are some ways to maintain contact throughout what can be a long sales process.

Make Sure Your Message has Value for the Prospect

One of the keys to successful follow up is making sure your message in the follow up has value. A contact, by phone, letter or visit that conveys "have you decided yet" is often intrusive to the prospect and seldom successful. A better message conveys "appreciation for your interest, responding to any questions or your interest in the prospect's success" is better received.

Phone calls - The telephone is often the most common tool used to stay in touch with a prospect. It can also be one of the most frustrating tools to use. Often the prospect is unavailable or busy. In either case, you should be prepared. If you do connect with the prospect, express your appreciation for his or her time and deliver your message clearly. Which of the following seems better:

- "Hello, Mrs. Jones. I was calling to follow up on your request for information on our new widget."

Or:

- "Good morning, Mrs. Jones. Thank you for taking my call. I promise to be brief. I would like to describe some additional benefits of using our new widget."

Voice mail - You must also be prepared to leave a message (especially with voice mail) that conveys the same impression. Consider the following:

"Good morning Mrs. Jones. I'm sorry we are unable to speak directly. I wanted to offer some additional thoughts on how our new widget may increase the efficiency of your manufacturing process. I will drop some materials in the mail today. If you would like the information immediately, please call me at (800) 234-9876. I expect to be available all day today. If we don't connect, please leave a message indicating when would be the most convenient time for me to phone you. Thank you."

E-mail - Using electronic communication can be efficient and effective. By its nature, it conveys a sense of speed and urgency. It also has become the communication method of choice of many busy people. While e-mail tends to be less formal than the written word, make sure your e-mails are grammatically

correct and conform to some e-mail etiquette standards. That means using complete sentences, avoiding unneeded capital letters and avoiding using too much bold type. Also make sure to include information on how to contact you.

Be sure your e-mail message adds value. Using a hyperlink to additional information on your product makes it convenient for the prospect to learn more. You may also want to include links to some other part of the Internet where you have found something that may be of interest to the prospect. For instance, if you read some industry publications, you may want to send an e-mail with a link to an article on your prospect's business.

Mail - The written word still has a place in our electronic world. Sending a short handwritten note thanking a prospect for a meeting shows your manners and conveys a sense of personal commitment to the prospect. You can also use the mail to show you are thinking of the prospect by sending materials in a "for your information" form. Many successful sales people scour trade publications to find articles that would be of interest to their prospects. A copy of the article and a short hand written note (maybe on the back of your business card) will remind the prospect of your continuing interest in helping them address their important issues.

Newsletters - Newsletters can be an effective way to stay in touch with large numbers of prospects and leads. While they may be a bit expensive, if your product or service is high-priced and usually involves a long sales cycle, they may be worth the effort and cost. One way to make your newsletter more valuable to the prospect is to mix information about your products/services with other information that will help the prospect be more effective in his or her role.

Summary

Staying in touch with prospects and leads is critical. Maintaining contact can take many forms and will usually be more effective if it is consistent without becoming an intrusion to the prospect. Developing a system that includes several of these ideas and then following that system can make the process easier and more productive.