

## Return on Prospecting©

I've been selling my whole working life, and there have been times when the only way I could get in front of prospects is when I'd "scared them out of the woodwork". Prospecting is a satisfying activity because it is close to "creation"! Having a prospect that wasn't there before you started the process is extremely satisfying and it makes you treat that prospect with respect - they are like diamonds - scarce, and therefore when you have one you need to convert them to business in as near 1:1 ratio as possible.

I've sold for only 3 organisations in my life and they have been industry leaders. Saying, "I'm from IBM" was enough to get a meeting with anyone in the target organisation. Prospecting was easy - cold calling was simply lifting the phone! I was good at it, I had, and think still have, a knack of getting people to talk to me and listen to innovative ways I can satisfy their needs.

**It's stopped working like it once did** - it's become increasingly difficult to get those appointments - and once I had them, the establishment of trust which I knew I needed to create, was even more difficult - something was not working - how I longed for the credibility I gained from a major brand. Omnipresent **competition** and effortless **access to information** was making my prospect **independent** from me - a major stumbling block for getting past square one!

My prospects were no longer information starved - and had a range of solutions they could select from. Opening the door and being first to "mind-share" was not enough. Cold calling was also setting me up for failure as I "made a nuisance" of my message as I worked the process. Telephone calling was not an effective means of starting the relationship - if not what was? Something had to be done! How could I get my "natural salesmanship" in front of the prospect if I couldn't get to see them?

### ***The Cold Call curse!***

They wouldn't see me; calling regularly just turned them against me; they knew more about my "solution" than I did through information access; - I had to somehow get my selling ability in front of the prospect. **How?** By putting my "cold-call" to words!

But, selecting the correct "word" is a critical factor - printed; voice-mailed; written; web-based; I had to understand that the message would only be as effective as the

words that were strung together. Somehow, I had to find a way to write something that would;

- Grab their attention,
- Captivate their interest
- Stir their desire
- Get them to take action!

Hey, that's really not that different from a first-call! Once I'd researched the prospect I'd structure my first call to do just that - sales 101 - don't "do" the product pitch; don't "do" the company overview; show them how you understand their "issues" and where you've done that before!

## The information mousetrap!

What is "the information mousetrap" - you call it anything you want to, but some names may be;

- Simple written report documenting a solution (solution document)
- White Paper (solution document)
- Quick Guide (solution document)
- Executive Summary (solution document)
- Surveyor Paper (solution document)

Just think - the prospect reads this information; **they call you** for more information; now I'm in the driving seat! If this works, how different would this be from me calling them and "begging" for a meeting?

### *What is this information mousetrap?*

Your document must be written in a plain and easy to understand style - but must also meet the criteria for a first-call. This "virtual first-call" becomes a silent salesman identifying a known problem and exposing solutions (including your own) while identifying the benefit to your prospect of a "call to action". What we're trying to do is identify a prospect with a need and pre-qualify them while attracting them into our sales cycle! Like a first-call, we're not going to shot-gun this mousetrap to everyone - we're going to send it to those prospects that may "have this need"!

## *Where are the prospects?*

Where do prospects go to look for information about their need; think:- Google ad's, directories, e-mail banners, magazines and newspapers. If the need is "Managing Sales Pipelines" (example) we would NOT distribute our mousetrap in an internal Intranet chat-room but would choose a sales magazine or other areas where sales managers "hang out" Just remember, like every good first-call you're offering problem solving information and not your company run-down or product overview! A tiny low cost advertisement (e-mail) offering a FREE report that will solve their problem will outperform an expensive full page advert 2:1 or even more!

Let's try one;

*"5 facts you need to know in becoming a recognised expert in your enterprise - by calling your sales pipeline accurately: INCLUDED! 10 must ask questions you should be asking your sales people that will force them to understand the actual value of their opportunities"*

*Push this reply button to register your e-mail for a FREE copy of this report!*

Why would you pick up the telephone to cold-call if a small e-mail like the one above could get your target prospects calling you? The first paragraph of the "white paper" report (whatever you name it) must "sell" them on the task of reading further and bring them to the point of undertaking further action by calling you to try your suggestions through a FREE no obligation "sales team meeting" presentation.

Your "mousetrap" has driven a prospect *with a need*<sup>1</sup> to give you vital information about themselves (their personal e-mail address) and then to *engage with you*<sup>2</sup> in the intimacy of their sales meeting or 1-on-1 review!

**Note**<sup>1</sup>: Not everyone who is exposed to the advert will respond - they either don't have the need (yet), or need to see the same "information" in different words - rewrite the advert up to 6 times and re-advertise using the same media. Concepts don't go stale only repeated adverts do!

**Note**<sup>2</sup>: Those who download - or get sent - your report, may not give you a come-back meeting! No problem, we have here a prospect with a need. If we word the delivery of the requested report in such a way as to gain their permission to receive further FREE reports (White Papers) from us, then we can repeat the come-on to this prospect with a

need - beats cold calling! A good technique here is to offer further reports as a "free bonus" for this face-to-face engagement.

What we have achieved is; to **filter** all likely suspects into prospects that **have a need** and **engaged** with them by **giving them valuable information and access to a subject expert** in a **no-obligation** way. Further, we have permission to share further valuable information, relevant to their need, which in turn will offer no-obligation face-to-face help in implementation.

## The mousetrap headline!

Did you every think of how impossible it is to stop thinking? As I write this there are a number of thoughts bouncing about in my head that have nothing to do with this subject. That **IS** happening in your suspects mind - how will you ever be able to start a conversation with the suspect until you break into the messages flashing around in that head! Every page, web page, advertisement - must have a hook - a headline that catches the attention and draws the suspect into reading further. Studies have shown that if they don't find the information on your web-site in 4-7 seconds they will go elsewhere. I have a friend who says that writing these very reports is a waste of my time as no-one gets past the first paragraph! So each advert, each page of the report **MUST** draw the attention and invite further reading. Remember, your suspects don't give any value to you, your product, your IP etc., they want self-gratification and they want it **NOW**.

### *What is a good headline?*

A good one is about your suspects' situation! It must break into the conversations going on in the head of the reader and draw them into reading further. Nothing gets **our** interest as much as **our** interest! Let's try - "*Are you a frustrated Sales Manager looking for ways to make your forecasts accurate*" or "*Is your Sales Manager position being threatened by inaccurate sales pipeline forecasts?*" Do you think a hard-pressed Sales Manager with this need will read on? Do you think you could come up with 5 questions that illustrate what makes your target suspect sleepless? A good headline piques the readers' curiosity. It is not about you, your product, great service, security etc. ***It's about them!***

## Delivering you mousetrap!

Let's face it - we started out by saying that our suspects are information rich - we have to look for some special ways to get our mousetrap in front of them

### ***Action #1 - "Naked" mail:***

Your prospects get all kinds of mail and most of it is filed immediately in the "round filing system" (the dustbin) - but a postcard is a novelty - how many do you think they get? They don't have to take them out of an envelope and if you address them in a personal way - Hi John (if his name is John :) they may get past the gatekeeper. *"Hi John, here is a picture of Vienna where we had our recent "Pipeline Management - best practices conference! We've gained access to some interesting solutions and would like to offer..."*

In the space of a couple of lines (use cursive type - or have them written out, scanned and printed) they have got the picture (sic) and will/may turn to their computer to type in your URL and download the FREE report (after leaving their e-mail address of course!). The picture and your logo on their peg board will also frighten the opposition!

### ***Action #2 - "FAX" mail***

Think fax is out - no - studies have proven that a personalised fax is 6 times more likely to get into that in-tray than a letter - although, I think a "by hand" personal delivered letter in an *open* envelope has as good a chance! Instead of a short advertisement that we used before, now we have to write a letter. Now if you think about that - a personal addressed FAX has a better chance of arriving on the suspect desk because it gets hand delivered - yes, not in a bunch of correspondence that needs to be opened, read and dealt with in that first rushed hour of the day. How many FAX's do you think the average executive gets? Not many, and one with a catchy headline, graphic and call to action will probably solicit more call-backs than most.

### ***Action #3 - "Publicise" your mousetrap***

The most important activity in advertising is pitching your words at the correct audience. I've worked in a number of huge enterprises that have spent an inordinate

amount of money advertising - mostly just to build the brand. Here is an opportunity to get marketing to advertise just to your market (target customer/territory), on a peanuts budget using copy you'll provide them - and it won't be long before they come knocking at your door to learn your secret!

Regardless of where you operate there are a number of virtual "information spots" where your customers will "hang-out".

### **1. Captive client base - e.g. Engineering News**

These are represented by magazines and web-based "news" feeds that have a captive audience based on the subject matter of the document/magazine or feed. Your "in" would be to write for them or offer information papers about how their customer can solve a vexing problem common to that industry. They "interview" you (or your customer) and then use your white paper to document a story for their magazine. You can advertise alongside the article or leave an invitation to the full "mousetrap" in the story to attract those suspects who:

1) have the problem, 2) the desire to fix it and 3) are searching for further information!

### **2. Editorial from contributors - e.g. salesguru; ITWeb**

Trade magazines normally fall into this category. They approach their advertisers and ask them to provide information in the form of editorial content, often quoting multiple sources of information from your enterprise and your competition. Again an accompanying punchy (paid for) mini-add directing the reader to a free download of the full solution can be inserted for little or no cost.

### **3. Advertorial - e.g. Computing SA - Sunday Times Review**

There are trade magazines whose content are either picked up from contributing magazines overseas or have content comprised of articles that describe a problem and shamelessly attach thinly veiled references to a vendor product which solves this problem. Most of the content is supplied by vendors. If you know they are doing a "series" - you may see this in inserts to the week-end

papers - you can get an advert or a by-line if you are the contributor. Make sure your "mousetrap" is somewhere close to catch the eye of the suspect as they read about a problem to which they require a solution.

**Key Point:** The main reason for getting published is to attract suspects to your mousetrap. Don't waste your efforts by providing a web-page URL or a phone number to contact the "writer", direct them by offering the FREE FULL REPORT and make sure they land on a URL that will capture their persona - e-mail, mobile number etc.

### ***Action #4 - Farm your Prospect List***

If you've advertised in the correct place and written and re-written your mousetrap in a punchy interesting way - a fair proportion of your target market will contact your web service for the full free report/white paper/Executive brief etc. Some of them will also follow up and engage with you directly to take advantage of the FREE face-to-face contact. Not all will do this however. That doesn't mean that they don't want your services. It means that they are either not ready or need a "nudge". Never forget this warm prospect list you're creating. You should be advancing them from this first contact through a hierarchy of "mousetraps" and "reports". You can set this up in your CRM system or look at "virtual systems" on the web. Here, for a small fee, you can manage in an asynchronous way to track and progress your prospects until they call you for a face-to-face. Your set-up should have objectives like;

- a) Continue to educate them on the subject they have shown interest in while showing them other views of the solution. Here you can offer implementation tips and warn of behaviour and features in competitive products that need to be minimised or removed as "must haves" from their perception. You can also use references and offer to facilitate these contacts in a way that allows you to get that face-to-face.
- b) Remind the contact of the cost of doing nothing and the return on doing something. The subject "track" they have chosen should have a ROI (Return on Investment) COO (Cost of Ownership) model, ready and mature to either be customised for the individual or - in our case - as it is an automated response generated in a time frame - a generic model to demonstrate the value of action.

- c) Make the offer time-limited. Nothing drives action like a deadline. If the prospect has entered your mousetrap, he needs to be driven to the sharp end and "closed" at some stage. This interaction cannot go on for ever so you need to structure an end-play. A good "give-away" is to tie FREE consulting time or an on-site survey of the problem to the "last" communication. On the date/time call the prospect and try to get that meeting to discuss this end-play. Failure means "dump", but many just require your voice and the meeting for the prospect to enter the sales pipeline.

Depending on your target audience, product and method of advertising there is a limit to the number of times you can get a prospect to "go round" before you should cut your losses. The success of an advertising/sales campaign such as the one we suggest can be doubled if you do just one more thing! **Measure the results.**

If you "sow" your "mousetrap" in 2 versions - measure which is getting the best return. Work with the words until you understand which word or phrase is attracting prospects. Changing a negative perception word like - exercise - to one like - healthy - can mean all the difference to responses and it could be as high as 30%! If you're thinking about skipping the measurement and analysis part - stop, delete this "whitepaper" and go back to cold-calling! It is that important.

This is something you can outsource to your marketing department. Let them count the returns; let them analyse the differences as you rework your advert. Pretty soon they will think it's their work anyway and will be bragging about this great return on advertising \$!

Good luck, the bottom line is that, in our changing world and economy there will always be room for a good salesperson. That salesperson with the intelligence to display their wares in the best possible way - and - the supreme confidence with energy to get off their butt and make that first call will be the one to outperform the others.

Don't complain about your pipeline being too thin - rather complain about the quality of the prospects that your salespeople (or you) are working on. Need help? We've helped individuals, small teams of a couple of salespeople and large blue chip enterprises to improve the prospects they engage with - [e-mail us for a FREE on site engagement](#) to improve this aspect of your sales process.