



Return to Cold Calling

Let's get back into the people business

by: Derek Shebby, Modern Sales Training

Our dealerships were built on human connection — connection with our employees, with our customer bases and with those we serve inside our local communities. Each salesperson was given a territory and asked to become the CEO of that territory. He (or she) was tasked to get to know the organizations within his ZIP codes, build a great reputation for the dealership and systematically grow market share through adding net-new business to the current customer book. Our legacies were built on people. Those days feel like they were a lifetime ago.

The COVID-19 pandemic introduced fear into that human connection. It changed the way we run our sales organizations. We had to change our sales processes to find alternative ways around any sort of human contact. We were forced to avoid that connection with our employees and customers by moving toward a Zoom/Teams culture and implementing work-from-home environments. We changed our prospecting methods, stripping out in-person cold calling and cold calling over the phone because we were led to believe that people were no longer in the office. We started using other methods like cold emailing and looking into building our brands on social networking sites like LinkedIn. The bottom line is, the pandemic scared the heck out of us. It scared us away from people.

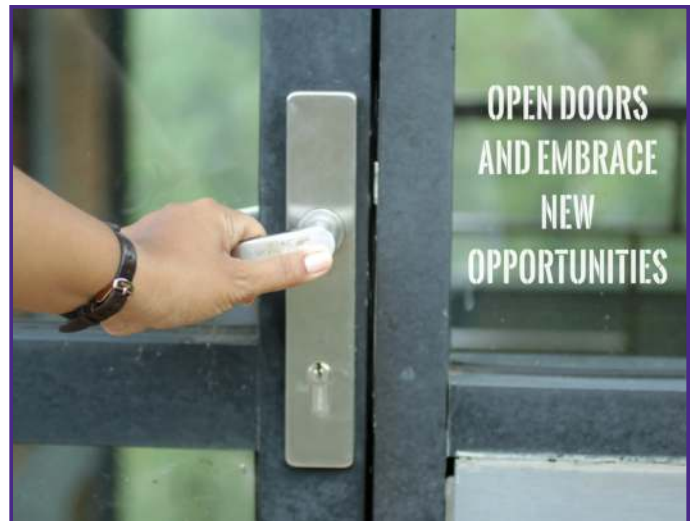
However, we all knew it was only a matter of time before the world would right itself again. Once the vaccines and safety measures were implemented, we could go back to what our business had always been about — people. The good news is those days are here. The bad news is our sales processes are still based on methods adopted during the pandemic, designed to keep our people avoiding human connection. The aftermath of the past couple of years has left us with salespeople who are still scared to prospect face to face.

We need to get back to our proven processes for success. To help you take giant steps toward getting back to those productive days, while at the same time building on things that worked during the pandemic, I have three recommendations for your dealership.

Embrace Those Scary Prospecting Activities

“Everything you’ve ever wanted is on the other side of fear.” — George Addair

Being in sales is not for everyone. It takes courage to be a salesperson. We interrupt people. We do what it takes to get in front of a decision maker. We take the shortest route to getting



an opportunity to meet with our ideal client. We put ourselves out there and knowingly face rejection. It is tough. That is why salespeople are among the highest-income earners in the world. Why? Because they face their fears day in and day out. There have always been other ways to prospect, but cold calling is the shortest route to your customer. Fortune has always favored the bold in sales. That boldness — and that fear — comes from prospecting. Prospecting is scary; or at least it was before the pandemic.

When the world shut down and we were encouraged to social distance, we ramped up using less direct prospecting strategies — the ones that did not require human-to-human contact. The passive ones. The ones that were not interrupting. The non-scary ones. And, as we expected, the results were slim to none. Here is a list of the (non-scary) pandemic methods of outreach: cold emailing; leaving voicemails; social selling (via LinkedIn, TikTok, etc.); and networking events/communities.

Cold emailing was the main method of choice. Salespeople were given hours a day to craft and send emails to prospects as part of company activity standards. These emails would even count as “prospecting touches.” Reps would spend hours crafting the perfect emails to their clients with the hope of having each one turn into a prospect. Our salespeople would end up getting used to hiding behind their computer screens, expecting responses for appointments and easy money flowing into their banks like some get-rich-quick schemes. The reality is most customers just sent those emails to their spam folders and

our sales forces just got used to mediocre results. Cold emailing is the furthest thing from interrupting, being bold or scary.

Cold calling is the most effective method of prospecting, but I understand why some industries would rely on cold emailing as a strategy. They blast the market en masse and hope to get a few prospects out of the campaign. That could work if your market is enormous or highly targeted with an extremely relevant and highly tailored message, but we cannot forget that this is not the silver bullet in our industry. We have territories. We have ZIP codes. Our people have streets that they cover.

I was shadowing a salesperson over the phone a few weeks ago and on the first cold call, the net-new customer said he was interested in new equipment. He had asked his vendor for a quote nine months ago and never heard back. So the vendor just forgot all about it. Insane, right? How does this happen? The email must have slipped through the cracks.

What is the easiest and shortest distance toward reaching your contacts? Get out there. Introduce yourself. Show your face. Meet them. All of this can be done by cold calling (in person or over the phone).

Cold calling in person is an extremely effective way to prospect right now. I have multiple sales boot camps going on in this industry right now and the results speak for themselves.

Are they interrupting their customers? Yes. Is it challenging for them to face that fear that has built up during the pandemic? Yes. When they learn the correct process of cold calling, are they seeing results? Yes.

I had one salesperson do 18 in-person cold calls in one day. He set nine net-new appointments. In one prospecting session, I had a tenured salesperson cold call a school and, two weeks later, he closed a \$90,000 net-new deal there. This happened in August 2022.

You know all about stories like this. In fact, you built your dealership on these types of stories. However, you might have started believing all the “cold-calling-is-dead” hype that went viral during the pandemic. The salespeople who are terrified to cold call may have become extra skilled in selling you why customers still are not in the office and why they cannot seem to reach any decision makers. I am telling you — none of this is true. Success stories from cold calling still exist and the business is out there. What makes it better is that there are fewer salespeople going after that net new in your territories, because their fear is keeping them hiding behind their computer screens. It is time to get your sales team back in cold calling shape. There is a new gold rush going on right now.

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working on your personal brand. Some of these coaches go so far as to imply that you and your salespeople should be spending time working on your personal brands online on a daily basis. They mention using tools like LinkedIn and TikTok, regularly posting and how it will lead to more prospects for your organization.

I acknowledge the fact that I use LinkedIn as a marketing and demand-generation tool. I post daily about sales topics and

current situations that I experience with the dealerships and salespeople I support. Regular posting takes a tremendous amount of effort on my part, but it is necessary to grow my business. I do this because it gives me free access to my target customers.

Does that mean your salespeople should be using LinkedIn like I do? No. Absolutely not. Over the past few years, I have met quite a few salespeople in this industry who use LinkedIn on a daily basis. In fact, a few of these people have three to four times more LinkedIn followers than I do. I asked each of them to tell me how daily posting about how they could be a resource for clients in this industry has helped them with their business. All of them have told me: “Derek, I haven’t gotten one deal or even one prospect from any of my efforts.”

We cannot overlook how LinkedIn makes money. Owned by Microsoft, it has become the largest network for working professionals in the world. There are more than 800 million registered users on the platform. If you pulled up LinkedIn’s financials posted through Microsoft, you would find that it is an \$11-billion company and it brings almost all of that revenue in through what it calls “talent solutions.”

What is “talent solutions”? Recruiting. Yes, LinkedIn makes almost all of that \$11 billion helping companies hire other people. So as soon as your salespeople start “social selling,” posting regularly and building those personal brands, you can expect LinkedIn to send recruiters their way offering new, grass-is-greener opportunities. LinkedIn is Monster.com. LinkedIn is Indeed. Be careful how you use it.

I do agree with the sales coaches about having a digital brand. Sales team members do need to have presence online. Why? Your customers will be looking them up. They want to see photos and bios of the people who have been prospecting them and validate if they have the expertise and could help their businesses. That is very important in today’s business world. Everyone has a digital and in-person brand, and they should match.

The other benefit of LinkedIn comes from the fact that it is the most current network for business professionals on the planet. This means you can use data inside the platform to help you reach the right people. That is a fact. However, a salesperson could also find that out from the source if he

Put LinkedIn In Its Rightful Place

The most popular topic among sales coaches right now is

physically goes to that account down the street in his territory. Why make the process longer? Why aren't they just going to see people in person? Why add unnecessary steps by making the research take longer than it needs to?

What should salespeople do with LinkedIn? I recommend two things. The first is to make sure their profiles match the types of people they want their prospects to see. They need to control that message online and control their brands when someone looks them up. The second is ensuring they understand how to use LinkedIn for prospecting purposes and research. It becomes a strong tool when you combine it with your other prospecting methods. It is a fantastic compliment to your strategy, but it is not the main strategy. Do not forget that LinkedIn is not scary. That means it is not the shortest distance to interrupting your prospect.

Modernize Your Net-New Activity Standards

The last recommendation I have for you is to dust off your net-new prospecting activity standards. What methods are you going all in on with prospecting? Are the methods that you want to track scary? That is a great place to start.

Your salespeople only have 40 golden hours per week. Those are the hours your prospects are working. You and I both know their week is not filled with appointments. At best, they have 10 appointments scheduled, but it is probably less than half that number. That means they have between 30 to 35 hours a week to prospect. How do you want them to spend that time?

I would suggest that cold emailing should not even have a slot in your tracking. When you prospect, it is natural to try throwing in an email as a follow up. That is OK. But tracking that as a prospecting touch is ridiculous. Their activity should be heavy on the scary ones, like cold calling in person and cold calling over the phone. That is where the results come from.

To modernize your net-new activity standards, I recommend prospecting sequences inside of your activities. These sequences do not need to be tracked online per se, but there should be a clearly defined process for them. Outreach, a popular CRM, built its entire system around sequences and it is a very effective tool. But you do not need to use Outreach to create your own recommended sequences. Here is an example sequence that you could follow:

- (1) Strategic in-person cold call
- (2) View their profile on LinkedIn
- (3) Warm call over the phone
- (4) Send a follow-up email
- (5) Connect on LinkedIn
- (6) Creative drop-off in person
- (7) Warm call over the phone

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This sequence would be targeting one individual at one organization. If you are targeting a new contact, you would start the sequence over at the beginning. Having your sales team members learn to follow a sequence will encourage them to go after an account over a longer period of time. In terms of tracking, I would still recommend just tracking the cold-calling efforts only. That is what is scariest and we know that where there is a bold salesperson, there are net-new appointments being set.

How to Get Back to The People Business

Thirty-six months ago, we were in the people business. We worked hard to get in front of net-new companies to share ideas on how to improve their employee efficiencies and help them grow their businesses. We lived in our territories and in our communities. We built human connections. It was never easy. Being a salesperson is not easy. It is picking up the phone and making that cold call. It is pulling up to a net-new business that you want to cold call and opening up that car door. It is walking past that no soliciting sign. We faced our fears and we reaped the rewards.

In a matter of days, the pandemic temporarily shut the door on those business processes and it has been a struggle to make other methods work. Cold emailing and social selling did not work for us because it is not who we are in this industry. It is not personal. It is not human.

We are an industry of people in local businesses working together in a community. We are in an industry that meets face to face, and that thrives off of personal and human connections. That is who we are. That is where we are. That is the foundation we have built our businesses on. We can still get back there, but we need to have the courage to get back into the people business. ■

Derek Shebby, founder of Modern Sales Training, spent 17 years as a top sales executive and sales director with Xerox Corp. in California. During his tenure at Mr. Copy (MRC), Shebby was a 13-time Sales President's Club Award winner, coached hundreds of salespeople and sales leaders to excellence, and helped grow his local division from \$40 million to more than \$100 million in annual revenue (30 to 500 employees). Shebby now spends his time raising his three boys in San Diego, California, while helping dealerships across the nation increase revenues and profits through his 12-week sales boot camp, online sales courses and MPS workshops. Shebby can be reached at derek@modernsalestraining.com and he has exclusive sales trainings for BTA members at www.modernsalestraining.com/BTA. Visit www.modernsalestraining.com.

