YOUR GROWTH HACKS AREN'T WORKING

NOW PICK UP THE PHONE AND GET CUSTOMERS! ☎

THE 2017 COLD CALLING GUIDE FOR STARTUP FOUNDERS

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Your Growth Hacks Aren't Working.

Now Pick Up the Phone

and Get Customers!

The 2017 Cold Calling Guide for

Startup Founders

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Steli Efti

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DEDICATION

To my mother Anthoula, my wife Diana, and my little super hustlers Georgios and Leonidas

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INTRODUCTION

Cold calling in 2017

We're probably living in the best time ever to create a startup. It's never been as easy as it is today to bring your idea to market. What would have cost thousands of dollars to set up just a few years ago, you can nowadays create almost for free. There are countless companies offering services that make it easy to get started, covering every aspect from company-formation, to scalable cloud-hosting, etc.

Founders are sharing their success stories and lessons while they're growing their companies, and it's available to anyone, for free, 24/7. All the marketing tactics, all the growth hacks, all the product strategy, everything you need to know about getting to product-market fit.

But amid all this information, there's one thing founders sometimes forget: their customers. The people who use, and pay for, whatever it is they're building.

Why did I feel the need to write a book about cold calling for founders?

Not because I love cold calling. I hate it just as much as you do. I hate cold calling people. I hate receiving cold calls. I know that everyone's busy, everyone's already got too much on their plate, and

nobody wants to be interrupted during their busy day to talk with someone wanting to sell them something.

The truth is that cold calling sucks. I'm with you on that. I'd love to just set up amazing online sales funnels and AI-powered chatbots, and create a product with built-in virality that spreads via word of mouth. I'd love just to focus on creating an amazing product and through a partnership deal with a large organization, get tens of thousands of customers at once. I'd love to set up a cool ad campaign that brings in an endless stream of paying customers.

But that's rarely how it works.

For one—everybody is trying that. It's not that these methods don't work. They do work—sometimes. But they're also overused, meaning you're competing in a very crowded space. Whenever a large majority is zigging, it's a good idea to ask yourself: what if I zag?

And when it comes to customer acquisition in 2017 for early stage startups, cold calling IS zagging. But there are plenty of success stories, as you'll learn in the next chapter how Uber got started with cold calling.

How to read this book

You can read this book from front-to-back or if your startup is established, jump to the relevant section.

It's organized so that each section represents a step in creating a sales process based upon cold calling:

1. Validate your idea
2. Find your ideal customer,
3. Decide between inbound vs outbound sales
4. Generate leads
5. Email leads before calling
6. Create and use a sales script
7. Qualify prospects
8. Deliver your pitch
9. Dealing with objections (and difficult customers)
10. Close the deal
11. Optimize your sales funnel

The last two sections address the psychological side of sales (such as dealing with rejection or a fear of sales) and common sales mistakes.

Again, the best reading order depends upon your situation. The important thing is to apply these lessons to your startup. In a world where everyone is zigging, it pays to zag.

Steli Efti, CEO of Close.io

From cold call to $69 billion startup: How Uber got started with sales calls!

Uber is one of the hottest and fastest-growing companies in the world, raising their latest round of financing at a reported $69B valuation.

They're successfully disrupting an industry that urgently needs it, and they have a beautifully designed app that does exactly what users want it to do. Such a hip company surely started with some viral growth hackery from day one, right?

Well, it turns out one of the core pillars of their success in getting started and validating the idea was good old-fashioned cold calling.

> I went to Google, typed in San Francisco chauffeur or San Francisco limousine, I just filled out an excel sheet and I just started dialing for dollars, right? First ten guys I called, three of them hung up before I got a few words out, a few of them would listen for like 45 seconds and then hung up, and three of them said 'I'm interested, let's meet.'. And if you're cold calling and three out of ten say 'let's meet', you've got something.
>
> — Travis Kalanick, Co-Founder/CEO of Uber

This is just one example of how cold calling can lead to incredible results but is cold calling right for your business? Here's how to decide.

Is cold calling right for your business?

"Should we be doing cold calling?"

A lot of new founders and small business owners ask themselves this question.

First: Cold calling isn't dead. It can enable incredible growth and millions of companies are growing rapidly because of it—even Uber started out cold calling. If you know how to use it, it will be of great value to your business, too.

In this chapter, I'm going to give you two highly tactical question that'll help you determine whether you should be doing cold calling.

2 simple questions to determine whether you should cold call

Start by asking yourself these two questions:

1. Do my customers buy over the phone?
2. Do my competitors successfully use cold calling?

These two questions answer one core question: Is cold calling a channel that will help me successfully reach my customers and sell to them?

There are two main ways to find out if your customers are likely to buy over the phone.

1. Learn from your potential customers.
2. Learn from your competitors.

Here's how to do it.

Learn from your potential customers

Find your ideal customers (If you're unsure who your ideal customers are, I'll cover this in more detail later) and survey them.

Ask:

- Are you being cold called today?
- Have you ever been cold called?
- Have you ever bought anything after a cold call?

If your prospects tell you that they don't buy over the phone, ask them why. Is it because nobody ever cold calls them? Or is it because nobody reaches them on the phone?

If your prospects are receiving a lot of cold calls, but the pitches suck, well—that's a good thing. Because naturally, a huge part of cold calling is being able to reach your customers. It's also means learning how to cold call the right way will give you a leg up over the competition.

Learn from your competitors

Ask yourself if there's a company in your industry that's currently doing cold calling.

Do they have the same type of customers as you and are they succeeding with this strategy? You'll want to talk to these companies, so start dialing.

Don't know how to get started with calling your competitors? It's easy. Call your competitors on their main sales line. Shortly, you'll find yourself speaking to someone that's very likely to be a junior rep. Just keep calm and act like a prospect.

Here's the thing: You don't even need to lie to them. If you approach the conversation the right way, they'll want to answer all your questions.

Why? Because you might potentially become a very important customer to them.

Eventually, you'll get to the topic of how they grow their business and they'll be happy to answer.

Let the data guide your decision

If your potential customers are buying through cold calling and if your competitors are using cold calling successfully, then the answer

is, yes—it's a strong indicator that you should explore cold calling as a channel for your business.

If your competitors tell you they don't do cold calling, you'd want to know why. Did they try it? If so, what were the results? Did they not try it? Why?

Getting started with cold calling today

Let's say you've answered these two questions and arrived at a "Yes." Next, you'll want to ask yourself two things:

1. Is this the best strategy for your business? Based on all your options when it comes to reaching prospects, is this the best one? Is it cost-effective? Is it competitive? Is it a priority to explore this right now? Like any strategy, you're going to have to invest time and resources into exploring whether it'll work or not.
2. Does anyone on your team have experience in cold calling? If not, will you train someone internally? Will you hire a sales rep?

While it's tempting to just hire a pro, oftentimes the best thing you can do at this stage is to do the cold calling yourself. Even if you hate cold calling people and are bad at sales, you want to be the person speaking with prospective customers before you hire someone to do it for you.

If you follow the advice in this book and you're able to create results, that's a strong indicator that cold calling is right for your business.

Before you jump straight into cold calling to find customers, though, you first need to be sure there's a demand for your product. The next section is devoted entirely to validating your idea using cold calling and a combination of other methods.

USE COLD CALLING TO VALIDATE YOUR BUSINESS IDEA

3 levels of customer feedback

There are many opportunities to build successful SaaS businesses. Find out if your idea has real potential by getting to know your potential customers in three steps.

Building a SaaS business takes a lot of work. Before you even start investing your time, energy and money into setting it up, spend a couple of days to find out if your SaaS idea has real potential to turn into a successful SaaS company. All you need is the power of hustle to validate your idea.

1. Meet potential customers

Go out and talk to people who could be potential customers. Spend a whole afternoon walking into 10 different businesses, and say, "Hi, I'm [your name], can I talk to the manager/owner?" When you meet the owner, say, "Hi, I'm an entrepreneur about to start a new business to fix a problem that I think you have. Can I get three minutes of your time to see if this is something that you might want?"

This is the best way to get started. The big advantage here is that you're going to be able to get valuable feedback by being able to see people's responses. It's very visceral and you will get a real sense for how they run their operations. Although you can't do this kind of

market research on a big scale, the quality of the responses/insights you get is really powerful.

2. Call potential customers

The next thing to do is to call potential customers. Even though you're missing out on a lot of visual clues about them and their business, you still get to have one-on-one conversations that will help you understand their wants and needs really well. This obviously scales better than in-person interactions.

3. Email potential customers

The final step is to email people. You can email a lot more people, but the quality of the insights you get will be different.

You'll be able to see open/response rates and read people's responses. Written feedback often times is a bit more "filtered" than what people would tell you over the phone or in-person. The great thing is that you can aggregate and analyze results at scale.

4. Separating real buying intent vs. "lukewarm interest"

When you're an entrepreneur just starting out, lots of people will tell you that your idea is great, just because they like you or want to encourage you. But there's a big difference between saying they would buy your product and actually paying money for it. How do you find out if they would have real intent to buy?

Here's a simple question you can ask people to find out if they have real buying intent: *"What are all the steps I have to take for you to become my customer?"*

I call this the "virtual close."

Listen carefully, watch out for red flags and make sure you get a very specific answer. Once you've reached a point where the "virtual close" has occurred, do a test closing.

There are different approaches to doing a test close. Find one that works best for you:

- "We want to start in 4 weeks—does this work for you?"
- "The beta program is heavily discounted. If you sign up now, you'll get it for half the price for life."
- "What is the decision-making process in your company? How quickly can we make a decision on this?"

And then ask them for money. Tell them: "Can I take your credit card info to process the payment?"

Make it risk-free. Tell them their payment is 100% refundable. If they're not happy with the product, they can get their money back at any point.

Not everyone will be willing to give you money. But you can get at least some of the people who say they want your product to actually

pay you in advance in order to get a discount in return or move the timeline up.

Summary of the four steps to validate your SaaS idea with sales

1. Get a deep understanding of the environment your potential customers are working in by talking to them face-to-face.
2. Talk to more potential customers by phone to see if the early problems you've discovered are validated with a larger test group.
3. Email more potential customers to test your early findings at scale/gather more data and build up a list of prospects.
4. "Test close" prospects to determine whether they are just "curious" or real prospects with real pain points and willingness to buy your product/solution.

How to get people's attention to validate your idea?

What's the best way to get initial validation for a business idea?

Talk to prospective customers for the solution you want to offer them!

But how do you get prospective customers to talk with you? Especially if you reached out to them and didn't get a response? What if they aren't even telling you that your idea isn't a good one because they don't even take the time to listen to your idea in the first place?

Here's what you need to do …

Tap into your network first

I suggest you first try to tap into your own network. Try to get an introduction to somebody who is a member of the group you want to sell to.

Even if you think there's nobody in your network, spend some time exploring second- or third-degree connections. Somebody you know who knows somebody who knows somebody:

- A friend

- An acquaintance
- A family member
- A co-worker
- An ex-colleague
- A former classmate
- A former employer

Reach out to people in your network and tell them:

"Hey, I'm working on this business idea I have, and I'd like to speak with someone in the XYZ industry about this. All I need is 10 minutes of their time on the phone. Do you know somebody who works in that industry? Or somebody who might know somebody?"

If you do this with some persistence, you'll often find that there are indeed people just two or three degrees away from you who are working in the market you want to sell into.

But if you've completely exhausted your network and there's absolutely nobody, there's still something else you can do …

Send cold emails (the right way)

Start sending out cold emails to people working in industry XYZ. However, a lot of people are too generic in their cold email approach.

It's important that you get the message just right: specific and succinct.

Let's look at this email:

> Hi Steli,
>
> I see you're working in the sales industry, and I have a great idea for a product that could be very valuable to companies in this field.
>
> When would be a good time to do a 10-minute call to talk about this?
>
> Ben

Now what I like about this email is that it's succinct. What I don't like about it is that it's too broad, too generic; I don't have any idea what this is about and whether it'll be worth my time.

I don't even know whether you're an entrepreneur who wants advice. Looking at that email, you could be a sales rep for a PR agency trying to play some BS game to get me on a sales call.

So what's missing in this email?

A clear, specific value proposition. Tell me exactly: what's in it for me?

A better way to convey value would be:

> Hi Steli,
>
> I noticed you're doing a lot of content marketing to drive leads into your sales funnel for Close.io.
>
> I have some ideas on how to take content marketing and promote it in a much more powerful way and I think that your content would be awesome for that.
>
> Can you take five minutes to bounce off these ideas and validate whether what I have in mind could be really valuable to you and your business?
>
> Ben

Now that addresses more clearly what this is about. It's still succinct, but it's also specific enough for me to decide whether I want to respond or not.

Problem-focused cold email

Another approach for an email could be to focus on a specific problem and basically offer people an opportunity to vent their grievances.

Nobody likes problems, but most people like to talk about their problems and get something off their chest.

> Hi Steli,
>
> I'm working on fixing Problem X, and I'd like to talk five minutes with you about the causes and effects of this, and how to best solve it.
>
> Could we talk about this Wednesday or Thursday 11am pacific?
>
> Ben

If you've identified a valid problem, many people will respond to an email like this.

But let's say even this doesn't get you responses. What's the next thing you can try?

Have them participate in a survey

Another approach that often works is to frame this differently. Tell them you're conducting a survey or creating a whitepaper on their industry, or for people in their particular position.

An example would be *"The 2015 B2B Sales Development Reps' Guide to LinkedIn Prospecting"* and your pitch could be: "Every participant will receive a free copy of this $150 whitepaper. It'll contain valuable industry insights, and you'll gain a better understanding of what's working well for others in the same position or industry, and what problems they have."

This is a true value exchange. You now have something intrinsically desirable to offer them, instead of just asking them to pick their brains for a business idea of yours.

I've seen this approach succeed for quite a few people to validate their ideas and learn more about the market.

Cold call until your phone gets hot

If you're not getting responses to your cold emails and you've already experimented with different messaging approaches, it's time to pick up the phone.

I also want to point out this: Depending upon who you want to reach, different media will be more effective.

Selling to enterprise? Cold emails are probably the way to go.

But selling to restaurant owners? Good luck getting their attention with emails. Cold calling would work better.

You have to find out what the best medium for your market is: email, phone or even showing up in person at their workplace. Heck, there are even markets where direct mail or fax work best.

But in general, it's best to get started with emails and phone calls.

No responses?

If you've tried different approaches to reach people and they're still not willing to take the time to really engage in a 10-minute conversation with you, maybe that's all you need to know about that market.

Your idea is probably not as valuable to them as you imagined it to be. It can be a painful realization, but the faster you get the insight, the better. It's time to close that chapter and move on to the next thing: validating an idea even if your product isn't built yet.

The best validation is money

I was talking to a good friend of mine who founded a very successful SaaS (Software as a Service) startup a few years ago and is currently considering a major new direction in their product.

He was asking me about my opinion on this new direction and the sales implications of going after a particular market with a very particular approach. As I was asking more and more questions to dig deeper into the matter, he said one thing that raised an immediate red flag for me.

"We're getting a lot of interest for this but many potential customers want a key feature that we don't have yet, so we can't sell to them today. I think we're going to build out the product over the next few months, since we know exactly what the market wants, and then start selling!"

Beeeeep! Wrong answer!

The best way to discover if your product has a real market is to **SELL FIRST** and **BUILD SECOND.**

I told him what I always tell founders, "You need to charge for the product today."

No matter if it's ready or not. See here is the thing: **getting interest from businesses and getting customers are not the same thing**. Not even close.

You want to test interested parties to discover if they are true buyers with real buying intent.

But how do you do that when you know they need these key features that are missing? How can you charge for something that doesn't exist yet?

It's simple.

Give incentives

They might not be able to benefit from the product/features they need right away (since you haven't built it yet), but they can pay upfront and receive one of two key benefits:

1. A massive discount for pre-ordering your product
2. A shortened timeline for the feature/product release if they commit today

The minimum viable pitch

Here's what you say:

> "It's clear that once we have feature XYZ, we're going to be the perfect solution for you. We're planning to get that feature

> done and released in six months. The pricing will be around $$$ which would deliver [insert massive value] to your business.
>
> We want to give you the chance to get on the early customer list for this and gain some massive benefits. If you commit to making a deposit today for purchasing this product with feature XYZ in the future, we will give you a lifetime discount of 50% and we will move the development in our roadmap to be finished in three months instead of six."
>
> The deposit is fully refundable so in case something unexpected happens to your business in the future, you have no risk. Sounds fair enough?"

What should you do when an initially enthusiastic prospect turns cold once you quote your price?

If a prospect cuts off the conversation just because an initially quoted price is too high, that prospect never had any sincere buying intent.

Which is exactly why you want to ask for the money early and often. Because some prospects will lead you to believe that they love and want your product but have no serious buying intention.

However, they can still be a source of valuable information. Find out why they think your offer isn't worth it. Ask a lot of follow-up

questions to uncover the real reasons. It's almost never about the price!

- Why don't they want to pay your price?
- How much would they want to pay, what number did they have in mind?
- How much would this be worth to them?
- What would you have to offer to make them want to pay your price?

Not getting real answers?

If you feel the prospect isn't being fully honest with you, bring it up.

"This is really hard for me to understand. Help me out here. What am I not getting right? It seemed like you were really interested, and our solution is the perfect fit for you, and I'm open to hear the price you had in mind to make this work. Help me understand how we can move the conversation forward. What am I missing here?"

Whatever happens, make sure that you charge for your product.

Most prospects won't bite and that's OK

If they are not interested in this deal, chances are they are not a real early customer anyway.

Their pain is not big enough and their intent to purchase not strong enough to get them excited about these benefits.

But if you can't close one out of five or 10 prospective customers on this type of early-bird deal, you're in trouble and might not really be on to something in the first place. You might want to spend a bit more time validating that there is a real demand for this product/feature before spending months and millions in feature development.

This is exactly how we got started

Here's a little secret: ElasticSales and Close.io started out like this. We sold our service before we were even able to deliver it, before our company even existed.

Fast track to product/market fit

The hardest (and most important) thing in the early phase of every startup is getting to product/market fit. Don't build and then sell. Do it in reverse. Once you have people that will give you real $$$ in order to get the chance to buy your product earlier and for a discount, you know you're really on to something worth building.

It's a simple strategy that will help you to get to product/market faster and with a lot less pain. The next step? Find your ideal customer.

FIND YOUR IDEAL CUSTOMER

Which type of business should you initially sell to: enterprise, small-to-medium sized, or prosumers?

If you've got a solution that could benefit customers of different sizes, how do you go about developing a B2B sales strategy? The worst thing you can do is to not decide, and instead try to sell to everybody.

Should you sell to small business customers? Fortune 500 companies? Medium-sized businesses? Solopreneurs? Micro-enterprises? Startups? Only restaurants, or restaurants and groceries and office supply stores? There are many ways to slice and dice it, and how you go about it can be the difference between success and failure.

First, let's be clear there are no universally accepted exact definitions of these terms. Different industries and different people will draw different distinctions.

Enterprise

These are the whale customers. Fortune 500 companies that are many times larger than your own company.

Benefits:

- Selling to enterprise customers can generate a lot of revenue. They've got huge budgets, and don't care about spending large amounts of money to solve important problems.
- You gain prestige and credibility. If you have Fortune 500 companies among your customers, and you feature that in your marketing materials, prospects will trust your company more.
- They're very sophisticated buyers. They're willing to pay the price for the high level of support and service they require, and usually come into the deal with realistic expectations.

Downsides:

- It's very difficult to close an enterprise deal.
- Long sales cycles of 6 to 18 months are common. (A lot of startups try to close enterprise deals prematurely, and shut down their business because they simply run out of money before a deal gets closed.)
- Requires industry connection and networking.
- Complex sales has its own playbook. You need to understand how to sell to large organizations with multiple stakeholders.
- Limited pool of potential customers, because there aren't that many enterprises.
- Even if you win a deal, if you don't have the team and infrastructure in place to properly serve them, it can all backfire and take your company down. There's no point in catching a whale if it will sink your boat.

Medium-sized business

Companies that do many millions in revenues and have thousands of employees, but are a step below Fortune 500 companies.

Benefits:

- Pretty much the same as enterprise customers, just to a lesser degree.
- There's are millions of medium-sized businesses around the world, and while they're not as big as a whale, you'll still catch plenty of big fish here.

Downsides:

- It's harder to define them, and because it's harder to define them, it's harder to find them. How can you effectively reach the right kind of prospects?

Small business

Can be anything from a local design shop to a restaurant. Small businesses are typically run by the owner and have fewer than 100 employees. Most of them are in the range of 5 to 25 employees.

Benefits:

- You have a huge pool of potential customers, because there are so many small businesses. You can become very creative and

targeted with your sales approach, and experiment more to find out what works.

- Buying decisions get made a lot faster, with a lot less complexity than enterprise or medium-sized businesses. Oftentimes you just need to get the buy-in from one decision maker.

- Lots of word of mouth happening. Small business customers that are happy with your solution will often refer you to other small businesses.

Downsides:

- Transaction size is smaller, and thus the amount of time and money you can invest in pursuing individual deals is also capped.

- Small businesses are typically not recognizable brands, so featuring their logo as one of your customers in marketing materials doesn't have as much value as well-known brands.

Prosumers

These are professionals who mostly run a one-person business, solopreneurs, maybe with the help of one or two people. Freelancers, single-practice doctors, consultants and so on.

Benefits:

- Very easy to identify and find. Their contact information can often be found in listings, on websites, in yellow pages, etc.

Downsides:

- Deal sizes are smaller, but if you pick the right kind of niche you can still find plenty of potential customers willing and able to spend several hundred dollars a month.
- Because most of these professionals basically "sell their time", they often don't want to spend it talking with people who want to sell them something.
- Sometimes it takes a lot of convincing to get them on board as they're usually very price-sensitive buyers on a tight budget

Hyper-niches

When you're selling to highly-specific businesses that are not necessarily defined by industry, but by the stage of their company. Selling to startups is one common hyper-niche

Benefits:

- If you help a couple of hyper-niche customers succeed, this can often lead to many other hyper-niche businesses signing up with you. When something works well, it tends to spread rapidly.
- Hyper-niches can be a great target audience to focus on if you're very familiar with them, and know what makes them

tick. It can give you a strong competitive advantage over others who don't understand the hyper-niche to the same degree you do.

Downsides:

- When servicing hyper-niche customers and optimizing your product for them, you might find that the specific features they want are not in-demand outside of the hyper-niche. This can limit your ability to grow.

Who should you sell to first?

If you've got one of these products that could be valuable to different-sized businesses, which one should you focus on first?

First and foremost, let your decision be guided by your own understanding of the audience. Pick a market you know very well.

Look for things that give you an unfair competitive advantage:

- Do you have a personal or professional network you can tap into?
- Do you possess insider knowledge?
- Do you have experience working in or with that kind of business?
- Do you have some recognizable branding within that space, are you known among these businesses?

What if you don't have any of these competitive advantages?

Start small. Map out the spectrum for which your product could be a good fit, and then pick the smallest kind of business to sell to. You want to sign up your first paying customers as quickly as possible, and build momentum, gain traction as fast as you can.

You want a high frequency of closed deals, even if they are small deals. As you build a steady stream of sales, look for signals that you're ready to move upstream.

Example: Close.io

At Close.io we're mostly selling to small companies with less than 100 users of our software (100 salespeople or less), and initially we were focused on startups only.

As we gained momentum, built out our product and increase our ability to provide value to our customers and serve them, we started seeing medium-sized businesses or enterprises sign up for our product. Somehow, they heard about us (this happened organically, mostly by word of mouth from our customers who knew people within those larger companies and talked with them about our product). Initially, these larger companies signed up, but mostly stopped using us after the free trial.

The more mature our product became though, the higher our win-rate with these large customers became. **This is the kind of signal you want to look out for.**

This indicates that you're ready to start dedicating a certain amount of your sales efforts on selling these higher-level customers.

This isn't the only way to grow, but it's what I advise you to do. Why? Because we see startups going this route have a much higher success rate than those who try to sell to enterprises from the get-go.

How to create your ideal customer profile for B2B lead generation

Now that you've decided which type of business to sell to, it's time to **create an ideal customer profile so that you can focus your sales and marketing efforts on generating high-quality sales leads.**

Pretty much every week, I speak with founders and sales directors who struggle to reach their sales goals because they haven't nailed their ideal customer profile yet. Many of these are very small teams, but in some cases, even startups with millions of dollars in funding aren't clear of who their ideal customer is.

So let's start with the basics ...

What is an ideal customer profile?

It's basically a description of a fictitious organization (company, government agency, non-profit organization ...) which gets significant value from using your product/service, and provides significant value to your company.

Let's further examine three parts of this ideal customer profile definition.

1. How does this imaginary organization provide value to your company?

- First and foremost, they pay you for the value you provide them. But there are many other secondary ways a customer could benefit your company.
- They might help refer you to other companies.
- They might become advocates for your company.
- They might give you access to resources to grow your business.
- They might provide you with valuable insights into new opportunities.
- They're pleasant to deal with and don't require excessive amounts of support.
- They might let you use their logo and provide a testimonial that you can use in your marketing materials.
- They might just be a constant and never-ending stream of positive feedback and encouragement for your team.

Having listed all these, it's worth restating that the most important indicator of value they provide to your company is the amount of money they pay you!

2. How does this imaginary organization get value from using your product/service?

- You help them make more money.
- You reduce their expenses.
- You alleviate pain points.
- You increase productivity.

- You raise morale.

- You help them better service their customers.

- You help them to become more successful.

- And a thousand other ways …

But ultimately in B2B, it's about how you affect the bottom line, and if your solution doesn't have a direct correlation with profits or expenses, you should be able to demonstrate how it indirectly will affect the organization's finances.

3. Now we said it's a fictitious organization, but the fiction is based on some solid facts and real data

You don't just fabricate an ideal customer profile out of thin air. Instead, you systematically identify shared traits and characteristics of real customers who are succeeding with your solution. We'll talk in more detail about how to do this, but first, let's look at some of your real customers.

Make a list of your "best" customers

Create a list of your 10 best current customers.

You should be able to call these customers and ask them: "How much are you paying us for our solution? And how much value are you getting out of it?"

The second number they tell you should be a multiple of the first number. So if they pay you $100 a month, they should be getting at least $200 of value in return from using your solution.

It's not enough that they pay for your solution. They need to get significant value from it and be aware of the value derived from your solution.

Sell to your customers in three stages

Don't assume that this magically happens by itself. You should take charge of making this happen by selling them in three stages:

1. **Before they buy,** you need to sell them on the promise of your solution. You need to convince them that your solution has the potential to make them successful, and is worth investing in.

2. **After they buy**, you need to sell them on implementing your solution. It's not enough that they just paid you for it—they have to invest time and resources into utilizing it, so that the promised value is actually created.

3. **After they've received the value,** you need to sell them on realizing that it's your solution that has created the value. You need to ensure that the people in the organization are aware of the value your solution has created. This is not something that happens by itself, it's something that needs to be engineered and directed. (Especially in large

organizations, where there will always be individuals and departments eager to claim credit for achievements.)

Don't have 10 ideal customers yet?

If you can't come up with 10 customers, drop everything else and focus on getting these 10 ideal customers. Either support some of your existing customers over to the top until they reach that level of success with your solution, or bring in new companies and onboard them to ensure their success with your solution.

Find common attributes

Now look at this list of your ideal customers, and ask yourself: **what do they have in common?**

This is where you must brainstorm and do your research. Dig deep and come up with lots of attributes for each of these 10 companies so that you later find commonalities.

Your ideal customer profile template

The best way to go about this is to identify which questions are worth asking your ideal customers. Here are some ideas to get you started in different directions:

- What's the size of the organization? (Measured in revenue, number of customers, number of employees, etc.)
- What's the size of the relevant department?
- Do certain job titles exist in the organization?

- Which industry or niche are they serving?
- From which academic institutions did they recruit their employees?
- Which companies have current employees previously worked at?
- Do they largely promote people from within the organization, or do they mostly bring in experienced leadership from outside? (e.g. in the first case, they might value training their personnel higher, versus in the latter they have more demand for recruiting services)
- How long have they already been in business?
- What's the number one reason that would prevent them from buying your solution?
- What's the number one reason that would make them decide to buy your solution? What makes your offer appealing to them?
- What goal do they want to achieve with your solution?
- How are they currently trying to achieve this goal?
- Why did they decide to try this approach? (What was the decision-making process that led to this choice?)
- What's the main pain point with their current approach?
- What are the three most important features for them?
- What's their buying process like?
- Did they ever make a purchasing decision to fulfill the need? If yes, how often did they already do this?

- Which industry publications, blogs or websites are they following?
- What kind of tools or services are they using?
- Where are they located? (Geographic region? Rural vs. urban area?)
- Any recent personnel change? Restructuring? Other recent events in the company?
- Seasonal or temporal factors? (e.g. Spending remaining budgets before the end of the year? Selling remnant advertising before going to print? Having to meet goals before the end of the quarter? Low demand during summer?)
- How have they been affected by changes in the economy or other developments outside their sphere of influence?
- What kinds of social media platforms do they use?
- What kind of usage patterns do they show?
- What's their culture like, what values do they practice?
- How do they position themselves in the market?
- What words do they use to describe their product or service?
- In which directories do they get listed?
- Which associations or trade groups are they members of?
- Are they more driven by a desire to be innovative or to reduce risk?
- Which trade shows or industry events do they attend?
- How technically sophisticated are they?
- Where do they source their materials?

- What distribution channels do they use?

- What's their awareness stage? Do they already know your product and just aren't motivated enough to buy? Do they know the end-result they want but don't know if your solution can deliver it? Do they know that they have a problem, but have no idea how to solve it? Are they not aware of the problem, and need to be educated about the fact that they have a tremendous opportunity for improvement?

As you can already see, there are hundreds of questions you *could* be asking, and it's impossible to provide an exhaustive list. That doesn't mean you *should* be answering all of them.

Don't get stuck in generic templates which try to define your ideal customer in terms of broad demographic, psychographic and behavioral attributes. These fill-in-the-blank customer profile templates are no basis for creating highly targeted lead lists.

Get together with your team for a couple of hours and brainstorm which questions are relevant to your ideal customers.

INBOUND VS OUTBOUND SALES

Inbound or outbound sales—which one should you focus on?

I share a lot of advice about outbound sales. Thus, many people naturally assume I'm an outbound advocate. I'm not. It's just one of the things I do, outbound is a part of the puzzle of success in business to me. But I don't think every startup should do outbound sales.

When it comes to inbound versus outbound, I'm not dogmatic—I'm pragmatic!

Cons of outbound sales

Outbound sales has taken a lot of flak for several reasons.

1. Public enemy number one

Nobody wants to be cold called—even sales reps who cold call don't want to be cold called. I'm more receptive than most to cold calls because I'm a sales aficionado. I appreciate good salesmanship but even I don't look forward to being pitched.

2. Interruption

When you're doing outbound sales, you're interrupting people. Everybody is an expert nowadays on filtering out interruptions. The average US citizen is bombarded with more than 2,000 marketing and

sales messages every single day (number varies depending on methods used to measure, but 2,000 is actually on the low end).

It's like our brains have a subconscious TiVo or adware program running that immediately blocks anything that triggers the sales pitch alarm. You basically have to buy, beg or bug your way in.

3. High-pressure sales tactics

These are still commonly used and encouraged in outbound sales organizations, but you can (and should) be a smooth operator rather than a sales bully.

4. Time inefficiency

Outbound sales reps waste a lot of time on mind-numbing tasks. They spend only a small part of their workday practicing their core skill: closing deals. (Which is something we're mitigating with our outbound sales software, but it's still a major pain point.)

5. Finity

Outbound sales stops working as soon as you stop working. One of the big advantages of inbound sales is that it keeps generating leads even if you stop doing it. But as soon as you stop doing outbound, it stops generating new business.

Pros of outbound sales

Now let's look at the flipside of the coin.

1. It works

Yes, it's 2017. Yes, "the buying cycle has changed" and we're living in unprecedented times since social networks changed the game of sales. But the fundamentals of salesmanship that worked in 1917 are still working now, and will still work in 2117. Outbound sales brings home the bacon.

2. Predictable and scalable

Once you have developed a sales process, you have a predictable, scalable growth mechanism for your business. Hire a new sales rep? You know how the actions you take now will affect your revenues three, six, nine months from now. Ask any business owner—that kind of simple formulaic predictability is a beautiful thing.

3. Power to choose your customers

Outbound empowers you to pick your customers. Outbound is hunting: You pick a target and go for it. Inbound is fishing: You hang a fishing rod in the water and hope that a fish will bite, but your control over what kind of fish will bite is minuscule.

4. You determine the timing and medium

Outbound sales gives you control to determine when you want to interact with prospects. This is the flipside of the "interruption" coin. Rather than having to wait for prospects to reach you through

inbound requests when they are ready, you reach out to them when you are ready.

You also determine the medium of your interaction, be it an email, a phone call, meeting them at industry events or even knocking on their doors.

5. Immediate results

Outbound sales can generate new business quickly, whereas inbound takes a long time to build up. If you want fast growth now, outbound is your friend.

6. Targeted reach

If you're selling to professionals, outbound allows for a much more targeted lead generation process. This kind of laser focus allows you to execute with a higher level of precision and accuracy, and thus be much more effective. Want to reach the VP of Marketing at Citigroup? Good luck trying to get his attention with inbound tactics.

7. Higher level of engagement

The most impactful and influential sales outreach possible is a human one-on-one interaction. It allows you to truly engage with the buyer. Everything else pales in comparison when it comes to the impact you can have on an individual buyer.

Is outbound right for you?

It really depends on what the focus of your business is now, how fast you want to grow and what kind of business you want to run.

Your strengths

Whether or not you've got what I call the "hustle DNA" and are a natural born salesperson, you should be doing some outbound sales, just for the lessons it'll teach you. But don't try to force yourself and break your back over making outbound successful if you have other means for growth.

Your market

Are there other companies doing outbound successfully? If yes, how are they doing it? Study their outbound sales process and learn from the market.

Your results

Ultimately base your decision on the results you get. Outbound is probably the least trendy, hip, cool, awesome, amazing thing a startup can do to grow the business. But you're not in business to get admiration from your peers and the press; it's not a popularity contest.

Business is about the bottom line. The only thing that matters is: **Does outbound sales make your business more successful or not?**

BUILD A LEAD GENERATION MACHINE

4 methods for B2B lead generation

You have an ideal customer profile and know who to target. The next step: Figuring out how to source leads for your outbound sales campaign. I see a lot of people getting this wrong—they take the most obvious, easiest and least intelligent way, and it hurts their business.

There are several providers that will sell you lists of names, emails, titles and other contact information and business data:

- Hoovers.com
- Data.com (formerly Jigsaw)
- Avention.com/ (formerly OneSource)
- Zoominfo.com
- Netprospex.com
- Infousa.com
- etc.

Highest quantity/lowest quality: Buying lists

If you buy from these providers, you should expect that a certain percentage of that data will be outdated. (It's been a couple of years since I last use any of these companies, but back then about 30%–40% of the data I bought was outdated).

Consider this will cost you twice: once the money you spend acquiring the bad data, and then the money (time/resources) you invest in reaching out to those unqualified leads.

High quantity/low quality: Web scraping

An alternative to buying lists is to make your own list by scraping websites, which means you extract contact data from a website with a little program/script.

It's a bit of a gray area, and you should check if the website you want to scrape allows that.

If you target a very specific niche and there are highly targeted websites, this can be a successful approach.

Low quantity/high quality: Outsourced lead gen team

Hire a company that manually finds leads for you, based on the criteria you establish with them.

Lowest quantity/highest quality: Create customer profiles

Look at your current 5 most successful customers. Successful in this context means: a) they get the most value out of using your product and b) you profit greatly from them being a customer. *(Look for the strongest win-wins between you and your customers)*.

And then try to identify the core DNA of your most successful customers. Ask a lot of questions about these companies and look for common denominators:

- How big is the company?
- How many employees do they have?
- What other software tools do they use?
- What are the titles of all the employees?
- What kind of social media platforms do they use?
- Where are they located?
- What's their average deal size?
- How long have they already been in business?
- How did they hear about us? How did we acquire them?
- Etc.

You'll have to ask a ton of questions and then filter out those that they have in common and that are most relevant.

Based on that you'll then create a very specific customer profile.

And then you go and find another 5 to 20 businesses that have the same core DNA (sometimes you can start with their closest competitors. ;)

You don't need thousands of shitty names. You just need a handful of great ones.

Reach out to those and strive to create high-quality sales conversations. Try to maximize response and conversion rates. Gain deep market insights that you can then leverage to make more sales and close better deals.

Find out what works best for you

You can probably tell from my answer that I personally prefer the highest quality, lowest quantity approach. But I encourage you to experiment for yourself. In some industries, for some businesses, the "spammy" high quantity/low quality approach works best.

The best source for B2B leads: Referrals

Want more, higher quality customers with a lot less effort than it takes to do cold outbound sales or inbound marketing? If you already have established customers, use this simple referral sales system to grow your business starting today.

Every week, I talk to startups who want to get more leads and are considering starting or expanding existing outbound sales efforts: "How can we get more leads? Are we ready for outbound sales yet? How can we improve our cold calls?"

Have you ever thought about your existing customers as a great source for new leads? Yes, I'm talking about referrals from happy customers! It sounds so simple, yet nobody cares to actually do it right.

Referral sales can be your #1 source of new hot leads and turn into a massive growth engine for your B2B startup if you do it right. The funny thing is most startup don't do referral sales. And those that try, do a half-assed job at it.

What does referral sales really mean?

Referral sales means closing your new and current customers on the concept of introducing you to other companies that are likely to need the solution you've built.

Why are referral leads better?

No outbound lead you could ever generate in any other form will ever have the same quality as referral leads. There are two levels of quality:

1. Your best customers will most likely know others who run very similar businesses, which means they are highly qualified leads for your company.
2. You are being introduced to them via a friend and have the benefit of trust right at the start of the relationship.

Are referral leads still considered outbound leads?

Yes, they are. They were introduced to you, which is the warmest form of outbound sales you could ever do.

However, it's still reaching out to someone who didn't come to you in the first place. If you're thinking of doing outbound sales, you might as well start at the warmest point possible.

Why are so many salespeople doing referral sales wrong?

Because they're afraid. It's scary to ask for more once you close a deal. Salespeople worry that they might jeopardize a deal, or that it'll turn a positive conversation awkward.

Go where others are afraid to go and you'll find massive opportunity. Don't let fear get in the way of winning.

When is the best time to ask for a referral?

Right after somebody made a purchase.

I know that people like to wait until customers have been around for months. That's fine, but it's also a waste of time.

Once someone decides to buy, they are likely to be convinced enough to tell others about it. You should take advantage of this moment to grow your business faster.

The way most salespeople try referrals

They ask for a referral, the client says, "Yeah, let me think about it and get back to you later." The salesperson replies, "Okay, thanks!" rather than pushing a bit further.

The right way to do referral sales

1. Ask for a referral.
2. Anticipate the no (or "I'll think about it."). Ask one more time right, then and there.
3. Give them an email template to make it easy and frictionless for them to make the introduction.
4. After you've closed a referral, make sure that your new customer thanks the person who introduced you, so you're

closing the feedback loop in a positive way (inspiring more referrals from the original referrer).

Referral sales script

You: "Are you happy that you chose our product?"

Customer: "Yes."

You: "Great. Who else do you know who could benefit from a solution like ours?"

Customer: "Hmm … I'm going to think about this later and get back to you."

You: "I appreciate that, and I'm sure that over the months and years as you benefit more and more, we're going to get lots of referrals from you, which is going to be awesome. Today, let's take a minute right now and think about just one friend who is in a similar position and would really benefit from this."

Some will tell you "no" in a slightly more annoyed way. That's ok. Just tell them "Okay, I respect that, I will follow up in an email, I really appreciate that you are offering your help." And just leave it at that.

Some will give you one or more names just because you pushed one more time (my experience has been that 40% of people will give you referrals after the second ask).

Write those names down and tell them: "Great, thank you. I want to make it as easy as possible for you to make that introduction. So you'll get an intro email from me. Just copy and paste it, and send it to Bob and Steve. Feel free to make edits or write something yourself, if you like. Let's make this happen today!"

Referral intro email template

> Hey [first name],
>
> I wanted to connect you with Steli, their company does XYZ. I think this can be really interesting for you, and a contact would be mutually beneficial.
>
> I'll let you guys take it from here,
>
> Ben

After you close a referral

When you sign somebody up who was referred to you, ask them: "Who is actually responsible for you getting all these benefits from becoming a customer of our product?"

Many times, you will get a response like: "Uhm … who? You mean … you?" And then you say: "No, the person who introduced us in the first place …"

"Oh, yeah, Bob!" "Do you mind doing me a favor and sending Bob a quick thank you email that he made a connection between us, so he knows that you appreciate it?"

The moment they send Bob the thank you email, you're closing the feedback loop, which will likely inspire Bob to make more referrals. The first thing Bob thinks when he gets that email is: "Hmm, who else do I know that I could introduce this to?"

Everybody wants to make successful connections and help others discover something they are grateful for. If you treat referral sales as a separate product that gets the same, if not more, attention from your sales team, you'll see an ever-growing amount of new hot outbound leads.

Make referrals part of every deal

Once you've seen success with referral sales, you should make it part of the experience of buying your product and service upfront.

After you had the initial meetings and everything looks like the prospect is going to buy, try saying this:

You: "It seems like we're a great fit. I'm excited. Before we go any further exploring a potential deal, I want to bring up that we're fully focused on building world class technology and on servicing and supporting our customers to massive success. What that means is that we're not investing in marketing and sales as heavily because our happy customers are referring us to others who could benefit from our product. Does that sound like a fair arrangement to you?"

Prospect: "Yes, that sounds fair."

(I've never heard someone say "No, I want you to spend less time on product and service and do more marketing and sales so I don't have to refer you to anyone.")

Referral sales: The warm outbound lead generation growth engine

I've taught this system to hundreds of SaaS startup founders and many have implemented it to great success. But I have to warn you— it takes conviction to keep asking for referrals even if people say no at first.

It takes patience to ask again after someone fully rejects it. Just like anything in sales, you need the emotional stability to go on as you face failure in the early days.

If you can do that, you'll start a growth engine for your company that's going to support scaling sales for many years to come!

What about referral incentives?

Someone on HackerNews asked the great question "What about referral incentives?"

I've found that in B2B, you don't want to "pay" for referrals and that people are more likely to make them when they feel like they are providing value to their network without any selfish incentives.

Occasionally, someone will ask for it and it's up to you to decide if you want to give people a discount or something else for helping you close new business. I personally think that's reasonable when asked but wouldn't offer it upfront.

With the knowledge from this section, you are ready to start contacting leads.

EMAIL-FIRST COLD CALLING

Getting started with cold emails

While you could jump straight into cold calling leads, depending upon your market, emailing leads first, then calling them may be more effective. Because one of the biggest challenges in B2B sales is reaching the right person, the person who can:

a. Understand the value your software can provide for their company
b. Make a buying decision

Salespeople and lead generation teams generally waste too much time on this task. Your company can create a lot more high-quality leads in less time by using cold emails based on Aaron Ross' predictable revenue model.

When I talk to many B2B SaaS startup founders, they get it. They recognize that cold emailing could make their outbound prospecting more effective. But they don't know how to get started in implementing it into their sales process.

Let's look at these six simple steps to getting started with cold emails.

1. Write your subject line

It's just one line, but it's the line that matters most. If people don't open the email, nothing else matters. There are many things you can do to increase open rates, but one easy best practice is using their name in the subject line.

Don't be gimmicky or try to trick people into opening your email. Your subject line should be relevant; otherwise, if there is too much of a disconnect between the subject line and email body, your emails will be canned.

2. Write your email copy

Be brief. Give context. End with a clear and specific call to action. Every sentence is sealing the value proposition of giving you a bit more of their time and reading the next sentence you wrote. (Remember: most email clients display not just the subject line in the inbox, but also the beginning of the email copy).

3. Get feedback

Show your outbound cold emails to different people, especially current clients of yours with whom you have a good relationship. Ask them: "Would you reply to this? What's unclear? What would you change?" If you have investors, ask them the same questions. Get feedback. Edit/Iterate/Test.

4. Send 25-50 emails a day

Don't blast out hundreds (or even thousands) of emails when you're just getting started. Your goal here is to find out what works, while at the same time having enough resources to follow up properly with those prospects who respond. You probably already know how to find almost anybody's email address.

5. On the following day, look at the two most important metrics

    a. Open rates benchmark: 15–30%

    b. Response rates benchmark: 10–30%

The open rates allow you to track the effectiveness of your subject lines while the response rates indicate how effective your email copy is.

6. Iterate

Try different subject lines and email bodies. Experiment and measure results.

If your response rates are below 5%, you're doing something really wrong. In the 10% range, you're on the right track. Anywhere between 10%–30% you're doing really, really well.

How to make your sales emails stand out

Email is the dominant form of communication in sales, and with good reason—according to a 2015 survey conducted by the marketing research firm Marketing Sherpa, **over 70%** of people report they would prefer businesses to contact them via email.

But here's another important statistic: the average B2B buyer gets over 100 emails a day, opens 23% of them, and clicks through only 2%. With so few emails attaining even a low level of engagement, think how few result in so much as a phone call, let alone a deal. It stands to reason that if you want to crush it in sales, you'd better be a top-notch emailer.

Most sales emails go right in the trash bin because they look just like every other sales email—there's nothing unique to catch the prospect's interest. Therefore, you must know how to write an email that stands out, generates excitement, and makes the value of the message immediately clear.

As John Chapin, sales author and motivational speaker, notes, "In sales you simply must stand out from other salespeople, not just the ones in your industry, but ALL the salespeople that are calling on your prospects and customers, as they are also competing for their time, attention, and money."

As someone who sends hundreds of emails a week, I've identified three simple yet powerful methods of differentiating yours from the rest. The competitive advantage comes from the fact that they're not obvious steps to take—very few other salespeople are doing these things.

Nevertheless, they'll help you get the absolute most out of every email you send and increase your response rate, whether you're cold emailing a brand-new prospect or reconnecting with your oldest customer.

1. Set yourself apart with your signature

The signature is some of the most valuable but under-utilized real estate in an email. To most people, it's an afterthought. Look at this example of an average email signature:
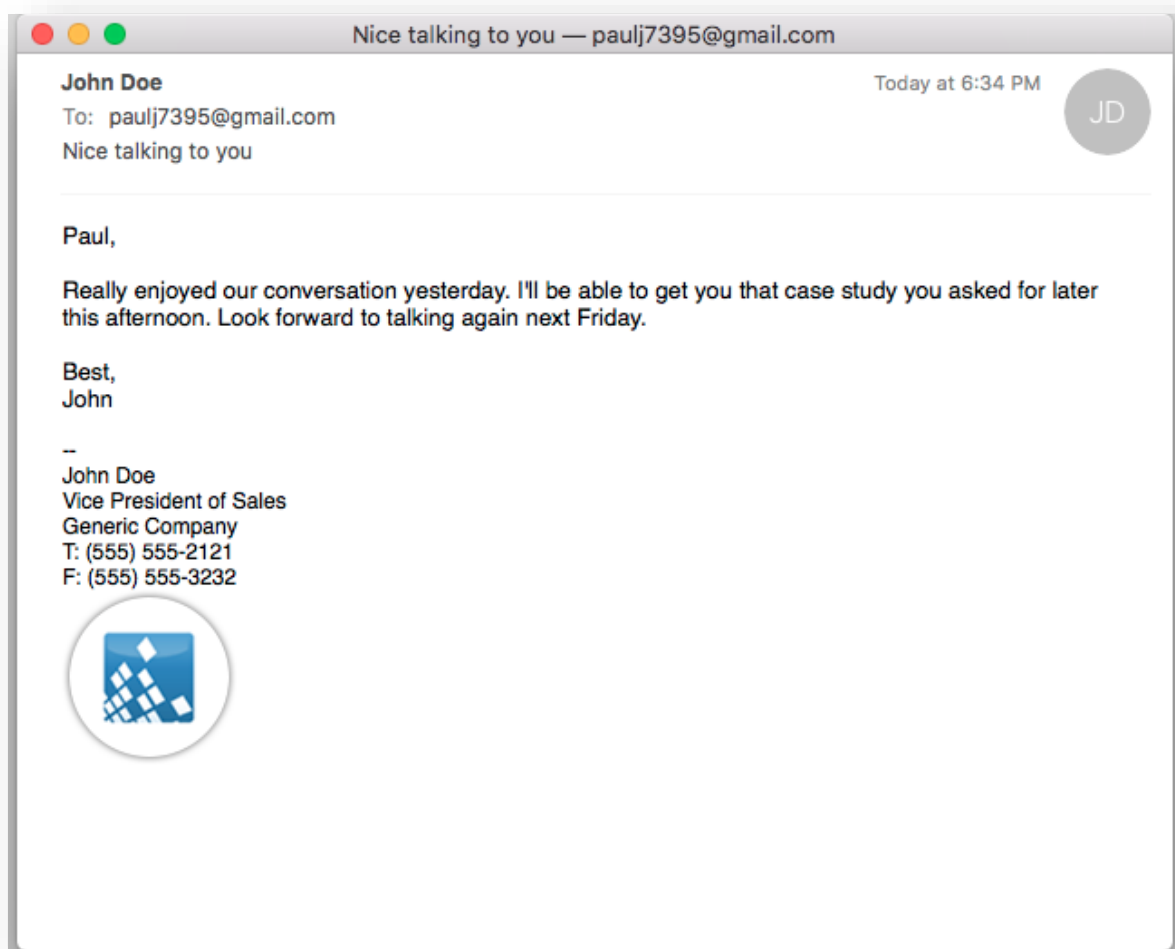
It has the sender's name, title, contact info, and company logo. That's boring. This signature isn't *doing* anything for John Doe or the people he's emailing. It's not building credibility. It's not offering something interesting. It certainly isn't selling anything.

I sell in my signature. I pitch my book, my podcast, my online sales course—whatever it is, I want the reader to look at my signature and think, "Hey, that looks interesting!" You can accomplish that by

including a link to a relevant press article, a webinar your company recently gave, a case study—anything that adds credibility.

Here's what my signature looks like:
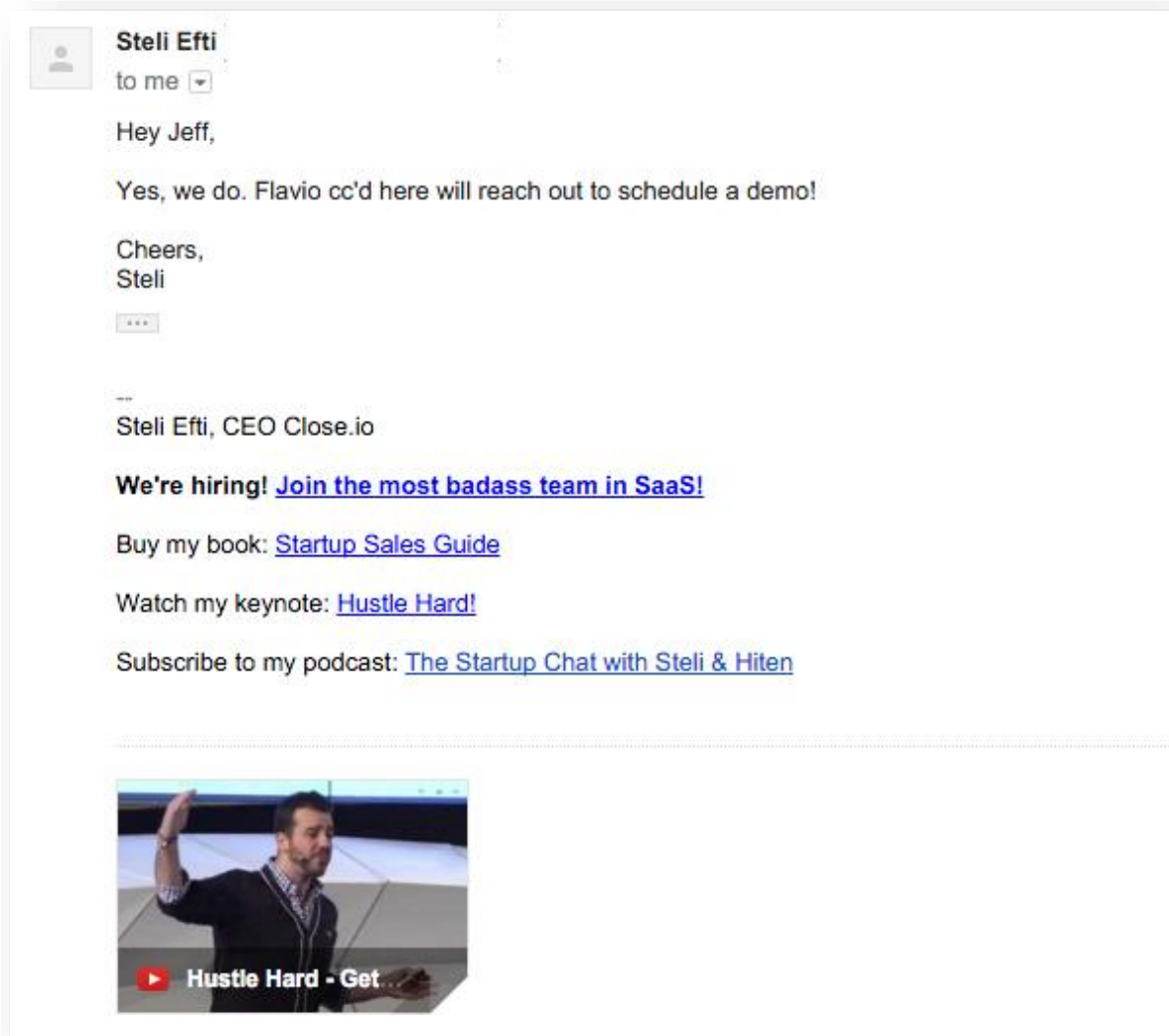
One of my favorite things to put in my signature is a YouTube link. In Gmail, when you add a video link, it displays a thumbnail of the

video—in my case, usually a thumbnail of me in a dramatic mid-speech pose.

According to MIT researchers, the most memorable photos are those that contain people. Psychologists have also found that color images are more memorable than black and white.

As a result, the video really catches the reader's eye—I can't tell you how many times someone has replied to one of my emails and said, "You know, I ended up watching that entire speech from your email signature," before addressing my original message. If your company has any kind of video marketing, your email signature is a great way to get customers' eyes on it.

As someone who takes pride in this, I was very flattered when Jeff Deutsch, a potential customer I corresponded with, wrote a whole LinkedIn Pulse article on my signature. He was even inspired to optimize his own signature. You can see the result below, along with Jeff's own notes on why it worked.

That's a signature that sells both the sender and his company. It vastly increases the amount of engagement he's likely to get from his email recipients.

Having a great signature takes very little effort—all you need to do is periodically update it with content you already have available, and in return, you differentiate your emails and get to engage with customers in a unique way.

2. Tap into the power of P.S.

The P.S. is another email hack that most people either don't take advantage of or at the very least underestimate. Not many realize

this, but the P.S. message is often the first (and sometimes only) part of the email your audience will read.

That makes it a great place to add something you want the recipient to read, but is only tangentially related to the rest of the email. And, once you've got their attention, you'd better give them something compelling.

A couple of ideas would be:

- Some good news about the company. "P.S. We just got our 10,000th customer, here's an article about it ..."
- A personal connection. "P.S. You and I actually have a common connection, we've both worked with so-and-so ..."
- Something you remember about them. "P.S. I remember you saying you watch a lot of golf, did you hear the news that so-and-so fired his swing coach?"

The great thing about the P.S. is its versatility. It can be personal, it can be helpful, it can plug your company—whatever you need it to do. With all those options, it's not that hard to think of a small piece of information that will get the reader's attention.

For example, here's a P.S. I wrote in an email pitching my Startup Sales Success Course:

> Once you have these numbers you can start putting together a sales formula with the goal to validate if your model is predictable, scalable and profitable.
>
> Once all the numbers add up to something that makes sense for your business you're finally ready to scale. And that should be the goal of any early startup sales efforts.
>
> Happy Selling!
>
> Steli
>
> P.S. Here's a very STRONG book recommendation on the subject: Predictable Revenue by Aaron Ross

I used the P.S. message to direct the reader to Aaron Ross' famous book on scalable sales models, a topic I also addressed in the email. If the recipient hasn't read the book, then I just added value by directing her to a valuable resource. If she has read the book, then I've shown her that I've done my research and that my sales theories are supported by a well-known expert. Either way, my P.S. message is building my credibility.

But that's just one direction I could've gone. You can change the P.S. to fit any context. Think of it as one of the only parts of the email your recipient is sure to read. You want to make sure it's targeted to the individual and works toward the goal of the email, be it getting that first meeting, relationship building, or defining your value proposition.

3. Make your emails short. And when you can't, at least make them easy to read.

Oscar Wilde once wrote to a friend, "Excuse the long letter, I didn't have time to write a short one." What he was getting at is that it actually takes more time and effort to write concisely than to just write everything you can think of on a given subject.

And being concise is exactly what you have to do if you want anyone to read your emails. Your prospects are busy—they don't have time to read a novel-length email about your product. Keep it short and sweet and realize that you can't close the deal and make the sale on that one email.

Of course, there are going to be times when you *have* to send a longer email. When that happens, you need to format it heavily. I'm talking about:

- Distinct, headlined sections
- Important information in **bold**
- Bulleted lists (much like this one!)

Good formatting makes it easier for the reader to scan through the message and get to the stuff they need to know. It also tells the reader that you put in the effort to help them digest the information quickly and easily.

For example, try reading these two versions of the same promotional email from a pizzeria.

Email #1:

Have some pizza this holiday season!   — ↗ ×

Our customers

Have some pizza this holiday season!

Hey there,

We at Bill's Pizza would like to wish you and yours the happiest of holiday seasons. We'd also like to remind you that pizza makes the perfect holiday meal. After all, is there a better meal to share? I don't think so. Whether you're looking to go out for an end-of-year feast with friends and family or need a caterer for your holiday party, Bill's has you covered. Our extensive menu has something for everyone: plain, pepperoni, extra cheese, buffalo chicken, veggie. Whatever your pizza preference is, we've got it, so don't let New Year's roll around without coming to Bill's.

Email #2:

Have some pizza this holiday season!   — ⤢ ✕

Our customers

Have some pizza this holiday season!

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We at Bill's Pizza would like to wish you and yours the happiest of holiday seasons.

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Our extensive menu has something for everyone:
• plain
• pepperoni
• extra cheese
• buffalo chicken
• veggie

Whatever your pizza preference is, we've got it, so don't let New Year's roll around without coming to Bill's.

Did you even finish the first email? The second email, which is formatted, is much easier to read.

Think about it this way: a newspaper would never just hit its audience with a giant wall of text. It's unreadable. Presumably, you depend on prospects to actually read the emails you send out. Formatting and concise writing make that easy for them to do—your readers will appreciate it and you'll see a better response rate.

Now make your emails great

Most sales emails suck. But, that gives you a huge opportunity. Each of these three practices will go a long way toward differentiating your emails from the homogenous barrage of emails customers are used to.

And the best part? Each of these is so easy to do! Adding a signature, P.S., and some formatting to your next email would take five minutes at most. Five minutes is all it takes to greatly increase your chances of a response from that next customer, so why wait to email like a pro?

5 ready-to-use cold email templates

In the previous two chapters, I covered the basics of cold emails, including how to make them stand out.

If you want examples of simple yet effective cold emails, here are five cold email templates that will generate warm leads and get you started on the right foot!

Every company, of course, is different but the below cold email templates and best practices should be a good starting point and sales tool for most of you.

First, let's review the art and science of effective cold email subject lines

- When it comes to subject lines, follow these guidelines:
- Use their name in the subject line when it makes sense.
- Make the subject line as specific as possible. The more personal the subject line, the higher the open rate.
- If you wonder if it sounds too much like a "marketing email", then it does sound too much like a marketing email :)
- Experiment with questions in subject lines.
- Always deliver in your email what you promise in your subject line (if the disconnect is too big, you're going to get good open rates but bad responses).

Here are 4 cold email subject lines that get open rates of +35%

1. "[Introduction] [name]" or "[Introduction] [your name/company] <> [their name/company]"
2. "quick request"
3. "Trying to connect"
4. "[Name of their company]"

There are 2 approaches to cold emails used today

1. You're emailing someone high up in the organization asking for a referral down to the right person (aka Cold Calling 2.0).
2. You're emailing the decision maker, directly pitching them to sign up/call/meeting/etc.

Let's get started with three cold email templates asking for referrals within the organization.

Cold email: Referral V1

Hi [first name],

My name is [my name] and I head up business development efforts with [my company]. We recently launched a new platform that [one sentence pitch].

I am taking an educated stab in the dark here, however based on your online profile, you appear to be an appropriate person to connect with … or might at least point me in the right direction.

I'd like to speak with someone from [company] who is responsible for [handling something that's relevant to my product].

If that's you, are you open to a 15-minute call on _____ [time and date] to discuss ways the [company name] platform can specifically help your business? If not you, can you please put me in touch with the right person?

I appreciate the help!

Best,

Sig

Cold email: Referral V2

Hi [first name],

I hope I'm not bothering you. Could you please refer me to the person in charge of [something that's relevant to my product]?

Thanks for your time,

Sig

Cold email: Referral V3

Hey [first name],

My name is [my name] and I'm with [my company name]. We work with organizations like [company name] to [insert one sentence pitch].

[One sentence unique benefit].

Could you direct me to the right person to talk to about this at [company name] so we can explore if this would be something valuable to incorporate into your events?

Cheers,

Sig

The next referral cold email is a template directly from the team at Predictable Revenue.

Subject: Can you point me in the right direction?

Hey [first name],

I'm sorry to trouble you. Would you be so kind as to tell me who is responsible for [insert your biggest pain point here that resonates with your ideal customer; OR insert function like "sales" or "recruiting"] and how I might get in touch with them?

Thank you,

Sig

Let's check out two cold emails that are using approach #2 and pitching the decision maker directly on the value proposition and next action steps.

Cold email: Selling V1

Hey [first name],

I hope this email finds you well! I wanted to reach out because [explain how we got their contact information and how we relate to them: talked to a colleague, saw your company online, etc.].

[Name of company] has a new platform that will help (your team at) [organization name]. [One sentence pitch of benefits]. We do this by:

- Benefit/feature 1
- Benefit/feature 2
- Benefit/feature 3 (optional)

Let's explore how [name of your software] can specifically help your business. Are you available for a quick call [time and date]?

Cheers,

Sig

Cold email: Selling V2

Hey [first name],

I hope this email finds you well! I wanted to reach out because [explain how we got their contact information and how we relate to them: talked to a colleague, saw your company online, etc.].

[Name of company] has a new platform that will help (your team at) [organization name]. [One sentence pitch of benefits].

I know that [our product] will be able to help [name of your company] [insert high level benefit here].

Are you available for a quick call [time and date]?

Cheers,

Sig

Increase your response rate with the 1, 2, 3 hack

Any great salesperson knows that you want to make it as simple as possible for your prospect to take the next step. Yet, so many people send out sales emails that make their prospects do all the heavy lifting. (Most of the time, prospects won't. They just delete the email. Opportunity lost.)

That's why I'm going to share a very simple method you can use to improve your response rates dramatically. I've seen cases where response rates went from 7% to 39% (a 457% increase)!

Less friction. More sales.

Like so many times, it comes back to empathy: Put yourself in the shoes of your prospect. They—like everyone else—are overwhelmed. Their inbox is overflowing, they've got too many things competing for their attention and only so many hours in their day.

And then there's your sales email. Let's assume your subject line works well enough and the prospect opens the email. What are they looking at now?

Is it a long, 10 paragraph email that talks about your company, your product, the innovative solution you're offering and the 15 ways it could help them become more successful?

Or is it a very short and succinct email that addresses a need they care about?

And what's the thing you're asking your prospects to do as a next step?

Are you asking them to write a lengthy response?

Or do you make it easy for them to reply?

3 rules for successful sales emails

There are 3 simple rules you need to follow if you want to send emails that create results:

1. Be relevant.
2. Get to the point fast.
3. Make it easy for them to respond.

That's it. I've talked about writing relevant sales emails in the past. I've also shared advice on how to get to the point fast. Today, I'll cover how to write emails that make it easy for the recipient to respond.

The 1, 2, 3 email

The concept is simple: Present your prospect with three scenarios that are likely to apply to them based on the information you have about them. Ask them to choose which scenario applies to their situation. All they need to do is hit reply, enter a number and click send. Friction removed.

1, 2, 3 cold emails

Instead of your usual introduction spiel, ask your prospect to select what their biggest challenge is right now. Once they've done that, you're going to respond with advice that's catered to their specific needs. Here's an example:

Hey Elon,

My name is Steli and I'm the CEO at Close.io.

We've realized that most sales managers like yourself often experience one of three problems:

1. You don't have enough leads.
2. You don't have good quality leads
3. You lack predictability for your funnel

Choose which applies to you and reply with the number. I'll send you something to help fix the problem.

Thanks,
Steli

B *I* ☰ ☰ 🔗 🖼   < >

☐ Remind me to follow up if no reply   in 1 week ▲
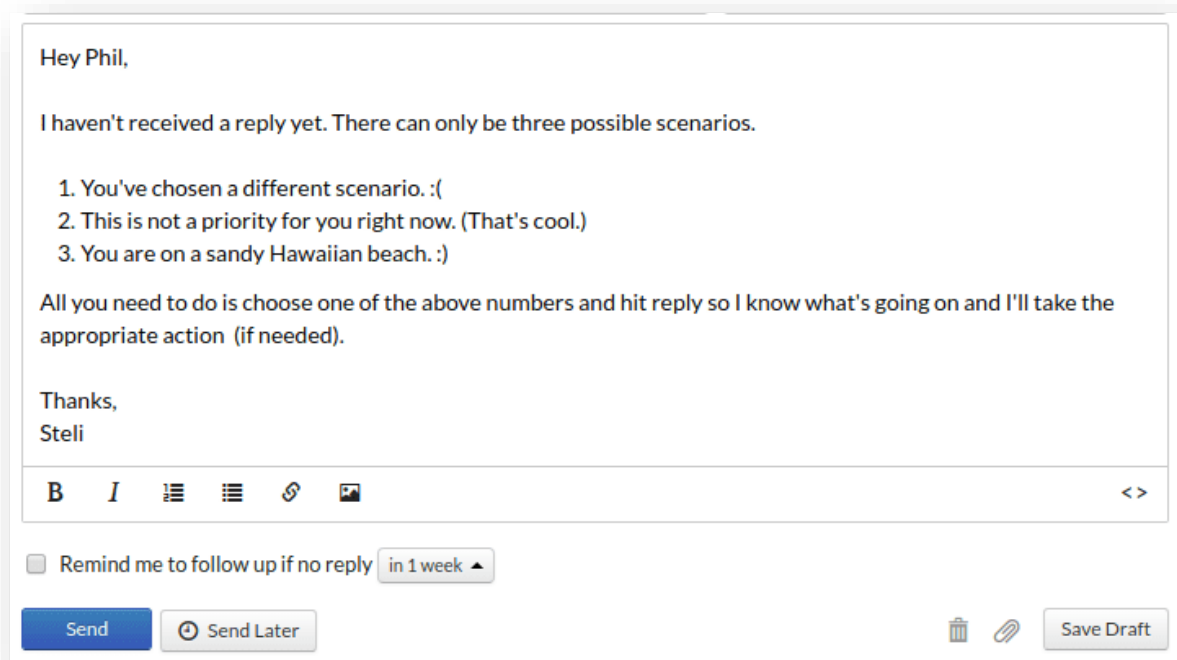
Send   ⊕ Send Later   🗑 📎 Save Draft

You're giving the person clear options and a low-friction CTA. All they have to do is hit reply, type in a number, click send.

Get replies to follow-ups

I'm all about the follow-up. Whenever your lead turns cold, the 1, 2, 3 tactic is an excellent way to re-engage your prospects. Imagine you've sent out your standard follow-up emails with no success. Here's what to send them instead:

Hey Phil,

I haven't received a reply yet. There can only be three possible scenarios.

1. You've chosen a different scenario. :(
2. This is not a priority for you right now. (That's cool.)
3. You are on a sandy Hawaiian beach. :)

All you need to do is choose one of the above numbers and hit reply so I know what's going on and I'll take the appropriate action (if needed).

Thanks,
Steli

B *I* ≔ ≡ ⧉ 🖻   < >
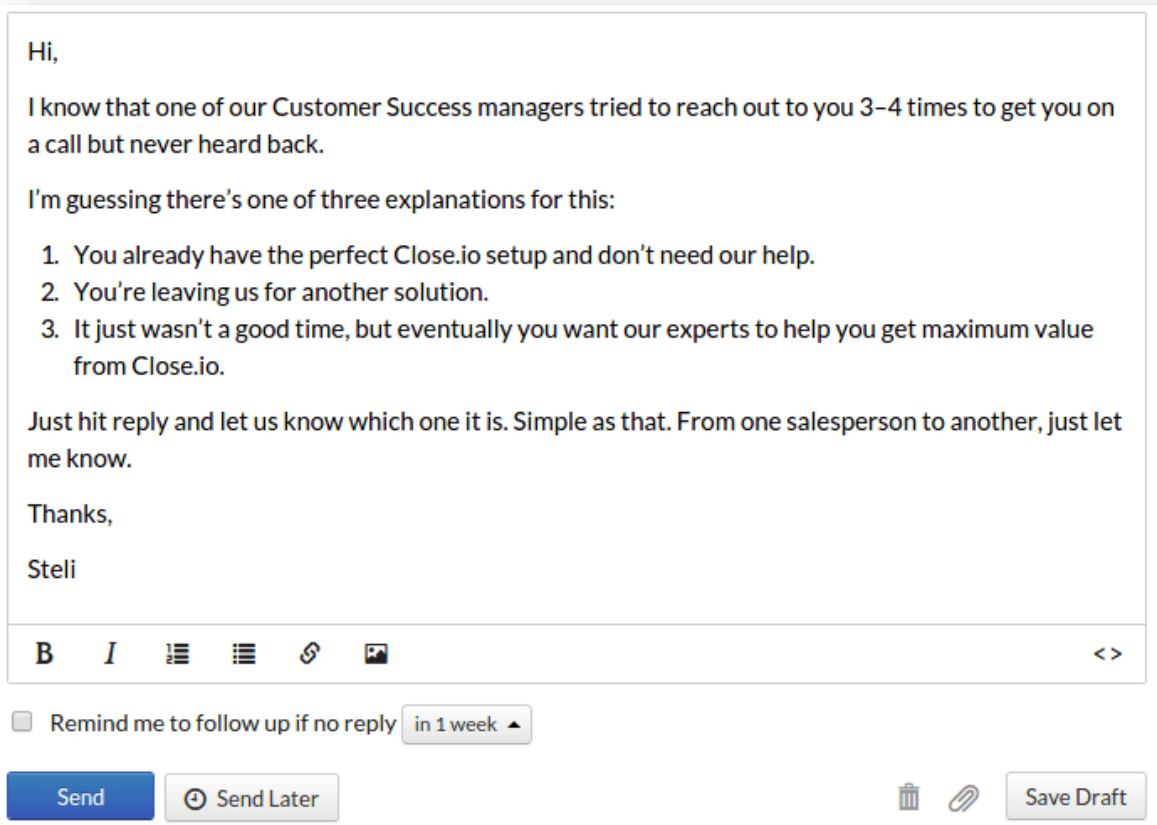
☐ Remind me to follow up if no reply in 1 week ▲

Send   🕓 Send Later   🗑 📎 Save Draft

This version is a bit more tongue-in-cheek and light-hearted, but effective nonetheless. You'll probably be surprised how well it works. The email is highly relevant with an added entertainment value, creating a very powerful way of hacking your response rate.

What we did to increase our call request responses at Close.io

One of our Success Managers tried to proactively offer product training for a specific segment of our customers. So she sent out emails suggesting to schedule a call. She followed up repeatedly, but some customers never responded. Eventually, I sent out the following email.

Hi,

I know that one of our Customer Success managers tried to reach out to you 3–4 times to get you on a call but never heard back.

I'm guessing there's one of three explanations for this:

1. You already have the perfect Close.io setup and don't need our help.
2. You're leaving us for another solution.
3. It just wasn't a good time, but eventually you want our experts to help you get maximum value from Close.io.

Just hit reply and let us know which one it is. Simple as that. From one salesperson to another, just let me know.

Thanks,

Steli

B *I* ≣ ≣ ⊘ 🖼 < >

☐ Remind me to follow up if no reply in 1 week ▲

Send ⏱ Send Later 🗑 📎 Save Draft

Start using the 1, 2, 3 email today

The beauty of the 1, 2, 3 email is that the prospect can provide you with a lot of information simply by choosing a number.

Pick your most important email or worst performing email

Start by picking your most important email or one that gets a really low response rate. Split test your current version against the 1, 2, 3 email and let the results speak for themselves.

Start from the beginning

Starting from scratch? Follow these simple steps to use the 1, 2, 3 hack:

1. Choose a small list (100 leads is enough) in your sales CRM.
2. Define three relevant options.
3. Create a list of resources to use once your prospects reply to your email.
4. Set up a new email template with same structure as example one.
5. Fire away.

That's it. You'll now get more replies that'll convert to more opportunities and ultimately more deals.

The right email follow-up cadence

You work hard to generate leads for your sales pipeline by sending out cold emails following the tips and strategies in the previous chapters. However, that's only the tip of the iceberg: Do you know what the best follow-up strategy is?

How many times should you follow up with a cold prospect, someone who doesn't respond to your emails? When should you follow up? What specifically should you write in these emails? When should you stop following up?

In this chapter, you'll learn how to put a consistent cold email follow-up strategy in place that will help you fill your sales pipeline and ultimately close more deals.

What I'm sharing here aren't rules but general guidelines, and it's your job to turn these general guidelines into best practices for your own startup. That said, here's what I think will work best for most people.

The follow-up formula

1. **Send out the first cold email**.
2. **1 day later, at a different time of the day**: Follow-up 1
   This email should be a modified version of your original email. It should communicate the same message, just in a different

format. For example, if your initial email was several paragraphs long, make this follow-up email just two sentences long. If your initial cold email was just two sentences long, make this email several paragraphs long.

Don't write something completely different. Don't add attachments.

3. **2 days after your second email:** Follow-up 2

    Don't even explain anything. Just succinctly restate your call to action. You can ask your prospect to introduce you to the right person in their organization, to schedule a call, or to respond to your email—whatever your desired call to action for your initial cold email was. For example, you could say, "Hey, when would be a good time for you to discuss this on a quick 10-minute call? How about Tuesday or Wednesday 10 a.m. Pacific?"

4. **4 to 5 days after your third email:** Follow-up 3

    The break-up email. It's an email in which you say goodbye to the prospect, betting on their loss aversion, a psychological principle describing people's tendency to strongly prefer avoiding losses to acquiring gains.

Optionally, you can add another follow-up email before the break-up email, but I wouldn't recommend following up more than four times.

For a systematic approach, it's best to create an automated workflow in your CRM so that you don't have to set this up manually with each of your prospects.

Workflows become especially powerful once you scale your sales process and are dealing with a high volume of leads.

What makes cold emails work?

Most people falsely assume the reason why they get a response to a follow-up email is because they've sent a better email or said something smarter.

In most cases, the real reason why people who don't respond to your first cold email respond to your follow-up email is very simple: **timing!**

It likely just so happened that the recipient saw the original email when they were too busy or distracted by something that prevented them from taking action. That's why it didn't register on their radar.

Then they got a follow-up email from you, which was sent at a better time, a time when the recipient had the attention, mental bandwidth, and time to consciously process and respond to your email.

If your prospects read your initial email and decide they're not interested in your offer and don't want to do business with you,

then **nothing you say in a follow-up email is going to turn that around** and convert them.

So, you shouldn't even try to optimize for those people.

Instead, optimize only for those people whom you have a realistic chance of converting from a cold prospect into a hot lead. These are the people who are somewhat interested but either didn't have the time to respond or didn't connect the dots—all they need is just a little bit more nudging.

You win deals in the follow-up

I say this all the time: The follow-up is where winning really happens. It's when everyone else stops running, and you're the only person still in the race. It doesn't matter how slow you run—you are going to win because everybody else stopped running.

If you've had a positive interaction (be it an email, a phone call, or a meeting) with someone in which they showed interest in your solution but then stopped responding to your calls and email, keep following up indefinitely. Forever. Until you get a result. Either a yes or a no.

If you haven't gotten any response to your cold email, stop at three to four follow-ups, and move on to more receptive prospects.

The breakup email

The breakup email is one of the most effective follow-up email templates you can use when a prospect isn't responding to your emails.

You're essentially "breaking up via email" with them. Not that your unilateral relationship was that great to begin with, but by being the one who's walking away, rather than the one who's pursuing, you turn the dynamic of the interaction around. It's high school all over again, but it's also highly effective.

Both outbound and inbound

It works both for outbound emails (when you're sending emails to people who have never expressed an interest in your offer or interacted with you) and inbound emails (when you're sending out emails to people who have at some point expressed interest in your offer, e.g. by signing up for a trial).

How to write an effective breakup email

It starts with writing an effective subject line. For the breakup email, here are some examples of good subject lines:

- Goodbye from Steli
- Goodbye from Close.io

- Thank you from Close.io
- Should I stay or should I go now
- It's not you. It's me.

Email body

The email body itself should be short and succinct.

Here are four good examples of inbound break up emails.

This one is from Trunk Club and does a good job at re-stating the value that's being lost.

Subject: Goodbye from Trunk Club

Hi Steli,

I was really looking forward to putting together a trunk of great clothes for you, but I haven't heard a response to my calls and emails. That means this will be my last email to you. If you change your mind and would like to give Trunk Club a try, please let me know and I'll have you looking great in no time.

Best,

This email by Hubspot is a bit too long-winded, I think, and they might have already changed it, but it's still a fairly good email to study.

> **Subject: Thank You From Hubspot**
>
> Steli,
>
> In reviewing some outstanding business today, I'll be taking Close.io out of my current follow ups at this time.
>
> Where we'd initially agreed in the value of our service to strengthen your online engagement, I've reached out to you on several occasions following our initial discussions. Having not received any replies to date, I assume that we've either fallen off your radar or perhaps the interest has diminished to the degree that my follow up is no longer warranted.
>
> I appreciate the opportunity to work with you and wish you the best with your ongoing marketing efforts. I'd be happy to speak with you when you are ready to invest resources into generating leads from your site.
>
> Best,

Here's an email from Bryan Kreuzberger's Breakthrough Email.

> **Permission to close your file?**
>
> {name},
>
> We are in the process of closing files for the month. Typically when I haven't heard back from someone it means they're either really busy or aren't interested. If you aren't interested, do I have your permission to close your file?
>
> If you're still interested, what do you recommend as a next step?
>
> Thanks for your help.

The "Should I stay or should I go" is being used by a ton of companies nowadays. Here's a recent example from Uberflip.

Should I stay or should I go?

Hi {name},

I've reached out to you in the past, but I understand that nobody likes being ambushed with random emails. The truth is, I really believe you'd be interested in what Uberflip can offer your team. In the interest of efficiency, I've removed all the fluff from my previous emails:

We're Uberflip.
We create amazing content experiences and generate leads.
We do it better than anyone else.

HOW?
1. Allow you to manage all of your content easily.
2. Allow you to better tailor the content experience to your target audiences.
3. Generate more leads - gate content and add call-to-actions that sync with your marketing automation.
4. Give you the insights you need to understand what's really working.

At first glance, I'm 92.8% confident that we'd create immediate value for your marketing team.

Let me know when you're free to chat -- I need that other 7.2% of confirmation from you.

Thanks,

Use these as inspiration for your own breakup emails, and constantly track how these emails perform.

If you're using Close.io to manage your sales pipeline and follow up with leads, you simply make your breakup email a template.

With Close.io's reporting features, you can measure how your email templates perform, iterate, and constantly improve subject lines and body copy.

The basic structure of an effective breakup email

Here are the elements you want to include in your email:

- I've repeatedly tried to do something good for you.
- You've never even replied (maybe because you're too busy, you're not interested or you've moved on to something else).
- Thus, this is the last email you'll ever get from me.
- If at any time you ever want to [insert the desired outcome, e.g. see how I can help optimize your sales process], I'd be more than happy to speak with you.
- Here my contact details [phone number, etc.].

Mistakes to avoid

Sometimes I get breakup emails that have an almost accusatory or disappointed tone—that's not what you should do.

It's important that you keep the email on the emotionally positive or neutral side. After all, this isn't a high school breakup; you're a professional, this is business. No blame, criticism or disappointment.

Why it works

The breakup email utilizes the principle of loss aversion. When you take a good thing away from someone, it makes them want it more.

It won't work with people who never had any interest in your offer at all. If they're completely cold, nothing you write in a breakup email will get them interested.

But for those people who were somewhat interested but just didn't have the time, or haven't made it a priority yet, it might just be the nudge that gets them engaged with you.

How to call prospects who open your email

Last, but not least: How to call prospects who open your email. This is the last chapter on cold emailing because it will allow us to transition to the next topic: starting to cold call using sales scripts.

Many sales teams use the cold calling 2.0 model that Aaron Ross pioneered and popularized in his book *Predictable Revenue*:

1. Send out cold emails to a list of targeted leads.
2. Use an open tracker or sales CRM (e.g., Close.io) to see which recipients actually open the email.
3. Call those leads who opened the emails.

This is generally a good approach because these prospects have self-selected themselves. The fact that they have opened the email is an indicator that they are a better fit than those who didn't open the email.

But there's a mistake people often make: They assume the prospect knows who they are or what they are calling about just because the prospect opened their email.

While the strategy of calling leads who have opened your email is good, assuming they'll receive your call with open arms is wrong. Yet, that's exactly what founders often do.

That's why we're going to cover the most effective ways of engaging—instead of frustrating—your prospects with your cold calls.

How to irritate your prospects within the first minute of your cold call

Let's look at the typical scenario of how founders handle prospects who have no idea why they are receiving their call.

Founder: "Dear Mr. Smith, I just emailed you some information and saw that you've opened my email. I wanted to see if you had time to look at that information and if you have any questions that I can answer."

Prospect: "Who are you? What email? I didn't open any email from you. How did you get my phone number?"

Founder: "Oh yes, you did. I can see it in my tracking software here. In fact, I can even tell you that you opened our email yesterday at 17:47 Pacific time!"

I am sure you can agree that it's not a good way to start a conversation.

What it means when an email gets opened

Just because someone opened your email doesn't mean that they care about what you sent them, that they're interested, or that they even read the email. Many people open an email only to delete it.

Even if someone did read your email, they might have forgotten it the next day.

Yet, many founders refuse to let go of the assumption that just because an email has been opened, it means that the prospect actually read it and cared about what you said. And when the prospect doesn't react the way they expect, they struggle with this resistance, which creates a lot of needless friction early on in the sales conversation.

To turn your unproductive conversation around, you need to change how you approach your prospect. Let's look at the two typical responses you might get from your prospects and ways you can engage them instead of frustrating them.

Response #1: "I didn't get any email from you."

Here's a common scenario, in which the prospect has no recollection of opening your email.

Founder: "Dear Mr. Smith, I sent you an email yesterday and wanted to follow up with a call to see if you had a chance to look at it and if there are any questions I can answer for you."

Prospect: "I didn't get any email from you."

Founder: "Of course, I'm sure you're getting tons of emails, which is exactly why I chose to go the extra mile and pick up the phone to

call you. I don't want to send you another dozen emails to clutter your inbox. Instead, let's take three minutes right now to create clarity on both ends and figure out if this is the right fit or not. I have three questions for you, and we'll immediately know if it makes sense to invest any more time in this. Does that sound fair?"

Rather than trying to fight against the prospect's statement that they didn't get your email, you embrace it.

Response #2: "I saw your email, but I'm not interested."

Here's a scenario in which a prospect remembered your email but didn't like it.

Founder: "Dear Mr. Smith, I sent you an email yesterday and wanted to follow up with a call to see if you had a chance to look at it and if there are any questions I can answer for you."

Prospect: "Oh yeah, I read your email, but I'm not interested."

Founder: "Of course you're not, nothing in that email could have made you interested. I apologize for even sending it. Let me in one sentence tell you what we do and then take three minutes to discover if this makes sense or not. I'll tell you why I am calling you in the first place: we've serviced 10 companies in your area and increased their revenues by 15% on average in just three months.

That's why I'm proactively reaching out to those companies for whom we believe we can create similar results."

Bottom line: call with the right expectations—none

When you call a prospect who opened your email, don't have a lot of expectations. Don't act based on your best-case assumptions.

Your sales script shouldn't rely on your prospects expecting your call or knowing what you sent them. Instead, you should expect them to not care or know about you and your offer at all. Embrace that reality, and your results will dramatically improve.

SCRIPTED: HOW TO USE AND CREATE SALES SCRIPTS

Should you use a sales script?

There's this almost religious debate among sales professionals: should you work with or without a script?

The answer is not "either or." Instead do both!

What are the common arguments made against sales scripts?

Professionals who believe sales scripts don't work often defend their position with the following points.

Salespeople don't want to act and sound like robots

Nothing is worse than reading a sales script verbatim over the phone. You can't build rapport that way, and it turns the creative part of selling into mindless assembly line work. This is how low-quality, high-quantity telemarketing works, but I trust that as a reader of this blog, you're not in the business of selling lottery tickets to random strangers over the phone.

Telling ain't selling

Salespeople who work from a script typically listen less to the prospect, because they're focused on the script, the anti-script proponents say.

Experienced high-performers dislike scripts

You can't hire top-notch sales talent if you expect them to work from a script. Experienced, successful salespeople want autonomy. They trust in their own ability to handle prospects more than in a written script.

Developing a sales script is tedious

Writing a sales script is the kind of work most salespeople would rather avoid. It's a boring process that involves a lot of editing, structuring, slow detail work, which are all tasks that run counter to the DNA of most sales professionals.

Updating sales scripts are a piece of work

A sales script isn't like a great novel that you write down once and it's done. Sales scripts need to be managed, maintained and constantly updated. You'll need to continually revisit and improve it when your product changes, your market changes and you find opportunities to optimize.

I think most of the people who are anti-sales script simply don't know how to use scripts effectively. They just see scripts being used badly, and assume scripts are intrinsically worthless. What they fail to see is that scripts, when used right, have many benefits.

Why you should be using a sales script

Refine your methodology

Sales scripts force you to really think things through. By developing a sales script, writing things out word for word, you bring structure and clarity into your thinking, and polish your process.

Raise your entire teams sales IQ

You can create a constant feedback loop if you involve your whole sales team. Let reps share success stories, best practices and new creative ideas. There's a lot of great sales knowledge in the room that typically is just stuck in someone's head. By collaborating, you get access to that vast reservoir of insights, and everyone benefits from that.

Improvements spread faster throughout your whole team

When you have a sales script everyone is using, and one sales rep deviates and tries a different approach, and find it consistently performs better—that improvement now gets shared! The whole team learns this way, rather than it being just one creative sales genius. You continuously elevate the skill level of your whole team.

Less low performance days

A lot of sales reps have strong fluctuation in terms of results they deliver. Some days are amazing, and some days suck, and it's very much dependent on the state of the individual sales rep. By having a script, you basically create a safety net for shitty days that prevents shitty performance.

Develop a scalable sales process

You'll train, manage and scale your sales team better. Building an effective sales operation is not about finding individual sales superstars. It's about creating an all-star team. You don't want to be the team that has the best individual players; you want to be the strongest team. A sales script helps you to bring new people up to speed faster, train and benchmark them better and just generally scale your sales faster.

Sales scripts empower your reps to be better listeners and be more creative

If people have a good sales script, they are actually better listeners, not worse. A sales script frees your mind up to really pay attention to what a prospect is saying, because you don't have to think so much about what you're going to say next, you don't have to constantly compute your own answers all the time.

Think of a basketball team: they train pretty much every single day. They practice their footwork, shooting, rebounding and dribbling every day. When they play a game, they can perform more freely and creatively. Their brains take care of all the individual actions automatically, without conscious thought, so they can play the game on a higher level.

The same is true for sales: you want your reps to have individual sales maneuvers so deeply ingrained that they always have at least one option to respond effectively to a prospect.

How to use a sales script effectively

Develop a sales script. Involve everybody in the team in the initial creation of the script.

Train your sales reps to know the script by heart and really commit it to memory. Let them role play, practice and study it until you could wake them up 3 a.m. and tell them:

"Well, your product is great, but it's just too expensive for us."

And they'd respond without blinking: "At which price would you buy?" (Or however you handle the pricing objection.)

Once they know the script inside out, you can give them the freedom to experiment with their own approaches, trust their instincts and be better than the script. You don't want sales robots, you want sales reps who bring in their own personality, ideas and creativity. But equip them with the mental sales tools they need to confidently face every situation in the first place.

Once or twice a month, have a team meeting where you all collaborate on improving the script. Discuss what works and doesn't work, ask questions, bring in your own experiences and then edit the

script so you come up with the next version. This continuous improvement will result in steady, unstoppable growth of your sales force.

Unleash the power of the sales script

Despite the many reasons sales script opponents cite, there's tremendous value in developing and continuously improving your script.

Just don't use it robotically, but mindfully. Require your sales reps to study the script, but give them the freedom to deviate and experiment with their own approaches as much as they want.

Regularly collaborate to improve the script and spread new learnings throughout your entire sales force.

Now, here's the basic outline every sales script should follow.

The successful sales call blueprint

When selling on the phone, oftentimes founders don't understand how to structure a call. If you don't have the right plan going into a sales call, it's going to be much harder to close the deal.

Every sales call, from a cold call to a closing call, should follow a pre-planned structure that is meant to increase the likelihood of the desired result. However, that doesn't mean there can't be detours along the way.

It's like driving somewhere new the first time—you will almost always use Google maps to give you a plan and direction. Then, each proceeding time you might use your directions a little less.

A sales call at any stage of the process should include the following five steps.

1. Make an introduction

The goal of the introduction is very simple: talk to the prospect and get them in the right frame of mind. Create context and build rapport. Make sure they are present and engaged in the conversation before attempting to pitch anything.

Examples:

- Did I catch you at a bad time?

- Do you have "x" in front of you?

2. Ask questions

If this is the first sales call, this is where you qualify the lead. In later sales calls, this is when you ask deeper qualifying questions and do discovery in order to find out what has changed or happened since the last call and what the current status is.

Examples:

- How are you currently doing "x"?
- What did your team think of the proposal you and I talked about on our last call?

3. Deliver the pitch

You've had a successful introduction and asked all the important questions to reach a real understanding of your prospect. This is the part of the conversation where you offer your pitch.

The pitch is not always going to be selling your entire product. Rather, it is going to be selling them on the objective of the call (i.e. a follow-up call, an in-person meeting, or a demo or a close). Your questions should help prepare you for the pitch.

Examples:

- *We are going to streamline your process by …*

- *We are going to save you 'x' dollars each month by …*
- *We can solve your security challenge by …*

4. Manage objections

A prospect almost never bites on the pitch with no questions or concerns. So, during this part of the call you anticipate objections and manage and address them.

Examples:

- This is something I hear pretty frequently, but here's the thing …
- I hear you. Most of our customers had the same concern. Let me tell you how we're addressing this today …

5. End with a call to action

Finally, all sales calls should end with a call to action. If you don't have a call to action (i.e. another call or a check-in after the client is using the product), then you will face an uphill battle the next time you talk with the prospect.

Examples:

- *When are you going to be able to bring this back to your team?*
- *When is a good time for us to connect again?*

The above five steps provide a great starting point for a founder of any experience. Now, try making it your own and see how things improve.

How to create an outbound sales script

Phone calls can be an incredibly effective tool to reach out to potential customers and close deals. How do you know that you have a sales pitch that is effective on the phone?

The best way to do that is to prepare and write a structured phone script.

Let's look at a simple cold call script structure you can use

- Raise curiosity (Who is this? Why should I care?)
- Give context (elevator pitch)
- Ask for permission to continue
- Ask questions. Learn about prospects' needs. Define if they are a fit.
- Test close: discover price sensitivity, decision timeline, etc.
- Schedule next steps

Opening

- Steps 1–3:
  - Hi, my name is_____. I'm calling some startups in the area to find out if they are a good fit for our product/service/beta program.

- What we do in a sentence is we provide companies with xyz.
- Does this in general sound interesting to you?

Qualifying and managing objections

- Step 4:
  - What is your current xyz process?
  - Who are your customers?
  - How do you currently solve xyz?
  - Etc.
- Step 5:
  - Manage any objections

Test closing

- Step 6:
  - We would want to start in X weeks. Does this work for you?
  - The beta program is heavily discounted. It's going to be $X per day.
  - What is the decision-making process in your company?
  - Etc.

Next steps

- Step 7:

- o Great. Sounds like this could be a good fit. Let me send you our brochure and schedule a time next week to discuss all your questions, etc.
- o What's the best email to send you information and the calendar invite?
- o What's a good time to chat next week?

Remember: send the calendar invite to the prospect while you're still on the phone.

How to create an inbound sales script

The sales script in the last chapter is for either outbound sales or when you're trying to find your first customers.

If you have a B2B SaaS product and free trial users, ask for their number and call them as soon as possible after signup (preferably within 5 minutes) and use the script template below!

Opening

Hey! My name is _____, I saw that you just signed up for our product _____ and wanted to personally reach out and say "hi".

I know you are just getting started with your trial and wanted to see if you had any questions or if there is anything I can do to help you get the most out of your trial?

User responds (answer questions/interact with user).

Qualifying

I also wanted to make sure that we are a good fit for you and that you'll succeed with _____. I'm curious.

How did you hear about us in the first place?

What's your main challenges/goals regarding _____?

How many people in your team would use _____?

[Other product specific questions]?

What other solutions are you checking out?

How are you going to make a decision if we're a good fit?

Closing (if qualified)

Great. It sounds like our product _____ is the perfect fit for you.

Take the next week to give it a good test run and do _____ and then let's set a time to chat so I can hear how things are going and answer any more in depth questions for you. Would next week same day/time work?

Remember to set a follow up time and send a calendar invite.

QUALIFYING: SELL TO THE RIGHT CUSTOMERS, NOT EVERY CUSTOMER

How to qualify prospects

Qualifying is all about gathering insights necessary to make a good judgment.

Should you sell to a given prospect? What is the best course of action to close a deal? Is this prospect a good fit for your offer? Is it a viable sales opportunity?

Only after you've qualified someone can you really know whether it's worth to invest your time and effort into trying to sell to this prospect.

However, many inexperienced salespeople jump to the pitch too quickly, without having first gained a proper understanding of their prospect.

What happens when you don't qualify leads?

You're essentially throwing darts in the dark, operating like a mindless sales monkey, and it will hurt your performance on several levels. You'll waste your time and energy chasing the wrong leads, barking up the wrong tree. You become a crocodile salesman—big mouth and no ears.

> Crocodile Salesmen are people who are always talking. They're pitching to you. They don't take the time to realize what your

> true motivations are because they're too busy telling you what they THINK you want to hear. Trust me – your chances of selling are much lower if you're talking rather than actively listening.
>
> — Mark Suster, The Danger of Crocodile Sales

Don't become a crocodile; we have two eyes and one pair of lips for a reason.

Wasting time

If you're not qualifying your leads properly, you'll waste a lot of time following up, and attempting to sell to prospects that aren't a good fit for your company. Spend this time on qualified prospects, and you'll close substantially more valuable deals.

Missed opportunities

Some of your best prospects might only become a customer if you invest a certain amount of effort into getting them on board. If you don't know who those high-value prospects are, you'll miss out on the chance to sell them.

Closing bad deals

Sometimes you might successfully sell to people who shouldn't buy your product. This isn't just bad for the customer whom you persuaded into a bad buying decision—selling to the wrong customers is also bad for you and your company.

Not knowing how to sell to them

What are their pain points? What's the context in which they evaluate your solution? What kind of person are you dealing with? What type of organization? If you don't know the answers to these questions, then you can't customize your pitch for your prospects.

Unable to close the deal

What's their buying process? How long does it take this company to buy a product? What's the deal value? Not knowing these things can lead to bad "surprises".

Most surprises you'll encounter in sales aren't actually surprises, they're just a result of a sales rep not properly qualifying a prospect.

How to Qualify

It's all about asking questions and eliciting the right information from the prospect.

There are four areas you want to focus on with your questions.

1. Customer profile

How well do they match your ideal customer profile? How big is the company? What industry are they in? Where are your ideal customers located? What's the ideal use case? Which tools have they used in the past? What kind of ecosystem are they playing in?

When qualifying prospects for our sales pipeline management software, we ask people how many leads they usually have in their pipeline. If it's less than 100 a year, we recommend they *not* buy our solution and instead just use a whiteboard or a spreadsheet.

2. Needs

What are this customer's needs? Is it about reaching certain goals in revenue? What are the needs of the individual, the team, and the company?

When I interviewed Gary Vaynerchuk on how he is selling to Fortune 500 companies, he dropped some interesting insights on how B2B sales is fundamentally no different to B2C: you're selling to people, not companies.

You must know how to fulfill their wants and needs. What are the results they want to get? And how will those results affect them, their team and their company**?**

3. Decision-making process

How do they make decisions? How many people are involved? Which departments are involved? What's their typical buying process like? How much time does it takes them to buy a product?

For instance, some organizations have 12 month purchasing processes. If you need to close deals in three months, that's no good

for you. When do they plan to buy? Maybe they're not ready to buy now, but will in the future.

4. Competition

Who are you competing against? Which other vendors have they worked with? Are they evaluating your solution vs. building their own solution? What are the criteria they base their decision on?

If you know all these things, you'll have a really great idea if someone is a qualified prospect or not. Create a simple, one-page document that lists all the crucial questions you want to ask or the information you want to elicit.

How NOT to qualify

While the most common problem is without a doubt that sales reps don't qualify their prospect well enough, there are also some people who take qualifying too far, and simply do it badly.

You can't just rapidly fire questions at your prospects. Qualifying is not interrogating. Be smooth about it. Weave the qualifying into the natural fabric of an engaging conversation, and approach them with an open sense of curiosity.

Identify red flags during qualifying

During the qualifying stage, there are several red flags you want to watch out for.

Spot incongruences

Sometimes the answers you get from prospects don't paint a coherent picture. Some of the things they say don't fit together with other things they say, and you can't make sense of it. Oftentimes they're giving you BS answers. Sometimes a prospect won't be completely forthright with you. You need to know if they're not being honest with you.

Here's a common example:

A prospect will tell you that it's very important that your solution is scalable to many millions of customers. Later on, you find out that their "team" is only two people (nothing wrong with that, been there, done that), they don't have venture funding, they don't have growth and they don't have customers.

A bit of a disconnect to put so much emphasis on scaling to millions of customers, and not having any right now. Maybe they are clueless and inexperienced, maybe there's something they are trying to hide.

Whatever it is, watch out for conflicting responses. Does the story they tell you make sense?

If it doesn't, then bring it up in a polite and honest way: "I struggle with this little point, why is scaling so important if you are still small?" Or: "I'm struggling with this one piece of information, most of

our customers who say XYZ don't have this constraint, why is this something that's important to you?"

Just asking them to clarify will often be enough to bring up the real information.

Pay attention to context, not just content

Don't just listen to *what* prospects say, but also to *how* they say it. If they tell you they're super excited about implementing your solution, but their voice is flat and muted ... maybe they're *not* super excited.

When you notice this, give them opportunities to clarify things. Don't grill them: "Oh, you say you're super excited, but you sound totally bored. Obviously, you're not being honest here!" Simply say something like: "Hey, a lot of times implementing a new solution is really hard. What are some possible issues you might encounter?"

The point is to stimulate a real conversation, to get real information, and not just to comfortably cruise along the surface level.

The reluctant prospect

Sometimes prospects will exhibit an unwillingness to provide you with substantial information. They'll repeatedly respond to your questions with "I don't know". Their answers will be so general and unspecific that they contain no valuable information.

If you're encountering a prospect like this, you're either talking to the wrong person and they're clueless, or they don't trust you.

Call them out on it. Tell them: *"We only deal with customers who become real long-term partners. To do that successfully we both need to be open. I really need to understand what you need in order to even judge if our solution is a good fit for you, or if I should point you into a different direction to make you successful."* (For more on building trust in sales, read How to sell to "nonbelievers": Turn doubt into trust.)

4 signs of a good qualifying process

There are certain things you can look at in your business that will be an indicator of how well you're qualifying prospects:

- Productive sales reps
- Successful customers
- Time to close
- Good forecasting (knowing what kind of deals are going to close and what they are going to be worth).

What if many of your prospects don't qualify?

Sometimes, the majority of people you talk to simply aren't a good match for your product/service. If that's the case, you're probably casting your net too wide, and should consider a more focused and

targeted lead generation approach. There's no point in spending most of your time with prospects who will never buy.

42 B2B qualifying questions to ask sales prospects

Everything you need to know about qualifying can be summarized with two questions: Can I help them? And can they help me?

This is what we call selfless and selfish qualification. If you can say yes to both questions, you'll never close a bad deal again.

But how do you get the answer to those two questions? By asking the right questions.

To get you started, here is a list of 42 qualifying questions to ask sales prospects.

How to use these qualifying questions

The first category, ideal customer profile, is meant to be a checklist for you to determine if you're targeting the right companies. If you don't already have one, now is the time to create your own ideal customer profile.

The remaining five categories—needs, decision making, budget, competition, and closing the deal—cover the questions you should ask prospects. You don't need to go in order or ask every single question but after qualifying a prospect, you should know:

- What do they need?
- Who are the decision makers and how do they make decisions?
- Can they afford your product or service?
- What other solutions are they considering?
- Are they ready to take the next step, such as having another meeting, attending a product demo, signing up for a trial, etc.?

From there, you'll know if you can help them and if they can help you.

Ideal customer profile

1. How well do they match your ideal customer profile?

An ideal customer profile is one of the most powerful ways to identify companies which get significant value from using your product/service, and provide significant value to your company. If you don't know which companies to target, you'll struggle to hit your sales quotas or worse, close bad deals.

2. Which industry are they in?

It may be tempting to try to target every industry imaginable but there will be certain industries that will need and value your product more than others. Don't take a scattershot approach; double-down on markets you already know and have been a part of or ones where you know many insiders.

3. How long have they been in business?

Length of time in business is an important criterion because it will help you get a feel for a business's stability. It can also determine which businesses need your solution the most. For instance, one business owner had a point of sales system for chefs who ran their own business but was having trouble selling it. However, behavioral data helped him realize that the best prospects were chefs who had *recently* opened up a restaurant.

4. What's the size of the organization? (Measured in revenue, number of customers, number of employees, etc.)

The needs of a small, early-stage startup will be different from those of an older, more established enterprise company. While enterprise sales can be lucrative, it also can be dangerous if you're a small startup unaware of the rules of enterprise sales or unequipped to support an enterprise client once they're a customer.

5. What's the size of the relevant department?

If your solution is for certain departments (marketing, accounting, HR, etc.), you'll need to sell to that department and prioritize their needs but you can't do that if you lack the right information.

6. Are they located in the same areas as your ideal customers?

Depending upon certain factors, location may or may not be relevant but if you've noticed your ideal customers tend to be located in particular areas, use location as a qualifying criteria.

7. What's the ideal use case?

Your ideal customers are in a special category because they use your solution in ways that maximizes value for them. Be careful of prospects who would use your product in suboptimal ways because they'll be unsatisfied and eventually churn.

8. What would automatically make them a BAD fit for your product or service?

For instance, when qualifying prospects for our sales pipeline management software, we ask them how many leads they usually have in their pipeline. If it's less than 100 a year, we recommend they *not* buy our solution and instead just use a whiteboard or a spreadsheet. That's selfless and selfish qualification in action.

Needs

9. How did you hear about us?

This is a killer sales question because it allows you to understand what makes the prospect interested in your solution and reminds them of the reasons why they are spending time with you.

Ask this question early in the conversation since the answer will guide your approach to the conversation, tell you which angle to use when conveying the benefits of your product, and which questions to ask to keep them engaged. It's a shortcut to gaining real insights into their wants and needs, so you have a more targeted conversation.

10. What are the top challenges your team or company is currently facing?

Prospects won't initially care about your product and all of the bells and whistles it has. Their priority is tackling their own challenges. Therefore, if you want to be on their radar, you need to know what their pain points are and demonstrate that you can provide a solution. Only then will you have a chance of closing the deal.

11. What are the top challenges you're currently facing?

In B2B sales, there are three levels of customer need: the company, the department, and the individual. Guess which level is most important?

To summarize one of the points of Gary Vaynerchuk's sales philosophy, you're not selling to an organization, you're selling to a collection of individuals. Failure to sell the individual prospects can lead to a delayed or derailed deal.

12. What are the results you want to achieve and how do you want to achieve them?

Knowing a prospect's challenges is a good start but you still need to dig past surface level understanding. For example, say your prospect's biggest challenge is increasing revenue. You could immediately launch into a pitch about how your solution will increase revenue by saving them time but that would be pitching prematurely.

By asking the right questions, you might learn that while they're not interested in saving time, they are interested in increasing revenue with more effective advertising. That changes the dynamic of the conversation because then you can tailor your pitch around their needs and interests but you couldn't have reached that insight if you hadn't dug deeper.

13. When would you like to achieve these results?

Your prospect may need to have their challenges resolved by a certain deadline. The closer the deadline, the more urgent it will be that they find the right solution, which could help speed up the sales cycle.

14. How would achieving these results benefit you, your team and company?

This question helps tie positive emotions to the resolution of the prospect's challenges and by extension, your solution. What if your prospect wants to increase revenue because it meant they could hire

more employees and better tap into more opportunities in the market? The excitement they feel about the possibility of more opportunities would then be transferred to your solution if they believe your solution can help make this possible for them.

15. What would the consequences be if you didn't solve these issues?

Despite a company or individual's challenges, it's still possible for them to delay or get distracted with other issues. By highlighting the consequences of not solving their problems, you create a sense of urgency and keep the conversation focused on the important issues at stake.

16. What motivated you to search for a solution now?

If a prospect has recently experienced a major event such as a change in leadership, the company, or market, they will have a greater sense of urgency and interest in selecting a solution, which would shorten the sales cycle.

17. If you're not currently searching for a solution, why not?

A prospect may not be searching for a solution for a multitude of reasons such as already using a competitor's product, not having the budget, or not viewing your solution as a priority.

However, an outside perspective can motivate prospects to rethink their stance by, for instance, informing them of a better option, helping them find the money in their budget or uncovering the opportunity cost of not having a solution in place.

While prospects don't want an aggressive salesperson, they will appreciate a salesperson who educates them and challenges their thinking.

18. Which features are must-have versus nice-to-have?

You need to know the answer to this question in order to help your prospect prioritize. Plus, it prevents you from pursuing deals that could never close because even though you had everything the prospect wanted, you didn't have everything they needed.

19. Why do you need these particular features?

It's very possible that your solution may not have one of your prospect's must-have features. In that case, you must think like an engineer, not a salesperson.

A salesperson may be tempted to overpromise and underdeliver on a missing feature. However, an engineer will often want to know why a prospect needs a feature and exactly how they plan to use it. This line of questioning can help reveal if a feature is a deal-breaker or if it's possible to use a workaround to accomplish the same objective.

Decision making

20. What role do you play in the decision-making process?

This is one of the most overlooked questions in the qualifying stage. The person on the phone may be an enthusiastic internal champion but at the end of the day, you still sell to decision makers and you need to confirm you're talking to the key players ASAP.

21. Who are the people who have the final say on making a decision?

The larger and more complex an organization is, the more decision makers there will be. Every decision maker must be sold on your solution before you can make a successful sale.

22. What concerns will these decision makers likely have?

Remember, you sell to individuals, not companies. Gain a competitive advantage by asking your internal champions what issues are more likely to attract or repel individual decision makers to or from your solution in order prevent any embarrassing or costly mistakes.

23. How does your company or department make decisions?

Knowing *who* the decision makers are is different from knowing *how* a company makes decisions. For example, one person or a group of people may have the final say but the company or department may

hold meetings to gauge the opinions of other important stakeholders such as end users. If you've turned each stakeholder into an internal champion, you're better positioned to make the deal happen.

24. Which departments are involved?

This question is especially important when selling to large organizations. Even if the marketing department will be the sole department using your solution, the procurement and legal departments of a company may be involved in finalizing and approving the contract. Use this simple sales hack to get your contracts signed quicker and reduce the amount of legal hassle to a minimum.

25. Who will be responsible for implementing or overseeing this service or product?

Even if the CEO loves your product, getting their approval is only the beginning of the deal. Generally, your product will be delegated down the organization to a more appropriate person. However, the person responsible for implementing your product won't always share the CEO's excitement for it if it means more work with very little upside for them.

Find out who will be responsible for managing your product internally. Then sell that person on how it will benefit their company

and their personal career. Otherwise, your product will be poorly implemented and the contract won't be renewed.

26. Do you have the resources and time to handle implementation and training?

Especially if you're dealing with a large and/or demanding prospect, implementing and training people on using your product can be expensive and time-consuming. You need to understand their capabilities and willingness in this matter, and make sure to sell them on using your product or else they will receive no value from your product.

27. How much time did it take your company or department to buy a similar product?

Asking this question will help you estimate how long this deal will take to close. If the timeframe seems long, you'll have a chance to ask about choke points and delays in the process.

28. When do you want to make a decision and begin implementing a solution?

You now have a rough idea about how long the decision-making process will take, but you want to ask your prospect about a deadline in order to keep them accountable for and focused on making a decision.

29. Which metric(s) would you use to evaluate the success of my solution?

If you know how they will judge the effectiveness of your solution, there will be fewer surprises as both parties will understand the objectives your product can and cannot accomplish.

Budget

30. Who oversees the budget?

By now, asking about the decision makers and decision-making process should have allowed you to identify the person or department in question but if you haven't, now is a good time to ask.

31. How much have you spent on similar solutions?

The amount a prospect has spent on past solutions could determine the amount they're willing to spend. You need to know where the pricing of your solution falls in regards to their predetermined range. If your price falls below their range, your solution might be too cheap and if it falls above their range, you'll need to convince them that the value of the product outweighs the price.

32. How much do you have budgeted now?

Things change. It's possible that they might have spent more in the past but now they're on a tighter budget. On the other hand, maybe more money has been made available recently. If there's a gap

between what they have spent on similar solutions in the past and what their budget is now, inquire about it.

33. Have you ever needed to invest in a solution that was outside of the original budget? If so, what was the budget allocation process like in that case?

If your solution costs more than their intended budget, you'll need to know about similar cases. It will give you an idea of the likelihood of the budget being increased and how it was handled in the past.

Competition

34. Do you currently have a contract with another company? If so, when is it up for renewal? Is there a cancellation fee?

If your prospect currently has a contract, your job will be double-fold: convince them that their current vendor isn't the right one for them and that your solution will make their jobs and lives better.

Don't be surprised if your prospect isn't interested in switching if they've recently signed or renewed their current contract. The key is to be patient and regularly follow up so when they're ready to switch, your company is the first one that springs to mind.

35. What has worked and hasn't worked with your current solution?

Picking up on unmet needs is a great way to position your product as a better solution if your product can solve those issues.

36. What were the deciding factors that made you choose that particular solution?

When you're qualifying prospects, you mostly ask a lot of questions that focus on the present but asking questions about the past can be powerful because it gives you access to past buying experiences. If their past buying experiences were positive, associate your solution with that success and use it as a model for the way you sell.

However, if their past buying experience was a flop, distance yourself from it and frame your solution as something completely different. How is your offer better? How does it protect them from missteps like these? Why won't they have to worry about making another bad choice if they choose you?

37. How does our solution compare to the competitor's?

In this day and age, prospects are more savvy and aware of their options. Therefore, at the very least, you need to know your competitors' strengths and weaknesses and be able to sell against the incumbent in your market. However, if you really want to blow the competition away, outcompete your competitors by pitching their product.

38. Are you considering building your own solution?

Competition can come from multiple sources and you don't want to overlook the potential competitor right under your nose: your prospect. Especially if they're developers, they might think they're better off building their own solution.

While that option gives them the most control, it might not be the most time-efficient option, particularly if they have to deal with maintaining and updating their solution on a regular basis. You might even have examples of current customers who initially invested in building their own solution, only to find out that in the long-term it's not feasible.

Closing the deal

39. What are all the steps we have to take to help make this deal happen?

This is called the virtual close and it's one of the most powerful questions you can ask. Ask this question in order to learn in detail what it would take to turn the prospect into a customer. This question will give you a roadmap to the prospect's buying process and will uncover any major red flags before they have a chance to screw up a deal.

40. Are there any obstacles that could prevent this deal from happening?

This question is essential. By asking it, you prompt your prospect to identify potential roadblocks, allowing you to be proactive instead of reactive.

41. Based on what we've discussed, do you think our solution is a good fit for your needs? Why?

At this point, you should know whether the prospect is qualified, have a roadmap to the decision-making process, and be prepared for potential obstacles. This gives you a chance to handle any objections that haven't been addressed and re-confirm the prospect's interest in your product.

42. When is the best date and time to schedule our next meeting?

The best time to schedule a follow-up conversation is when your prospect is still on the phone! While you're still talking, ask them to look at their calendar and schedule a time that works for them. Then, a day or two before the next meeting, make sure you send them an email to remind them of, and confirm, your next appointment.

Selflessly and selfishly qualify, then sell

There's a saying that we have two ears and one mouth so that we can listen twice as much as we speak. In sales, this means asking the right questions and then listening to what your prospect says. Only

after you're sure you can help them and they can help you should you sell to them.

Close the right customers and you'll have successful customers who will be a source of referrals and additional revenue in the form of upsells.

Close the wrong customers and you'll have unhappy customers who will be a source of bad reviews and higher churn rates.

The difference between those two outcomes begins with qualifying prospects correctly.

Buyer refuses to answer your questions? Do this!

I recently got an email from Vivek, one of my blog readers, who had to pitch to a massive car company. It was a high-pressure sales situation for Vivek. The stakes were high as a lot depended on this deal and he had just one shot.

As soon as Vivek opened the presentation with a qualifying question, the buyer interrupted him:

"Listen, Vivek. You are here to present to us. We would like to not have to answer any questions. Why don't you just go ahead and make the presentation? We will ask the questions. And then when you leave, we can determine whether we want to move forward with this or not."

How should you deal with this challenge?

Let's discuss what you can do to turn an unfavorable sales presentation around and win over your prospective buyers.

Should you fight or follow?

Properly qualifying your prospects is a crucial step in sales. Asking questions and listening to answers is one of the most important aspects of your interactions with a prospective customer.

Your ability to do your job well is squashed when the buyer tells you:

"You're not allowed to ask any questions. I just want you to present, and I'll make my choice afterwards."

What do you do?

Do you:

   a. Fight for your right to ask, or
   b. Sell the way your prospects want to buy?

If you think that a large enterprise has its own way of making purchasing decisions and it's easier for you to adapt to its buying process than to get the enterprise to adapt to your sales process, you might choose option B.

I, however, would strongly advise you to choose option A.

But how do you fight for your right to ask questions without creating an argument?

You can't just insist on your way of selling. You can't declare:

"No way! This is how I present and sell, and I need to ask you these questions!"

Instead, your goal is to demonstrate to your prospects that answering your questions will benefit them. You have to disagree without being disagreeable.

Plan A: Turning your meeting around

Here is a step-by-step process you can follow to convince your prospects to let you lead the conversation.

Step 1: Make a supporting statement

"That makes perfect sense. In a typical vendor and buyer relationship, that's a really good process, and it's served you really well."

Step 2: Re-frame the issue

"But we like to be more than just a vendor. We actually want to be a partner."

Step 3: Make your case

"In order to be a partner, it's important for us to truly understand what the needs of the people who use our software are. Only this way we can make really good recommendations and focus on what's most important."

Step 4: Sell your prospects on an additional benefit of green-lighting your questions

"So, I would suggest we just take five minutes to explore how our product would actually relate to your initiatives and needs. These five minutes will either make the next 45 minutes more productive or it will save both of us a lot of time because in five minutes we might discover that we're not the right fit. If we discover quickly that we are not the right fit, I won't waste your time with a long presentation."

Step 5: Transition into your first question (without waiting for permission)

"Does that sound fair? I have three really crucial questions that will influence the way I present our product, and I think it's going to make a big difference."

Plan B: Play by their rules

If you manage to convince your prospective buyers to answer your questions, great!

If they interrupt you again and refuse to provide you with any information, you'll have to make your next decision.

Do you now:

a. Play by their rules, or
b. Insist that the questions are of vital importance?

From my personal experience, I'd advise against pitching to a buyer who is totally closed to receiving your questions and treats you like a commodity.

But if you want the deal to happen so badly that you're willing to tolerate such treatment, then proceed as they instruct you.

Be aware, however, of the disadvantaged position you will find yourself in.

You're throwing darts in the dark. You don't know your prospects' decision-making criteria. You don't know their pain points and objectives. You're treating guesswork as gospel, flying blind.

My question to you is: *if you're flying blind, should you make your presentation as short or as long as possible?*

Think about that for a minute. What's the better strategy here?

You might be thinking that it makes sense to squeeze as many case studies and convey as many different benefits of your product or service as possible into your presentation. You hope that among the great number of value propositions you showcase, at least one will hit your buyers' sweet spot.

If you think making your presentation longer is the right choice because it allows you to cover more ground and talk more extensively about the topic, think again.

Why?

Large amounts of information will overload and bore your prospects. They won't pick up on the things they like. Instead, they'll focus on the elements of your presentation they dislike.

That's why you should keep the presentation short. Take 10-15 minutes to highlight the most important facts about you and your solution in general. Tell a quick, 2-5 minute, story of how adopting your solution helped a company similar to theirs.

End the presentation by saying:

"At this point, I think it's a good time to actually have you ask some questions to make sure I answer and address everything that's important to you."

And then let them drive the conversation by asking questions.

Answering follow-up questions will give you the opportunity to ask clarifying—read qualifying—questions.

Buyer: "Well, how do you _____?"

You: "You know what, that's an interesting question. Let me make sure I understand it correctly. Is this important to you because of X or because of Y?"

That's how you secretly present a qualifying question to a buyer who resists being asked qualifying questions.

You must be attuned to the subtle dance between you and your prospects. Let them guide you in the direction they want the presentation to go while keeping your goals in mind.

Shift the dynamics

When your ability to ask qualifying questions during a sales pitch is hampered by the uncooperative prospect, try to reframe your request as a benefit to them.

If your attempts fail and you don't want to walk away from the meeting, comply with the proposed format but make your presentation short. State the most relevant facts and insert a case study to support your points.

Use follow-up questions as an opportunity to ask your qualifying questions and transform the presentation into a productive conversation for both sides.

PITCH PERFECT: HOW TO DELIVER AN IRRESISTIBLE PITCH

10 steps to giving a good pitch

If you want to gain more traction for your startup and get more signups for your product or service, then these tried-and-tested steps to building a sales pitch will be invaluable. Even if you need to sell your idea to an investor or convince a talented developer to join your team, your pitch might just be the most important thing to focus on right now.

1. Focus on how you say what you say

When crafting a pitch, most people spend a lot of time and energy on the content and the words they use, but not enough time on how they deliver the message. Your body language and your tone of voice need to communicate enthusiasm and confidence.

Imagine somebody who doesn't understand a single word of English is in the room with you, watching you speak. That person should get the impression you believe in what you are saying, know what you are talking about and are enjoying talking about it.

Make sure your body language and tonality make people want to listen. Practice in front of a mirror, in front of friends, or in front of a camera.

2. Get in the zone

Feel great when you deliver the pitch. Most people feel negative towards selling or pitching an idea because they're anxious about the outcome. Do whatever is necessary to put yourself in a great emotional state before you deliver your pitch.

Some people visualize their goals to feel inspired and upbeat. Some people work out. Others eat healthy food or listen to music they love and dance. Do what works best for you.

3. Ask to understand

Want to know the real secret to success in sales? Empathy. You need to understand your customers' wants and needs, their challenges and problems, so you can help them in the best possible way.

How to gain this kind of understanding? By asking questions. Ask them about their work. Ask them about their situation. Ask them about their frustrations. Ask them about their ambitions.

Do this until you know what they care about and understand what they need. Only then should you sell them the right solution, and only if it truly is the best solution for them.

Many years ago, I attended a sales training that taught me the power of asking questions. It was the most important lesson I ever learned in sales. This is what sales is about: ask the right questions. Listen.

4. Present solutions, not features

As a founder, you probably love the details of your product or service. But your customers aren't interested in your product. They are only interested in what your product will do for them: How will it solve their problems? How will it help them to achieve their goals faster and with less effort? How will it save them time or money? How will it protect them from risks?

Always translate your product's features into your customers' benefits. Don't focus on the bells and whistles, but what they do for them.

5. Manage objections

Most people fail to prepare for objections. You want to identify the 10 to 20 most common objections and prepare answers to them. Your answers should be clear and concise.

Rehearse your answers until they roll off your tongue. When you encounter an objection in a sales conversation, you won't need to think about which words to use. Instead, focus on answering their question in a comforting manner. Keep eye contact. Nonverbally communicate expertise to create trust.

If you prepare for objections, you will look forward to addressing them. Most salespeople fear and try to avoid objections. Great salespeople do the opposite.

6. Ask for the close

This step is all about confidence. Rehearse your close so you can deliver it smoothly. It should be a natural progression from your conversation, so that asking for purchase is the next logical step. Make your prospects feel as confident about your solution as you are. It's your job to guide your prospect through every stage of the buying process.

7. Negotiate

Once a prospect has made a buying decision internally, they will want to make sure to get the best deal they can. It's negotiation time. There are two simple rules to negotiating:

1. **Know your price.** Sometimes if it's necessary, you can offer better terms or a lower price. But know your numbers in advance and decide at which point you will walk away from the deal. If a prospect can't afford to pay what you are worth, he's not the right fit.
2. **Be quiet.** Use the power of silence to your advantage. Let the other side do the talking. If you keep your mouth shut at the right times, the client will often start to negotiate on your behalf. It's absurd and illogical, but it works.

8. Follow up

Everything we have covered before now is just 20 percent of the sales process. Eighty percent of all deals are made in the follow-up.

Be consistent and reliable. Follow through on your word. Your margin of negligence in the follow-up is between staying true to your word and overdelivering. Keep following up until you either get a yes or a definite no. But never ever interpret a lack of response or any other kind of message as a no. Winning in sales happens in the follow-up. Be relentless.

9. Anticipate rejection

In sales, you often need to brush yourself off and keep on going. Dealing with rejection is a core skill. You need the emotional stability to take a "no" and still go into the next meeting filled with positive energy and enthusiasm.

The number of people who won't buy will always be larger than the number of people who will. You will encounter more no's than yes's. That's the way this game works.

10. Ask for referrals

This is one of the most important steps to creating a truly scalable sales process. So make it part of your pitch. When a prospect has already made a buying decision, ask for a referral:

"Great, but I can't let you buy just yet. Right now, we are a startup. Which means we focus all our energy, time and resources on delivering as much value as we can to our customers. We don't have a big marketing budget. If you are happy with our product, please

recommend us to others who you think might benefit from our solution as well."

Put these 10 steps into practice and you will be able to craft and deliver an amazing sales pitch for your product, service or idea.

How to customize your pitch for each prospect

A lot of founders start pitching way too early in a sales call. This almost always shuts down your chances of closing a deal. Want to know how to work your way to the perfect time to pitch? And a failproof method to find out *exactly* how to customize your pitch for every prospect?

This method ties in with the most important lesson I ever learned in sales. It's fundamentally about gaining a deep understanding of your prospect, and using it to close the deal.

But rather than talking in abstracts, let's demonstrate this on a specific case.

Example: Pitching a scheduling app to doctors

You call up Dr. Smith, and after a quick intro, you launch into your pitch, full of enthusiasm.

Founder: "Hey Dr. Smith, we've built this scheduling app, and it saves doctors like you a lot of time. Would this be interesting to you?"

Dr. Smith: "No, we don't really have that problem, I don't think this is really for us."

Founder: "Yeah, but our scheduling app can also help you to reduce staff costs because you don't need to have somebody on the phone all the time, going back and forth with potential patients. Are you interested in reducing your staffing costs?"

Dr. Smith: "No, I don't think this is something we're interested in."

Founder: "Yeah, but, how about if we could actually increase your revenue a bit?"

And the founder goes on and on like this, without a clear target, without a clear understanding of where to aim at.

Aimlessly throwing darts in the dark

He's just throwing features and value propositions around, hoping something sticks.

He's just taking stabs in the dark. He's not working, he's guess working. He's playing value proposition lottery, hoping to get a lucky ticket. That's not selling, that's speculating. It lacks strategy.

Building a no-street

Every time you throw out another random benefit of your solution, and the prospect says no to that, you are building a no-street. You're conditioning the prospects mind to say "no" to your proposals. The more often the prospect says no to you, the more likely he is going to

be to keep saying no, and the bigger the disconnect between you and the prospect.

No -> no -> no -> no -> no -> ... (can you guess what they'll say next?)

Even if you finally get lucky and offer them something they *are* interested in ... if they've just told you no five times in a row, they're much less likely to now change into the yes-lane. They'll just give you another no, because they have mentally tuned out. They feel like you don't really know what they are interested in, you don't really get them, and you don't have anything of value to offer.

How to work your way to yes

What's a better way than random benefit sputtering? You want to gain an understanding of the prospect that is so precise that you can predict in advance where the prospect's sweet spot is. Wouldn't it be awesome to lead the conversation in a direction where you can do just that? Well, there is!

And what's the best way to lead a conversation in sales?

Asking questions!

Specifically open-ended questions (questions which can't be answered with a yes or no).

Use your questions as satellites which map out the prospect's wants and needs. You want to use your satellites to spot the exact coordinates of their sweet spots.

Founder: "What's one of the biggest challenges you have in your practice right now, especially when it comes to patients, managing revenue, managing costs, managing your time?"

Dr. Smith: "Figuring out a way to increase revenues is important in today's economy."

Founder: "Ok, so increasing revenue is really important for your practice."

Dr. Smith: "Right."

Getting past surface level understanding

Most people at this point in the conversation would think: "Great, I got it! I will pitch this doctor our scheduling app as a way to increase revenue!"

But you—the real pro sales rep—aren't satisfied with that. You keep exploring, you take it a step further.

Founder: "If increasing revenue is important to you, what have you done in the past to achieve that? And what are you currently considering? Is it about advertising, is it about getting more new

patients in? Is it about efficiencies, e.g. having more people show up on time, and reduce the number of no-shows? What kind of measures would you think of that could really make a dent?"

Dr. Smith: "We don't really have a problem with no-shows. The main thing would probably be doing more effective advertising."

Now *that* piece of information changes the whole dynamic of the conversation dramatically, compared to what the first version of the answer was (and even more so compared to the sales rep shooting darts in the dark).

What's next? Digging deeper!

At this point it might seem like there's no way to sell to this doctor. After all, how can your scheduling app help Dr. Smith's advertising?

But this is the point that differentiates mediocre sales reps from great sales reps. Because now you're really getting into consulting. You're not just trying to get the prospect's money in exchange for what you've got, you're revealing something of value to your prospect.

Keep asking questions. You want to find out: Is advertising really the thing that would benefit this doctor the most? What's their actual no-show rate? (Maybe there's potential for significant improvement, and Dr. Smith simply isn't aware of how big an opportunity for increasing revenues this represents.)

Practice the art of listening

Don't just listen to what they say. Also listen to how they say it. If you're selling person to person, observe their body language. When does the prospect really light up, when does the energy in their voice get a lot more excited? These are often more important signals to pay attention to than the actual words they speak.

Test before you pitch

At this point in the conversation, you're probably in a good position to pitch. But again, don't gamble, don't guess, don't hope for luck. Instead, test!

Don't proclaim, "Dr. Smith, I think I have the perfect solution for you! We can save you money on scheduling!"

Instead, keep asking, probing, testing:

Founder: "Dr. Smith, if there was a way to significantly save on scheduling and staffing, to save on software costs, would you be interested in a solution like that? Would saving a lot of money be an option for you, so that you keep your revenue unaffected, but lower costs, and thus end up with more profit, instead of trying all kinds of new advertising things that have unknown outcomes and aren't predictable?"

And then wait to hear what they say!

Dr. Smith: "Na, I'm not really a saving-money guy."

That's valuable feedback! It saves you a wasted bullet. Now you don't have to pitch what you wanted to pitch, and are still good for another round of interaction and questioning, until you get a clear sense of what would work.

Ultimately, you want to get to a point where Dr. Smith says, "Yes, that would indeed be interesting."

Because now you have a clear target. Now you know which buttons to push and how to frame your solution. Now you can throw and you are certain that you will hit. You have the clarity to know what they care about. Now it's time to actually make that pitch and close the deal.

DEALING WITH DIFFICULT OBJECTIONS

AND CUSTOMERS

Why you need an objection management document

Most founders come up with answers to objections on the fly.

That's a huge mistake.

What you need is to develop an objection management document.

I'll share with you how to do that in a few simple steps.

But first let's look at all the reasons why "computing" an answer to an objection in real time is a bad idea:

- It's going to take focus and attention away from the customer while you're trying to formulate your response.
- Your answer will probably longer than you want because you're communicating in a stream of consciousness style.
- You're not going to seem very confident.
- The quality of your answer will heavily depend on your state at the present moment.

So how do you create a great objection management doc?

Here are the 5 simple steps

1. Write down the top 25 objections you're facing in your market.
2. Write down the best answers to each objection.

3. Limit the answers to a max of 3 sentences.

4. Have at least 10 people review the answers with you and give feedback.

5. Train your team and yourself to know these answer by heart.

What are the benefits of doing this?

There are many benefits in doing this exercise and creating a objection management doc, but by far the biggest one is the **boost in confidence** it will give you and your team when delivering the answers.

Here are a few common objections to get you going:

- I don't have time.
- I don't have money.
- Your product/service is too expensive.
- Please just send me more information.
- We don't need this.
- [Add more industry/market/product specific objections]

With your objection management document in hands, let's go over how to manage the most common objections and difficult situations you'll encounter

3 strategies for getting past gatekeeper

How often do you reach a decision-maker on the first call?

It's rare, I know. Most of the time, you connect with an executive assistant, office administrator, or intern.

They're the gatekeepers, right? The first obstacle between you and the close. They ultimately decide whether you'll pitch your product or service to anyone else in the company. It's no surprise that the relationship between these people and sales reps has always been difficult: they don't have the authority to make a buying decision, but they do have the authority to stop you from making a sale.

So how can you incentivize gatekeepers to connect you with decision-makers?

Stop calling them gatekeepers

Seriously. Let's all agree to kill this term.

We're talking about human beings. They're operations professionals and they deserve our respect, especially if we want them to champion our products and services.

When we think of them as roadblocks, we miss the point entirely.

Yes, one of their main responsibilities is to keep distance between salespeople and decision-makers, but they're also valuable sources of information.

Don't worry about getting past the gatekeeper

Instead, ask yourself: How can I get this person to buy into my vision?

These 3 strategies should help you answer that question.

1. Provide value

Plenty of articles warn that you shouldn't sell to gatekeepers, but that's bullshit.

These people may not make the decisions, but they're absolutely stakeholders in this process.

Empathy is such an important skill in sales. You need a hard-nosed attitude that produces results, but you also need a fine-tuned emotional antenna.

When you start your pitch or ask to speak to their boss, they're already weighing the pros and cons. What's the upside to linking you with a decision-maker? Is this worth interrupting someone else's busy schedule? Will this get me a raise? Will it get me fired?

Your first objective is to **minimize the perceived risk**.

All you need is fifteen minutes. You want to talk about a product that could help their business. You're calling to solve a problem.

If the situation calls for it, turn things around: let them know that it's risky NOT to let you speak with a decision-maker. They need to buy your product because the competition already recognizes its value. They can't afford to pass on this opportunity.

As you craft your pitch, consider these questions:

- What's the risk?
- What's the reward?
- Which problems can you solve?
- What are their individual goals?
- How can you support them in achieving these goals?

Like any multi-stakeholder sales process, you need to figure out how to satisfy the wants and needs of each person involved in this purchase.

2. Build trust

To build trust, just be honest and straightforward.

Consider the 3 levels of customer needs: company, department, and individual.

You can build trust by addressing any or all of these needs. The company can save money. A department can streamline workflows.

An office administrator can get promoted after recommending you to a decision-maker.

Do everything you can to bridge the gap between doubt and trust.

Use testimonials to demonstrate that you deliver on your promises. Discuss the other businesses you've helped and why you helped them. Share a story about your days as an intern. Let them know you've been where they are, and you understand the responsibility that comes with such a position.

If you can't establish trust, if they don't believe you're acting with their best interests in mind, if you don't form a connection, there's little chance that they'll ever champion your product or service.

3. Manage objections

Identify common objections you encounter at this stage. What are they concerned about? What scares them? What gets in the way of a close?

Your concise and thoughtful responses to these questions will help to provide additional value and build trust.

Here are a few objections you'll likely hear:

- We don't have time for this.
- My boss doesn't want to talk with salepeople.
- We've tried something like this before, but it didn't work.

- Just send us some information.

- It's not a priority right now.

When your list is complete, create an objection management document so that you can deal with pushback more effectively.

Successful founders ♥ gatekeepers operations professionals

My advice is simple: don't treat executive assistants, office administrators, and interns like nuisances. Don't call them gatekeepers.

Once they buy into your vision—after you've provided value, built trust, and managed their objections—they're much more likely to pass you along to the people with purchasing power, the decision-makers.

"I don't have time"

Unless you happen to cold call someone whose office has just caught on fire, it's pretty likely that "I don't have time" is just a polite way of saying "Go away," or "What you're offering is not a priority for me." After all, if they really didn't have time, they would have just hung up on you.

And yet, your average salesperson still hears "I don't have time," stammers, gets nervous, and hangs up. It's a difficult objection to deal with—we're not used to responding proactively to "I don't have time." You can't really argue with it, because who are you to question whether someone really has time?

A great salesperson, however, finesses this objection around into further conversation. A great salesperson hears "I don't have time" and recognizes that it's time to drive home the core value proposition that will get that customer to stay on the line.

Think about it this way. If your potential customer was convinced, deep down, that they could make $8 for every $1 they spent with you, would they still tell you they don't have time? No! They'd rush to keep you on the phone, and spend as much money with you as they possibly could.

"The main thing when you are engaged with a client, dream client, or prospect is to create value during every interaction. The more value you create, the more valuable you are to your client. The greater the perception of value, the greater the likelihood you gain a commitment that moves you forward together."—Anthony Iannarino

Your #1 job when someone tells you they don't have time is to demonstrate all the value and upside you can bring them, proving that you are *worth* their time.

You need to work around this objection by showing the value at every turn, whether this objection pops up early in the sales cycle, or later and more insidiously, toward the end of the process.

Early stage objection

No one likes getting cold called, and the "I don't have time" objection is often a polite way of shooing you away early in a call. But this knee-jerk reaction is your chance as a salesperson to differentiate yourself and your product from the swarm of telemarketers out there selling candy and cable upgrades.

At this stage, you need to acknowledge the value of your customer's time, and show them why they should give it to you. Emphasize with their position, but make sure you grab their attention and hook them on value.

Founder: "Hey, I get that, maybe it's not worth your time! The last seven people in your field who I talked to said that as well. *And they were all wrong*. Just give me three minutes to see if you're right—let's confirm that talking to me is not a wise investment of your time."

Be polite, charming, and decisive. Give them compelling proof for why they should stay on the line, and why they'd be missing out if they hung up. Most customers will be willing to give you a few more minutes—which is all you need to start establishing value.

Pitch to priorities

Use this time to show how your product or service can help them meet their goals *today*. Pitch to their priorities by asking questions.

Ask questions that will help you understand what your customer's needs are, while demonstrating your expertise and authority in the field:

1. What *is* your number one priority at this point? Because if you're like the other customers I talk to in the field, your number one goal for next quarter is _____.
2. Is this something that matches your priorities or are you thinking something totally different?
3. If not, what *are* your top priorities right now?

There are lots of fluffy things about your product or service you could choose to emphasize. But you shouldn't start spouting a list of features just because you think they're cool. You need to tailor your value proposition to the specific needs of your customer.

Remember the old sales parable about the guy trying to sell a home-heating system to a little old lady? He starts off by talking all about BTUs, his company's achievements, his CEO's resume, and continues until she stops him. She just has one question she wants to ask: "But will it keep a little old lady warm?"

The only thing your customer *really* cares about is how your product is going to help them solve their problems now—how it's going to help them increase revenue, cut costs, whatever it is. Figure out these priorities, and you'll know exactly the tactic you need to lock your pitch down and make your core value proposition as targeted and effective as possible.

If you handle it right, that initial objection can be your friend. It gives you a window into the things they *do* have time for, and hammers home to your customers that you're truly committed to helping them succeed. It's this commitment that will close deals.

Late stage objection

It's a completely different beast when you hear "I don't have time," toward the end of the deal. You've aced the initial call, exchanged

some emails, maybe even had an online demo, and *then* they hit you with it: "Ah, I don't know, we don't really have time for this right now," or, "This just isn't really a priority for us at this time, we'll check back in with you down the line."

It's frustrating and hard to understand. "You already gave me so much of your time!" you think.

When this kind of objection appears toward the end of the sales cycle, it means that you found a customer that was willing to hear you out without being 100% convinced of the value you could deliver.

Just think of it as a more indirect version of the cold call rejection. Now you really know that they do have time and are just unconvinced.

You essentially made one of two mistakes.

1. You pitched ineffectively. You didn't demonstrate your solution's core value, and they're just saying this as a "nice" way of shooting down the deal.
2. You sold them well—at first. They came into the sales cycle thinking your services might be worth their time, but by the end of the deal, you'd persuaded them otherwise. Ouch. That sucks.

Do not write an email. Pick up the phone as quickly as possible, because you're about to figure out where you went wrong.

Foster trust

Be aware that as a salesperson, you put your customers at risk. If your solution fails, or your company goes under, then they will have made a huge mistake, and this reality often sets in for them toward the end of the sales cycle. To combat this fear, you need to foster trust.

Say, "Hey, I need your help. We went through this whole process and it breaks my heart to think it was all for nothing. I did something really, really wrong, clearly. Just help me figure out where I went wrong. Help me understand."

They'll usually start backtracking: "No, no, no. It's not you. It's us."

People are trained to be polite, rather than tell you about the mistakes you made or where you went wrong. Level with them, and demonstrate that you're willing to hold yourself accountable to your own shortcomings. In doing so, you'll build up the trust you need to push the sales conversation past a dead-end.

Step up: "No, I don't accept that, because my job is to *help you*. My job is to help you succeed and I'm clearly failing at that. Don't take this responsibility away from me: what did I do wrong? How did I misunderstand your priorities, and what are they actually?"

Open up to your customer. Being vulnerable and transparent makes it easier for them to trust you and reciprocate your honesty, which is what you want above all else. Only then can you move past the objection and into the heart of the real problem.

You don't close deals being dishonest: you close deals with mutual understanding. You close deals when customers believe in you, your company and your product.

Turn the conversation back to priorities. If you're getting a "We just don't have time" this late in the sales cycle, it's a good indicator that you missed your chance to really get a good understanding of your customer's problems and priorities. This is your last opportunity to fix that mistake. Customers *don't want* to be sold to: they want someone who's going to work together with them to figure out the best solution.

Deliver value on all fronts

If you absolutely can't get your customer to change their mind, then don't push it. Offer them a referral to another company or service if you know one that might fit their needs better. The end of the deal doesn't have to be a dead end: if you handle it gracefully, your perseverance, honesty and authenticity will pay off.

Cultivate a mindset that revolves around delivering value in as many ways as you possibly can, and prove it not just by pushing past the "I

don't have time" objection, but also by knowing when to let it rest. If you can do this, then objections won't be obstacles, and no matter what happens you will have done well by your customers.

"Send me more information"

Many founders don't even see their prospect's requests to receive some info materials as an obstacle.

Early on in a cold call, a prospect will ask, "Can you send me some more information? I'll review it and get back to you."

A new and insecure founder will respond, "Of course! I'll send it right your way." They send out the email, and that's it. Maybe one or two timid follow-ups, and they file the lead away.

Let's break down why blindly sending more information is the wrong way to respond and how experienced and successful sales reps respond to this common request.

The painless way of losing deals

To insecure founders, it doesn't *feel* like it's a lost opportunity. There's still hope, right?

Maybe the prospect will review the info you sent him, find you're selling exactly what he needs, call you up, and ask one or two clarifying questions. A subtle nudge of your elegant salesmanship will be all it takes to close the deal.

Positive thinking at its finest—except the real world doesn't work this way.

What "please send me more information" really means

It means "I'm not interested, and I don't want to give you my attention and time."

It's simply the most convenient way for the person on the other end of the line to get rid of you. They don't want to be rude; you don't want to be rejected. You both know it. Thus, the unspoken agreement is reached between the two of you.

Why you shouldn't just send more information when they ask for it

You haven't learned anything about this prospect yet. You haven't qualified them. You don't know what their wants and needs are, which problems they face, whether they can afford your solution, etc.

Based on this lack of knowledge, what kind of information will you send them?

Just generic stuff about YOUR company.

What do you think will come out of that?

Nothing.

When you send info materials to a prospect, you want to be sure that it's custom-tailored to the recipient, so that it actually hits the mark.

How to respond when someone requests more information

1. Use the power of yes

First of all, tell them: "Yes! Can I have your email?"

This is the jiu-jitsu part. You use the momentum of their request to your advantage, and then redirect it the way you want to.

2. Get them invested

After they give you their email address, tell them:

"I want to make sure that I send you the most relevant piece of information. Can you tell me, _____ [easy to answer qualifying question, e.g. are you guys more interested in X or Y]?"

This is a tiny, little follow-up question that most prospects will answer. However, it's powerful because it will cause them to lower their guard, thereby shifting the conversation's momentum.

They have given you a bit more information, invested a bit more time and energy into the conversation—and thus are more likely to stick around.

3. Ask more follow-up questions

Engage them in a conversation by carefully asking more follow-up questions. The secret to success here is to fine-tune your antennas, but it's really not rocket science. **If you're in a good state, and you genuinely care and listen, you can do this.**

Some people will cut you off and tell you to just send them the information. If they do, that's fine. Thank them for their time, and get them the info they've asked for.

Many times you can really get them engrossed into long sales conversations. I do this all the time when people ask me to send them more information because they're "too busy to talk right now". 20 minutes later, they're still on the phone with me.

People actually often LIKE this. Rather than a high-pressure sales call with a sleazy telemarketer, they're having a real conversation with a knowledgeable person showing interest in their opinions, problems and wishes. (I'm assuming you have subject matter expertise).

4. Take the next step

Usually you'll still end the call by telling them that they'll get more information. But now you've moved the sale much further. You know more about them, they know more about you, you both have determined that there's some real potential for mutual value

creation. You'll be able to send them much more relevant information to them, and they'll study it much more attentively.

I've had many sales calls where a prospect tried to get rid of me by asking for more information, and using the simple engagement strategy I shared with you here, I re-engaged and closed them on that same call. And if you practice this enough, you'll see similar results.

"Your product is too expensive"

In the words of Mark Cranney of Andreessen Horowitz, "One of the myths of SaaS is that the products are so good, so easy to use, so quick to deploy ... that the product sells itself. [...] But as many startups discover to their horror [...] this is far from the truth. Even with early viral growth, SaaS products don't sell themselves."

And yet, so many SaaS founder expect their job to be just as easy. That's why they get tripped up when customers hit them with the dreaded objection: "Your product is too expensive."

What the price objection *actually* means

When mediocre salespeople hear "your product is too expensive", they take it at face value and give up on the deal. Good salespeople take it in stride.

What the pricing objection means is that you haven't properly communicated your product's value. You need to work together with the prospect to understand who will be using your product and what benefits they'll get: increased productivity, better margins, more customers—whatever that value is, make it clear to the prospect that it outweighs the price.

Plus, a lower price doesn't make a product more attractive—in fact, it does the opposite. Yes, everyone would like to pay less. But, most

customers understand that buying from a cheap competitor will lead to "intolerable" problems.

Look at it this way: what if you were looking at the menu for a nice-looking steakhouse and saw they charged the same as McDonald's? Sure, you might be happy to save some cash, but you'd also worry the food might make you sick. Your product is a ribeye, not a Happy Meal.

Back to value

Here are a few ways to navigate the pricing objection.

- **Don't even discuss price until both you and the customer understand the value your product can deliver.** Remember: this isn't a Starbucks transaction—price isn't relevant at the beginning of the conversation. If they ask too early, say something like, "Well, what's your budget for this project? That'll impact how we can structure the deal."
- **Refuse to lower the price.** When you doggedly stand by your price, it tells the customer that you believe in your product's value. If they demand a lower price, say, "This is the best deal we can offer you," and steer the conversation back toward all the issues your product can solve at the available price. In the words of Evan Carmichael, the founder of EvanCarmichael.com: "You don't want to compete on price. Price is the worst way to stand out. It's not a long term sustainable advantage."

- **Reframe the issue.** Shift the conversation from what they'll pay upfront to what they'll save in the long run. A recent Gartner survey reveals that the majority of companies who buy SaaS do so because they believe it will ultimately save money—in other words, they know that the value over time outweighs the price. Remind them of that by asking something like, "But what will it cost to keep doing what you're doing?"

You might think you're building a strong relationship by giving the customer the discount they want, but really, you devalue your product by telling them, "You're right, it really isn't worth what I originally said it was." That customer will ditch you the second a cheaper option comes along. But, if you focus your sales conversations on what your product provides, customers will start to see the price as an investment in their future, rather than just another expense.

At Close.io, we encounter the pricing objection all the time. Prospects say they just want a simple CRM for calls, they love the product, but it's just too expensive.

We then learn more about their sales process through a simple series of questions:

- How many sales reps do you have?
- How many calls does each rep make a day?
- How long does it take them to log a call in their CRM?

- How much time do their reps spend on average with data entry in their CRM?
- How much are they paying their reps per hour on average?
- What's their average reach rate, qualification rate and close rate?

Many times, when prospects do the math, they're able to see that even though our inside sales software costs more than other CRM tools, they're still getting the better deal because Close.io can improve their sales productivity more than other vendors. It's simple math, once they do the numbers, the value becomes apparent.

Think of ways to do this for your own product. If your product costs $30 more per user than an alternative vendor, but it'll help the prospect to make an additional $600, it would be penny wise and pound foolish to get hung up on price.

"Your product doesn't have the feature I need"

"If I had asked people what they wanted, they would have said faster horses." — Henry Ford

Common scenario: you think you've found the ideal prospect. Product solves a problem? Check. Right industry? Check. Interested? Check.

But then, the customer utters, "I like your product, but I wish it had this feature."

A mediocre salesperson will panic and ask himself, "What do I have to say to make this sale?" A good salesperson will instead ask, "What does this really mean? What pain does the customer wish my product could relieve?"

Put yourself in the customer's shoes. They're trying to envision exactly how your product will make them more successful on a day-to-day basis. When they ask about a missing feature, it means that in their mind, there's a gap between what your product can do and what they need it to do—some burning issue they don't think it can solve.

Ask the right questions

"By asking great questions, salespeople create great value in the eyes of their prospects." — Marc Wayshak, best-selling author and sales strategist

The feature request only gives you a superficial idea of what the customer wants your product to do. You need to dig beneath the surface by asking questions that uncover the real, pressing need behind this feature. That's the best way to refocus the conversation on your product's value.

No customer hears about a great product and thinks "Oh man, let me think of some random features I could tack onto this thing!" They think "Wow, sounds useful … but I don't see how it could solve X for me. What if it did Y?" Asking questions is the only way to learn what they're looking for.

You're an expert on your product and your industry. Act like one. Ask how that feature would enhance the customer's experience. Learn from your engineers, and consider questions like:

- Can you tell me exactly what problem that feature would solve for you?
- Who on your team would that help most?
- In the big picture, how would solving that problem help your company?
- Can any of our current workarounds do that for you?
- Is this a make or break issue? Why?

Asking these questions enables you to collaborate with the customer to uncover the issues your product can solve for them.

Not only that, but these questions establish trust. A sleazy salesperson would say anything to close a deal: "Oh, you know, that feature is actually coming out in a week, so why don't you buy now?"

You, on the other hand, made an effort to learn about the customer's business and showed genuine interest in their success.

If you were sick, would you trust a doctor who pitched a medication before he asked about your symptoms? Nope. Customers won't trust you if you do the same thing.

As with the pricing objection, adding on whatever feature they ask for sends the wrong message about your product. You think you're being helpful, but really the customer is thinking, "Wow, do they change the product every time someone asks them to? Will this thing even look the same in two months?"

The way to really help the customer is by exploring creative new ways to solve their biggest issues. Listen closely to what they tell you, but then see how their feedback fits into the bigger picture to avoid feature creep.

It's unavoidable that people will request features you don't offer. At Close.io, we hear feature requests all the time. People want emoji support in our WYSIWYG email editor. They want icons for different

kinds of tasks. They want automatic announcements for incoming and outgoing calls that calls are being recorded. And they've got good reasons for wanting these features.

But indiscriminately fulfilling their requests would lead to the monstrous kind of bloated sales software we always wanted to avoid. Product strategy means saying no.

Like Rob Hanna said about our app for salespeople:

> "[Close.io] intuitively leads you to get the fuck out of the way of yourself so you can make more goddam calls effortlessly and efficiently – which means closing more sales in less time."

Rob knows what he's talking about. He's been selling and managing salespeople since the 1970s.

Adding more features is easy. A lot of software vendors follow the "more features = better" philosophy and proudly display feature comparison charts on their homepage. But to create a product that really helps your users succeed, you need to think more deeply and uncover what the few things that truly matter are, and focus intensely on getting them right.

"I'm going to buy from the market leader"

"Your software really looks like the best solution, but we will go with Salesforce, simply because they're the standard in this field. We know their software can scale and grow with our company, it integrates with everything we need."

This is a common objection we get when selling our sales CRM, and I know that many SaaS startups have their own version of this.

"Your product is better, but we'll go with _____ (biggest name in your industry)."

There are a couple of common reasons why people choose the industry incumbent:

- Everybody uses it, thus, it must be good/secure/capable of delivering good service/reliable.
- They're a big company, so they'll be around forever.
- Once our company grows, we'll need an enterprise class solution.
- Everybody in my company knows BigCompany, so I won't get demoted for choosing them if there's ever a problem.

As a new player in your market, how do you deal with this objection?

There are two sides to this objection:

1. **The irrational:** People making decisions based on fear of making mistakes. You must manage the emotional and irrational side of the objection in a irrational way.
2. **The rational:** You tell them about the pros and cons of both choices, and you give them a new choice that they didn't think of before and that's *not an either/or decision.*

Here's an example of how we do this when selling Close.io.

1. State the benefit of the big company

Prospect: "Yes, Close.io is the better solution, but we'll go with Salesforce because it's safer as we grow in the long-term."

Steli: "I understand that. In the long-term, as your company grows to thousands of employees, you'll want a software that can operate reliably in a Fortune 500 environment, and integrate with all your other software vendors. In the long-term, Salesforce will speed you up and be able to adapt to your growing demands, right?"

Prospect: "Exactly."

2. State the disadvantage of the big company

Steli: "The flipside of that is, in the short-term, it will slow you down significantly, because it's just not a good fit for a company like yours at the current stage. It's clunky and complicated, and just not

designed for the small and agile environment of a fast-growing company like yours. And I think you realize that, because you said it yourself, Close.io is a better product for you right now, right?"

Prospect: "Yes, but we have to think long-term."

3. State the benefit of your product

Steli: "Exactly. Close.io would be better for you in the short-term. We'd speed you up right now. You're going to close more deals, make more sales, reward your team faster. Your sales reps will be happy to use a sales CRM that does the work for them, instead of having to waste their time on manual data entry, and all the other headaches that come with Salesforce.

And the fact that we don't have as many customers as Salesforce is actually good for you because you'll get better care and attention from our team than you could get from a huge company where you're just another number in their customer database. But you don't want to sacrifice your long-term growth for short term gains, right?"

Prospect: "Yes, that's the point."

4. Challenge their thinking

Steli: "Good, that's smart. What if this isn't an either/or choice, though? What if you can have the best of both worlds? Speed up

growth right now and move faster in the short-term, while also being able to scale big once you're hiring hundreds of new employees?"

Prospect: "Of course that would be good, but I don't see how."

5. Show them how to get the best of both worlds

Steli: "Neither did we, but one of our customers came up with a solution for this. And we've introduced this solution to several of our biggest customers, who are now operating this way. They chose Close.io because they want the speed, the ease of use, the accelerated growth now and as they grow and succeed big, they buy Salesforce too ... even before they need it. And then they use Salesforce as an invisible back-end reporting engine, while using Close.io as the front-end their salespeople interact with."

6. Preempt and manage objections

Steli: "Even though they're paying for both solutions now, the productivity gains for them by far outweigh the costs of operating this way."

Prospect: "I see. But doesn't it double the workload to run two systems in parallel?"

Steli: "It would, but not with our API. You basically pump all the data from Close.io into Salesforce automatically."

Prospect: "That makes a lot of sense. I didn't think of this before but it would be awesome to have the best of both worlds!"

Apply this to your sales process

See how this works? How could you apply the same approach to your own SaaS startup?

You're not arguing with them about the point they are making.

You're not promising them you'll soon be able to do everything the big incumbent can do.

Instead, you acknowledge that they have a valid point, and show them that you understand their concerns and objectives.

And then you tell them how other customers solved this problem, and how it applies to them. You're **creating value**, rather than just communicating value, which is what startup sales is really about. You're showing them a better way of doing business by utilizing your solution. Everybody wins.

"It's not a priority right now"

You've had a great sales conversation with a prospect, pitched your product, asked for the close—and your prospective buyer tells you: "This sounds all really good, but it's just not a priority for us right now."

How do you respond to that? What can you do to make a sale happen?

There are two ways of handling the "this just isn't a priority right now" objection. Which of the two you should choose depends on *why* the prospect tells you it's not a priority.

Reason #1: Your pitch doesn't push their buttons

Did you properly qualify your prospects? Do you really understand their needs, challenges and priorities?

If not, you need to ask more questions until you have a clear picture of what matters to them.

Then you can customize your sales pitch to match their priorities.

If you're going to use a generic, one-size fits all value proposition, you're going to miss out on a lot of opportunities. One of the reasons why salespeople can create more revenue is precisely because they can personalize the sales approach for each prospect.

The same product/service can be presented in different ways, to match different needs.

Example: Saving costs vs. increasing revenue

Let's say your solution helps businesses to reduce their accounting costs, and for a particular prospect you estimate it could save them $20,000. After qualifying your prospect, you learn all they care about is increasing revenue though.

What do you do? Just pitch them on saving $20k on accounting? Hope that they'll bite, because, well, a dollar saved is a dollar earned?

Nope.

You get creative and present your solution as a way to increase revenue. This will require further questioning. And you make it about identifying opportunities where $20k can be put to use to increase revenues.

Don't expect the prospect to connect the dots—it's your job as a salesperson to find ways to create value for them. Sales isn't just about peddling your goods - it's about consulting them to better achieve their goals.

Reason #2: They're avoiding the real issue

You have qualified them and they told you about their priorities. You adjusted your pitch to match these priorities. But when you ask for

the close, they tell you: "This sounds all good, but it's just not really a priority now."

What's going on? Maybe you misunderstood them, maybe they just bullshitted you about their priorities.

There's some kind of disconnect, but what do you do about it?

How do you get to the real issue?

You just ask them: "You know what? I'm struggling with this, and I need your help. How come it's not a priority, since you mentioned that increasing revenue in the next quarter or two is really the number one goal that you guys have in mind? And I think I've demonstrated that our product could help you accomplish that in a pretty powerful way. Where is the disconnect? What am I missing? Why isn't this a priority at this point?"

Don't be confrontational about it. Just be upfront and honest, and ask them to resolve this mismatch in a way that allows them to save face.

Oftentimes they just told you a little white lie because they were polite, or they were felt uncomfortable bringing up the real issue. At this point, many inexperienced salespeople make it about who is right and who is wrong.

Yes, you can start to argue with them and prove them wrong, point out their fallacies. But do you want to close the deal or do you want to be right?

Most of the time if you probe, the prospect will then tell you about the real objection, for example:

- "You know, it actually is a high priority right now, but the thing is, we've tried this many times with other startups, and one issue we had is the technology looks really cool, but it's usually not mature, and then it takes way longer to implement than we thought, so, I really don't want to get into these problems."
  → It's really about a lack of trust!
- "You know what, the disconnect is that I don't really think you're going to move the needle on the revenue side. Yes, this could bring like a 2% improvement, but we're looking for 30% growth! And we already plan to do X, Y and Z to increase our revenue. This is really a small distraction, its not going to make a big enough difference."→ It's about your value proposition.

NOW you have something you can work with. Here's a real objection you can manage to move the sale forward!

In sales, an inconvenient truth is always better than a convenient lie

Because it's something you can use to move the deal forward (or determine this just isn't a fit and stop wasting your time on a bad prospect).

If they still give you "not a priority BS", become more confrontational.

Challenge them

Ask them: "What would need to happen to make this a priority? If you're three quarters into the year and you're not on track to meet revenue goals, and you don't have more budget to spend? If you fail to grow revenues and your company needs to let people go in order to be able to afford more for marketing—will it then be a priority?"

You'll want to get a good sense for who you're dealing with before you take the gloves off, but sometimes that's what it takes.

The thing is, "not really a priority" should *never* be the reason why they resist your pitch if you've properly qualified them and identified them as a good fit.

"It's not really a priority" should never be the final argument in a sales conversation.

There's always a next step—it might ultimately lead to figuring out that they're actually not a good fit, but oftentimes you'll see that there's an undiscovered opportunity to create a win-win.

Sales objection overkill? How to handle prospects who keep requesting more and more

I recently listened to our sales guy talking with a prospect who had a seemingly endless list of objections. He wanted feature X, he didn't like the way our sales CRM lacked social features, he thought we should improve the mobile experience, and it just went on and on like this. A never-endling list of requests.

Our sales guy defended our app. Immediately jumped in after every objection. Lots of explanations and excuses.

The prospect kept on going. More objections. More demands.

It went back and forth like this for several rounds, and the call wasn't going anywhere. It was just tiring and exhausting, and no value was created for either party. The sales conversation slowly but surely deteriorated into one big waste of time.

How do you handle a situation like this? What can you do when you're inundated by objections, and for every answer you give, you just get another objection?

Let them talk themselves empty first

First, don't immediately jump at every objection they give you. Instead, let them talk and just listen. Don't create a situation where it becomes a competition between sales rep and prospect. Give them space to express their concerns.

Ask if there's anything else, and keep listening. Don't defend, don't respond to these objections directly at this stage.

Prioritize objections

Now you ask them, "Out of all these things that you mentioned, what's a deal-breaker, what's important, and what's nice-to-have?"

Let them prioritize their requests and objections into these three categories.

And then focus on the deal-breakers. Completely ignore the nice-to-haves. Just handle the objections that can kill the deal first.

Then ask them: "Did I do a good enough job? If we could address these particular things in this way, would you consider us the right solution?"

You'll either get a yes or a no. If you get a yes, it's easy—you can move on with the sale.

But what if they say no?

Then you ask them another question. You ask them, "What's missing? What else do you need?"

Prioritizing their objections, so you can focus on the things that matter, rather than forever dancing back and forth with them around an endless stream of objections.

Ignore the nice-to-haves

Don't talk about nice-to-haves if you haven't dealt with deal-breakers and the important stuff. Even if you can fulfill *all* their nice-to-haves, and you're the perfect fit for them in that category ... if you can't resolve the deal breakers, the nice-to-haves are worthless.

Keep the conversation on track

I can tell you from experience that many times prospects will bring up a dozen different things that they want to have, and when you ask them: "What's a deal breaker, what's really important to you?" they will bring up things they haven't mentioned at all.

Prospect: "Well, if you want to talk about the really important things, that's A, B and C." (And during the entire conversation, they've talked about everything from D to Z, but not a single word about A, B or C.)

If that happens to you, don't get frustrated with the customer—it's *your* responsibility to keep the sales conversation focused on what matters.

YOU have to ask the right questions so that they give you the answers that matter.

How to deal with hostile and aggressive prospects

Your prospect has completely lost it. He's shouting at you over the phone, making ridiculous demands—you can hear shattering glass as he throws stuff at the walls. Your ears are ringing and you have a massive headache.

Maybe he's just having a bad day. Maybe he thinks he has you in a corner, and can get whatever he wants. Maybe he's just like this all the time. After a while, you can't take it anymore, and just hang up the phone. He was completely out of control—a saint would've done the same.

Except that's exactly the wrong approach:

> Now, you may think it's OK to lose one client who's unhappy—but it's not. You see, when we have a good experience with a company, we tend to tell three other people about it. Positive word-of-mouth is great for business. However, someone who's displeased with a situation tells, on average, 11 people about it.
>
> — Tom Hopkins, author and sales speaker, "How to Handle an Angry Client"

Your approach to bullies is crippling your sales game. You can't control why the bully is the way he is, but you can control how you handle it. By giving up and making excuses, you don't only miss out on revenue—you miss out on an opportunity to separate yourself from the salespeople who give up at the first sign of trouble.

The 2 most common reactions to bullies

The reason so many prospects resort to bullying in sales is because a lot of the time, *it works*. Most people have no idea how to deal with bullies, and so do one of two things:

1. Roll over

Some people just can't handle aggression. It comes out of the blue, and catches them completely off guard—they just want the yelling to end. The can't endure it any longer so they wave a white flag and give in.

Eventually, they hear themselves discounting their product into nothing, with no idea how it happened: "Yeah, you're right ... I mean ... I really want to give you what you're asking for. Please don't give us a bad review. We'll find a way to do what you want." They end up with a deal that costs their company money.

As Mark Hunter, founder of the blog The Sales Hunter, puts it, "Discounting your price should not be part of your vocabulary or

thought process. If it is you will use it, and as soon as you use it once, you'll use it again and again."

A bully isn't going to magically back off and leave you alone just because you give in. You're basically telling them, "What you're doing with me is working. Keep doing it." You're giving the bully positive reinforcement for his behavior—encouraging him to keep making more and more outrageous demands.

2. Fight fire with fire

Others fight fire with fire, which just makes for a bigger mess: they're so convinced that they're right and the bully is wrong that they completely forget they're supposed to be making a sale.

A lot of good salespeople feel the temptation to act this way. They have Type A personalities, they're aggressive problem-solvers who don't like backing down. They naturally want to respond to aggression with aggression. But by yelling back at the bully, they sink to the level of the bully, sparking off a screaming match that goes nowhere and wastes everyone's time.

Don't play the bully's game—you'll lose control of the situation. Even if you "win" the argument, you're losing the larger battle: getting them to buy your product. And pissed off prospects can ruin your business' reputation. They'll hang up the phone and run around bad-mouthing your company, they'll spend the next day throwing a

temper tantrum and going on a Twitter rampage. They'll find another outlet for their anger, which can do serious damage.

Kill them with kindness (or friendly strength)

The most powerful way to overcome bullies in sales is with friendliness, while also standing your ground. This position is called friendly strength— it channels both your confidence in your product and your deep domain expertise in the field.

Think of how doctors deal with scared or angry patients: "I know your arm is still stiff after the surgery, and that it's painful. But if you don't do physical therapy, you might never be able to use your arm again."

A good doctor diagnoses her patient's illness, and prescribes a solution with both empathy and a clear set of directions for getting better. She has nothing to prove—she's spent years studying, and even more helping real people. She knows what her patients have to do, and everything in the way she communicates is geared toward setting her patients on the road to recovery.

Like a doctor, you also have deep domain expertise. As a founder, you're the world expert in your product, and you've helped many customers become more successful with it. Unlike a bully, who operates from a position of unfriendly strength, you ultimately come from a place of wanting to help your prospects—and you achieve that

by exercising your authority and telling them what you can realistically do for them.

Use friendly strength to get the conversation back on track.

Stay calm

Bully: "You're a scam artist, and these prices are outrageous. Do you think I'm stupid? I've seen greedy salespeople like you before …"

You: [silence]

Bully: "Your product is a piece of shit, it looks like it was designed for Windows 95 …"

You: [silence]

Don't engage with the bully—let him rant and rave. If you have a hard time not responding to his ridiculous accusations, try muting yourself on the phone. Bullies live to get a reaction from people—they want to see you squirm, or hear you yell back. Don't give them the satisfaction.

Silence can be just as intimidating as aggression—it makes people think they've made a mistake. Let the bully run himself out a little. The bully will take a step back and think, "Here I am screaming, and they don't even seem to care. What do they know that I don't?"

Here's how Robert Terson, founder of the blog Selling Fearlessly, uses silence to alter the dynamics with rude prospects:

> I'd shut up and give him a cold stare. The burden to explain his rudeness was his to struggle with. Nine out of ten times (remember, you can't win them all) he was embarrassed, apologized, and conjured up the best excuse he could think of. "Please continue," he'd say politely, his attentiveness and body language 180° opposite of what it had been prior to the confrontation.

By using friendly strength, and keeping calm, you turn the tables. You don't try to shout them into submission, because you don't need to shout to command respect.

Take control

Bully: "If you don't lower your price by x, I'll head to a competitor. I'll tell everyone I know about this awful experience, and how your business is a scam. You'll never see a new customer again."

You: "I appreciate that that's the way you feel. Let me clarify a few things. We're a legitimate business with thousands of customers. I don't know what went wrong in our communication—let's figure it out. More importantly, let's focus all our energy on the future. The best price I can give you is already on the table—if you'd like to be a customer, we'd love to have you. If you don't, I can recommend you

to other companies that might be able to help you. What's it going to be? It's up to you."

It seems counterintuitive, but by throwing the ball into the bully's court, you actually take control of the situation. You draw a line in the sand that shows him you aren't willing to back down—but you also provide a clear plan of action for moving forward. By exercising friendly strength, you cut to the chase.

The bully is *already* invested in the deal—otherwise he wouldn't be screaming about price. You are too, and you'd love to make the sale. You both want to make it happen—but as a salesperson, it's your job to make that happen as quickly and efficiently as possible.

Know ahead of time what you're willing to negotiate on and what you aren't. That way, if the negotiation's going badly, you won't cave in to the temptation to give in to the bully. Instead, you're already equipped with a list of viable options.

You leave the choices up to him, but *you're* the one in control, because you've cut to the point: "Stop wasting my time and tell me what you want to do."

Walk away

Bully: "I'll pay this price or it's no deal."

You: "I think a different company may be a better fit for you. Thank you for your time."

Sometimes, no matter how good of a salesperson you are, you just won't be able to get through to a bully—sometimes, it's just not worth it. You must know when to walk away.

Prospects who obsess over price, for example, often make the worst customers, and you might be better off without them. They'll make constant demands on your time and energy, and jump ship the moment a low-cost competitor comes to market—after all, they never realized the full value of your product in the first place.

Or as Paul Castain, VP of Rock Star Development for Castain Training Systems, explains with Paul's Theory Of Aholetivity: "An A-Hole in motion stays in motion meaning ... If they're an A-Hole now, precourtship ... They're probably going to be an A-Hole during the marriage!"

Knowing when to walk away from a bully can save you a huge amount of time and energy later.

Often, being willing to take the deal away from the prospect and walk out the door is the tipping point that will have the bully running back to you. Everyone wants what they can't have, and bullies are no different.

By walking away, you communicate your absolute confidence in the value of your product, and get the bully scratching his head: "Wait—they don't need me? Sounds like they've got their shit together. Maybe I want in on this."

Friendly strength isn't a trick

When handling a bully, it helps to understand what's underneath the aggression. The bully flew off the rails because he's trying to avoid what he *doesn't* want.

He doesn't want to be taken advantage of. He doesn't want to be manipulated into overpaying, just so you can inflate your wallet. Basically, he doesn't want to be lied to.

Exercise friendly strength to show the bully that while you won't give in to outrageous demands, you're not trying to game them either. It's not just some tactic that helps you close more deals—it's ultimately a frame of mind that comes from a place of genuinely wanting to help your prospects.

You're not just grabbing the check and taking off—you're building trust, support, a relationship. If you can show the bully you're in for the long haul, then you've won the battle and turned that bully into an ally.

4 simple words that unlock difficult sales conversations

Ever been in a sales conversation that's been going nowhere? A negotiation that's been stuck? There's a magic four-word-sentence that can resolve these situations and help you get a real dialogue going. Just say the words: "Help me out here."

We've previously covered how to deal with prospects who flat out refuse to answer your questions.

But sometimes prospects aren't outright resisting you ... they're just subtly evading a meaningful exchange of information. They do respond to your questions, but their answers have a very low information density and don't provide you with any valuable insights.

Here's what this might look like.

Conversation with a reluctant prospect

Founder: "What kind of sales do you do? Inbound, outbound, field sales?"

Prospect: "It's a mix."

Founder: "Ok, so what's your team like?"

Prospect: "We're a startup."

Founder: "How many people are working on your team?

Prospect: "A few."

Founder: "So what's the number?"

Prospect: "Well, it kinda depends on how you count it."

That's all wasted time. You need to ask qualifying questions, but if all you're getting are worthless answers, you need to stop and address that. Most of the time when you get answers like this, the person just doesn't trust you and doesn't want to give you any information. They're assuming you'll use whatever they give them against them.

Everybody has experienced calls where an obnoxious salesperson tried to debate you into buying his product. Not sharing any substantial information is an effective way for prospects to shield themselves from these attempts.

How to break through

Just say this: "Help me out here. I feel like I'm failing you here, and I'm absolutely not helpful to you. This conversation isn't going anywhere. What's the problem? Is it about me? Do you think I'm just some obnoxious sales guy and just want to get rid of me? Help me out here."

The magic is in these four words: **help me out here**. By asking for help, you're shifting the dynamic of the conversation. You put your guard down and they do the same in turn. They'll just open up because they typically don't experience a sales rep talking to them in this way.

Now you've paved the way for a real, meaningful conversation. A true exchange of information can take place now. You don't need to waste any more time and energy on an empty back and forth over the phone.

Negotiation gridlock?

Sometimes you're in a negotiation with a prospective customer, and it's just going on forever. Just say: "Help me out here. What is it going to take to make this happen? This negotiation has been going on for too long. Help me out here, what do we need to do?"

You can use help me out here in almost any kind of sales scenario to make good things happen. The more you ask for help, the more helpful people will be, it's really that simple.

THE ART OF CLOSING DEALS

How to close a deal: Ask early, ask often and embrace the no

Most founders ask for the close way too late.

They're all waiting for the perfect moment. That moment when they have a guaranteed "yes."

We do this because we want to avoid rejection.

Step up your closing game

A lot of people don't ask for the close because they're afraid of getting a no.

Instead, they keep providing their prospects with more information and reasons to buy, assuming that they're eventually going to close themselves.

Wrong.

You need to step up your closing game. The first no is your friend.

You talk to a customer, qualify them and make sure they should buy your product. Once you know that they're a good fit and you've given them your pitch—**ask for the close**.

Don't wait for objections. Just go for the close. Make it simple.

Say, "Hey, it seems like you guys are a great fit. I've showed you how we're going to solve your problems effectively. Are you ready to buy?"

At this point you know for a fact that they're going to say no. Be okay with it.

Then ask them, "What's the process we need to go through in order to get you ready to buy?"

Using the virtual close will let you find out what the road to the close looks like and what it will take to get there.

Stare rejection in the face

People that are afraid of rejection are the ones that get it often. Those are the people that are the most affected by it. The people that are trying to avoid it and work their way around rejection.

They take it personally. They can feel it. Taste it. You can see it all over their face.

You know who doesn't care? People who are winning. People who are closing deals.

Say, "Let's get you ready. What do we need to do?"

When you embrace rejection and take a no with smile, it communicates that you're successful.

Don't work your way around rejection. Stare it in the face. Learn to love it.

Make "no" a part of the process

People are so afraid of the no that they provide their prospects with more and more information. They try to arm them with as much bullshit as they can to save themselves from potentially getting rejected. What they do instead is overwhelm their prospects to the point where they can no longer make a decision.

Ask for the close early. Embrace the no. Accept it. Make it a part of the process.

It's your friend.

The virtual close

Many founders come to me for advice on big deals that they're trying to close.

A lot of times they describe how they met with a buyer from a huge corporation, demoed their products, answered all initial questions, and seem to be getting some good buying signals.

They just finished their initial meetings, which went well, and then send follow-up emails to schedule the next face-to-face—and now they enter uncharted territory.

They worry:

- Is this deal realistic?
- What do I need to do next to make this happen?
- Are they really interested or just being nice to us?
- How long will this take?
- When and how should I follow up? Should I wait until they get back to me or be proactive? If so how much?

At that point, I ask them if they took the chance to actually have the potential customer describe to them in detail what it will take for them to become a customer. Most of them say no. And that's the problem.

The solution to this is something I call the "virtual close."

It will help you accomplish these objectives:

- Figure out the roadmap of all the steps it's going to take to close the deal
- Discover major red flags and issues that will slow the deal down or prevent it from happening
- Guide your prospects or their internal champion—someone within a prospect's company that's on board but needs to convince others—through all the steps he or she will have to take to make the deal happen
- Make your prospect imagine and visualize a future where he or she has become a customer of your product or service
- Uncover whether there is no real buying intent

How? Simply ask this question

"Dear potential customer. Now that you know what we do and we've answered all your questions, it seems to me that we are a perfect fit. What are all the steps we have to take to help make this happen?

Then shut up and listen.

If the prospect says something to the effect of "Well, not sure ..." or "Well, we wouldn't buy before 2023 since we are locked in the

current contract ...", you're in trouble. This means there is no real buying intent. Move on with life.

In all other cases, you have to put on your investigative hat and actually keep following up with questions until you both reach a point where a deal can happen.

Here's what a typical conversation should look like

You: "Dear prospect. What will it take for you to buy our product?"

Prospect: "Well, I would have to show it to my boss and some colleagues and see what they think."

You: "Great. How do you typically get feedback? Scheduling a meeting? This week? Next week? Do you make a presentation or how does this typically work?"

Prospect: "Well, we have a weekly standup meeting and that's when I will present this."

You: "Awesome. What happens when your boss and teammates really like the idea and want to move forward?"

Prospect: "Then we would schedule a follow up call with you and all stakeholders to answer all questions."

You: "Makes sense. Let's assume we have a great call and I can answer all questions to the team's satisfaction and we're all happy to move forward. What happens next?"

Prospect: "Well, then it would have to go through legal."

This is the point where most people would stop asking questions and feel happy about what they have learned. That's a mistake. Keep asking questions until you've arrived at the virtual close. Like this:

You: "Of course. How does this process typically work for you? Have you purchased something similar to our product in the past six months and can you describe to me what we'll have to do to make the process as smooth as possible?"

Prospect: "Yes, we'd have to run through a few higher-ups, then the purchasing department and ethics committee."

You: "Oh, interesting. Could you describe this process a little more?"

Prospect: "Well, purchasing usually takes a couple weeks to review, and if it looks good, then
they move it on to ethics, who has the final sign off."

You: "Great. But THEN we're in business, right?!?"

Prospect: "YES!"

Now you know what it will take to make a deal happen

You have a roadmap to:

- Forecast accordingly
- Start preparing all steps and run some of them in parallel to save time
- Decide if you really want to pursue this deal

On top of that, you've made them create a world where they are customers and have already made a small mental commitment to it.

After this conversation, you'll have all the information you need, the customer has thought through the deal—and you have everything you need to make good decisions and make every deal happen.

Create urgency to close deals now

You're trying to clear out your pipeline and turn those opportunities into revenue. Here are 5 things you can do to push prospects through to the finish line!

1. Save your prospects time

The B2B sales process can take months. And for many companies, it's only getting longer—53% of B2B buyers reported that the length of their purchase cycle has *increased*. You can either watch prospects delay making a decision or help them finish one more task before the year ends.

There was a reason they wanted to buy: They believed your product could provide value to their business. Tell them if they purchase now, you can help them import their data, invite users, or create a workflow now. Otherwise, they'll waste next month on purchasing or onboarding.

2. Make them an offer they can't refuse

Run a special end of year promotion, or give the prospect a special deal. There are four kinds of incentives SaaS businesses can offer:

1. **Discount:** "If you buy before the end of the year, you'll get a 10% discount, so you'll save [x] dollars next year per seat that you buy now."

2. **Special features or higher tier plans:** "If you buy now, you're going to get the business version of our product for the basic price plan." It's basically also a discount—the difference is that you increase the value rather than lower the price.

3. **Buy 1, get 2:** "If you buy by the end of the year, you'll get a free seat for every seat that you purchase. So if you buy three seats, you'll actually get six seats." Buy 1, get 1 free works for SaaS businesses too :)

4. **Special services:** "If you buy this week, you're going to get our Advanced Customer Acquisition training package for free." Think about special support packages, consulting packages, training, onboarding … whatever it is. Make any kind of special service to help them succeed with your SaaS product free.

However, don't use discounts as a crutch all the time. According to research by Price Intelligently, while SaaS discounts can help you reach your sales goals, there are drawbacks. Customers who receive aggressive discounts are more price sensitive, churn at a higher rate, and have a lower lifetime value.

The best deals have a limited time frame and target prospects who are on the fence.

3. Save them from upcoming price increases

As your product grows and matures, and you offer more value, you're probably going to increase its price. Let existing customers and prospects know in advance. It's a great incentive for them to make a quick buying decision so that they can lock in at the current (lower) pricing.

When we increased the prices for our sales CRM, we grandfathered existing customers and current trial accounts. We also gave them the option to add new user seats at the old prices if they did it within the 14-day period before the price increase. However, after 14 days, they would have to pay the new (higher) prices.

This led to a huge bump in sold seats for Close.io during the 14-day period and our average customer lifetime value increased by over 10%. Customers saved money and we closed more deals. That's a win-win.

4. Give them exclusive limited access

If your product is new, or you release a major new plan, you can invite prospects to a limited alpha or beta.

For instance, before we started Close.io, we ran ElasticSales, an on-demand sales team for startups. We gave ourselves one month to find a customer. Yet, by telling prospects we were running a limited

beta with only two spots, we had seven companies that wanted to pay us money in only 2 weeks.

Tell your prospect:

- "This looks like a really great fit, but I want you to know that we are going to run a limited alpha—which means that only 10 companies will get access to our product. We currently have around 40 companies interested in participating. We're now trying to identify which ones will be the best candidates for this alpha so that we'll be able to support and turn them into massive success stories."
- "You'll have to make a decision within _____ (the next x days/weeks) because we'll launch the alpha on _____ (state a date)."
- "It's first-come, first-served. So whenever one company that we believe to be a great fit decides to go ahead, they get the next limited spot."
- "We only have four more spots left, let's make sure that we don't lose this opportunity. So let me give you all the information and support you need to be able to make a decision as quickly as possible."

By limiting access to your product, you create scarcity, which creates urgency to make a decision and enhances the perceived value of your offer.

5. When nothing else works—ask for a personal favor

You'd be surprised how many times salespeople successfully ask the prospect to buy now as a personal favor. "You'd make my year if you just pull the trigger now, even if payment starts in January. Do me a favor and help me make this the greatest year of my career and buy now!"

Asking a prospect for help shifts the conversation's dynamics. They aren't used to salespeople opening up to them this way. By putting your guard down, they'll put theirs down too.

With all this pushing to convert your pipeline, never forget that you only want to close successful customers.

OPTIMIZE YOUR SALES FUNNEL

The 3 cold calling and emailing metrics you need to track

Tracking sales data is a lot like dieting.

You know you should do it. You know it's good for you. You might even know how to do it. But do you?

Probably not.

You'd rather be calling, emailing, or visiting customers—literally anything other than tracking numbers. Besides, most salespeople don't track their sales data.

But most salespeople don't produce extraordinary results.

Here's why you need to track your data.

Your bias is killing your business

Human beings are biased, and our bias leads us to generalize, delete, and distort information. Because of this, we rarely see the "truth" in any situation.

We get attached to our ideas and let our emotions influence our decisions (and that can have serious consequences).

We need data because it has no bias, emotion, or motive. It simply *is*.

Data is the great truth teller.

Why don't we track our data?

Most salespeople don't track their data because they don't know where to start, and they don't know the difference staying on top of data could make to their career.

Tracking your sales data does not have to be complicated.

I'm going to show you a three-metric system that will transform your sales performance.

But before we get there, let's get clear on where you are in the sales process.

Are you in sales exploration or sales execution?

You're in sales exploration if …

- You can't tell me what your revenue numbers will look like three months from now.
- Your sales model has to change if you add more people or spend more money.

To track your data in a meaningful way, **you need a sales model that is predictable and scalable**. This means having an ideal

customer profile, consistently generating leads, and effectively engaging with leads in order to close deals.

You're in sales execution if …

You have a sales model that is predictable and scalable.

You're recruiting, training, hiring, and, most importantly, selling. This is where you find the highest quality data. Now you're ready for the three metrics I mentioned earlier.

Crush your sales with these 3 metrics

1. Activity

How many cold calls did you make? How many cold emails did you send? How many storefronts did you visit? Knowing your activity will help you track how your time is being invested and provide a foundation for the following two metrics.

2. Quality

How many decision makers did you reach? Of those, how many were qualified for your product? Use this to determine whether you're pursuing the right prospects and to test the quality of your lead list.

3. Conversion

How many of those qualified decision makers moved on to the next step (demos, trials, or purchases)? The conversion metric is great for pinpointing the strengths and weaknesses of your pitch and close.

Make it a habit

The key to effective data tracking is consistency. If you don't make it a daily habit, your data is meaningless.

It's better to track one of those metrics for a week than all three for a day.

How to pinpoint the weak spot in your sales process

Most people think of sales as the act of closing deals.

When performance is suffering, the first and only place they look is the pitch.

If you aren't making sales, you're obviously either a crappy salesperson or your presentation sucks. Right?

Maybe. Maybe not. There's no way to know for sure without looking at the data.

Let's look at a few scenarios and some data driven solutions.

Low reach rates

You're calling 100 prospects, reaching two, qualifying two, and closing one.

Activity: 100 cold calls

Quality: Reached two (2%), qualified two (100%)

Conversion: Closed one (50%)

Although you have a qualification rate of 100% and a conversion rate of 50%, you're only reaching 2% of the customers you're calling. You don't need to improve your pitch, you need to speak to prospects! Figuring out how to do that is your number one priority.

Potential solutions:

1. Call different numbers
2. Visit storefronts in person
3. Call at different times

Low qualification rates

You're calling 100 prospects, reaching 15, qualifying two, and closing one.

Activity: 100 cold calls

Quality: Reached 15 (15%), qualified two (13%)

Conversion: Closed one (50%)

Your reach rate is better and your close rate is still acceptable. However, the problem is that none of your leads are qualified. Either your lead list is outdated or you are going after the wrong customers.

Potential solutions:

1. Revise your customer profile
2. Get a new list
3. Explore inbound opportunities

Low conversion rates

You're calling 100 prospects, reaching 15, qualifying 10, and closing one.

Activity: 100 cold calls

Quality: Reached 15 (15%), qualified 10 (66%)

Conversion: Closed one (10%)

Now you've got great reach and qualification rates, but your conversion rate is bad. If you can only close one qualified prospect then your pitch needs some serious work.

Potential solutions:

1. Use a script
2. Delegate sales responsibilities
3. Find a new career

How to measure your results

If your sales aren't bringing the results you want, optimize from the top down. Ask yourself:

- Is my sales activity high enough? *If it is,*
- Is my lead quality high enough? *If it is,*
- Is my conversion rate high enough?

Use the framework below to benchmark your performance against successful campaigns.

Cold calling benchmarks

Reach rate: 15% of total called

If your reach rate is below 15%, change your cold call approach.

Qualification rate: 30% of total reached

If your qualification rate is below 30%, you need a new lead list.

Conversion rate: 50% of total qualified

If your conversion rate is below 50%, you need to work on your pitch.

Cold emailing benchmarks

Open rate: 30% of total sent

If your open rate is below 30%, then you either have inactive email addresses or weak subject lines. Remember, five times as many people read the headline as the body copy.

Response rate: 30% of total opened

If your response rate is below 30%, you don't have compelling calls to action. Get your readers to respond.

Conversion rate: 50% of total responses

If your conversion rate is below 50%, there's a problem with your follow-up pitch.

What sample size would give you enough data to make a decision?

This is the messy reality of startups: you will not have enough time to gather data for a perfect decision. You need to optimize for speed, not perfection.

I'd rather be wrong three times in a row really fast than be right really slowly.

Here are some basic guidelines:

- **Cold calling:** 100–200 calls/day for three weeks
- **Cold emailing:** 25–50 emails/day for two weeks

It won't give you perfect data, but you don't have the luxury of waiting around. Billion dollar companies can afford to have data scientists on staff to make sure that they only deal with statistically significant sample sizes. But even they get it wrong sometimes.

For a startup, aspiring to have 100% accurate data is a waste of scarce resources that could be put to better use.

The 2-week challenge

Tracking your sales data doesn't have to be complicated. In fact, it's almost effortless if you're a Close.io user. We've automated the majority of the process; all you have to do is tell our software what you want to track.

THE PSYCHOLOGY OF SALES SUCCESS

Turn your fear of cold calling into fearlessness

Entrepreneurs often struggle when they start doing cold calls. They hate calling others to drum up business and they're not good at it either. Their approach is too timid and they give up too soon when they encounter resistance. They don't manage objections well. And they don't bring home the bacon at the end of the day.

Fear of failure

One of the guys on our team had this problem which was strange, given he was an audacious, bold and outgoing person. But tell him to sell on the phone, and he turned into a frightened little chicken.

The cause was obvious: *fear of failure*. He was scared of rejection. We both knew it. He also rationally understood that this fear did not serve a positive purpose, yet, he was stuck in it.

Turning fears into reality

How could we get him unstuck? How could we shake him up and change his state?

I decided to challenge him with a new task.

"Fail with every call!" For the rest of the day, he should call people and make them hang up on him. His mission was to fail miserably.

To make it more fun, I told him to fail in a different way with each call. "Start with speaking painfully slow and unenthusiastic", I told him.

Our little coaching conversation had turned into the center of attention in the office. Everyone on our team was looking at him when he made the first call. His discomfort was obvious. But he played along. Each ... word ... spoken ... sloooowwwwlyyy ... with ... excruciatingly ... looong ... silent ... pauses ... in between. *Painful*.

Everyone in the office had to tap into the core of our brains' self-control center not to burst out laughing. But there was no holding back once the other person hung up on him. The whole office was going crazy, including him.

The team came up with a new challenge for the second call: stuttering. "Hell hell hell hello, thi thi this is is is ..."

After ten of these calls, the atmosphere in the whole room had totally changed.

Changing your state

I looked him in the eyes and said, *"Now go and fucking get'em. Close deals. Take everything you got and make it happen! And have fun!"*

Suddenly he was a different person. Total transformation of energy: fearless and unstoppable. A relentless machine.

What caused this transformation?

Not a new insight. He already knew that it was just fear holding him back. But he had now transferred that insight from a logical, rational level into an instinctive insight. He had emotionally internalized what he knew mentally by making failure real. And that led to the breakthrough in his behavior.

Use this technique if you or a colleague ever feel anxious about cold calling

1. Address the issue and verbalize it.
2. Instead of trying to avoid failure, aim for failure.
3. Be creative about different ways to successfully achieve failure.
4. Have fun and be silly. It will unlock the secret vault of sales power deep inside of you.
5. Once you have experienced what failure feels like, realize there is nothing to be afraid of.

Now crush it and see how you perform once you aim for success.

Mentally prepare yourself before every call

Most people think deals are won or lost when you've got the prospect on the phone. They're wrong. You win or lose the deal before you even pick up the phone and dial; it's your state of mind that determines the outcome of the call more than anything else.

I have three questions that I ask myself before every crucial sales call: *Why? What? How?*

I've taught the same questions to many other founders and sales reps, and you can literally hear the difference. Salespeople who haven't answered these questions aimlessly float with the tide. Don't be one of them; swim for a goal!

"The game looks like it takes place between the lines on the court, but really it takes place between your ears." — Novak Djokovic

Here are three questions to ask yourself that will set you up for success between your ears.

1. Why am I calling?

On the most superficial level, you can answer this question by saying "I'm calling because that number, that prospect is in my sales pipeline."

But why do you even go through your sales pipeline?

"Because I want to close that deal."

Why?

"Because I want to accomplish my goal."

Why?

"Because I want to be successful."

Why?

"Because I want to accomplish my dreams."

Why?

"Because I want to make my parents, my friends and myself proud."

Keep asking why until you connect this sales call to whatever it is that drives you in life, to your higher purpose … you will feel very different about the next call than when it's "just another sales call" or "just another commission."

Everybody's answers are different to these questions. What matters is that you know your answers, that you know your WHY.

2. What do I want to accomplish?

Be specific and clear about what you want to accomplish. Don't just say, "I want to close a deal." That's too generic.

What's the deal you want to close? When do you want to close it? What's the action you want them to take?

Create a scenario in your mind that you can clearly see, and then step into it, like a virtual reality game.

3. How am I going to accomplish this?

What's your game plan? How exactly do you want to get to the finish line? Here's one example of how you might answer this question:

"I'm going to do this by getting them engaged and emotionally invested in the conversation. I'll make them understand how our product can help them achieve the outcomes they want and the value this would create for themselves and their company. I'm going to elegantly manage all their objections and make this the begin of a long-lasting business relationship."

Go into whatever level of specificity you think is adequate for yourself. If you've internalized all of these steps already, just mentioning the names is enough—if they're not yet fully integrated into your muscle memory, then being more detailed about it can be helpful.

Sales success starts in your mind

You have to plant the seeds of success within yourself before you can reap its juicy fruits on the outside. Before you get on a sales call,

mentally set yourself up for the outcome you want to achieve. Prime your mind to go in your desired direction, so you will go into the sales call with a higher level of clarity, energy, and purpose.

How to captivate your prospect's attention

You've got a prospect on a sales call. How do you captivate and keep his attention? It's not enough that he hears you speak—you want him to really listen.

Some people possess the charisma and showmanship that naturally mesmerizes their listeners. If you don't, you'll need to master the mechanics of getting attention. Use this simple 3-step process to get your message across:

- Highlight the highlights.
- Mark what's memorable.
- Ask for attention.

Once you start paying attention to how much attention prospects pay you, it's almost shocking to discover how much of the time they're absent-minded!

It's not about what you say—it's about what they hear!

Most salespeople just look for an opportunity to kidnap a prospect's time for a couple of minutes, and then throw up their sales pitch all over them.

But selling isn't about getting the words out of your mouth. It's about the thoughts you create in your prospect's mind.

Embrace the fact that they're not paying attention

Prospects can't give you 100% attention and that's fine. We've been even trained out of it even more with today's technology.

We're always connected, always distracted, never paying full attention to anything. Why should they do that with you or change their lives with you? They won't. You don't need their full attention. You won't get 100% attention every time. All you need is attention when it matters.

What are the three most important points of your pitch?

Before you go into a pitch, think about the three most important things you want your prospect to realize and remember about your offer. Think about what those core three things are.

This is the single most important takeaway from this whole article. If you could only do one thing, I'd want you to do this from now on: **whenever you go into a pitch, take a couple of moments to prepare and be very clear about the three main points you want to make.** These will be the highlights of your sales pitch. What are the three things that will make the biggest impact on them?

Use the power of 3

There's always that tendency to cram in more points. We're always tempted to add another benefit, hoping THAT will win the prospect over. But you should strictly limit yourself to no more than three main points in your pitch.

Even if it's a complex technical sale where details are critical, keep your pitch focused on three points. I recently told the story of how focusing on three big ideas helped us pass the Y Combinator interview with a previous startup.

Really limit yourself to no more than three main points. A recent study from UCLA showed that sales pitches with three positive claims are the most persuasive:

> In settings where consumers know that the message source has a persuasion motive, the optimal number of positive claims is three. More claims are better until the fourth claim, at which time consumers' persuasion knowledge causes them to see all the claims with skepticism.
>
> — Kurt A. Carlson and Suzanne B. Shu, "When Three Charms But Four Alarms: Identifying the Optimal Number of Claims in Persuasion Settings"

Highlight the highlights. Mark what's memorable. Ask for attention.

This is not rocket science. In fact, it's so simple, that many salespeople disregard it as trivial. Yet, it can make a huge difference in the way prospects perceive your pitch. Even if you don't change a single thing about your whole sales approach, you'll see a drastic difference in the effectiveness of your pitch just by making sure you do these simple things.

Say the person's name

During your pitch, just about when you're ready to share one of your highlights, say the person's name. This focuses their attention on you.

Wait for a few seconds

Give them those few moments they need to really mentally arrive from wherever their mind had just wandered.

Tell them how important this is

Just say: "Hey, this is crucial. The next thing is going to be crucial. If there's only one thing you take away from this, it's this."

Quiet down to be heard louder

Rather than shouting louder, you actually get more attention from a prospect if you suddenly quieten down. When the volume goes down, they turn up their attention to capture the message. Use that dynamic change to mark what's memorable.

You highlight the highlights. You mark what's memorable. And you ask for attention.

And then you tell them what it is.

Ensure your 3 most important points stick

At the end of your sales conversation, you will have talked about many different things. How can you make sure that your three most important points still stick in your prospects mind?

Just ask them one of these questions:

- What were the highlights of this conversation for you?
- I'm wondering, what was the most interesting thing that you've learned in this conversation?
- In your opinion, what was the most impactful part of today's pitch? What are the things that you're taking away?
- If somebody asks you tomorrow to describe what we discussed today, how would you summarize our conversation?

The point of asking this question is so that you close the feedback loop. If they don't talk about your highlights, if they missed something crucial in their answer, then that's an opportunity to highlight the highlights again.

You: "You're absolutely right. The two or three things that you just said are incredibly important. One more thing that I want you to take away is _____."

Be memorable

You can make your sales pitch more powerful by highlighting the highlights, marking what's memorable and asking for attention.

Before going into a sales conversation, decide what the two or three most important points are you want to make. When you bring them up, use their name, pause for a second, tell them this is the most important thing you'll tell them today, quieten down to be heard louder, and then make your point.

At the end of your sales pitch, ask them what their main takeaways were, and reinforce your message if something crucial is missing.

How to recover from a bad sales call

If you've ever cold called before, this scenario is probably familiar to you.

You have a bad sales call; the person on the other end of the line is rude and uses you as an emotional punching bag. You hang up—and immediately vent your frustration: "Wow, I can't believe this guy! Such an asshole!"

A co-worker turns around and inquires: "What happened?" (The person asking that question is most often the person who is not performing well that day either. When you're on a roll, you're focused in order to stay in the game.)

Now you've basically got an invitation to keep venting, and that's exactly what you'll do: "You know what this guy said? He said bla bla bla! Can you believe this?! So I told him bla bla bla, and then he bla bla bla! Total asshole!"

Co-worker: "Yeah man, I had a call like this last week, screw these assholes, bla bla bla."

Now, more people join the conversation, and soon you've transformed a bunch of champs into a congregation of complainers. The whole room is filled with negative energy.

And for what?

Just because your feelings were hurt when a sales call went bad. Congratulations, you've successfully brought down your entire team.

What should you do instead right after a really bad call?

What's a better way to recover from shitty sales calls and bounce back?

First, step away from the desk. Get up from your chair, and get out of the room.

- Take a five-minute break.
- Get a coffee.
- Go for a walk around the building. Go outside, take some fresh air.

Get some distance from what just happened, so you can have perspective.

When you return to your desk, do something that's fun. Just take a minute or two and listen to your favorite song, or read some motivational quotes, do something that lifts up your spirits and puts you into a positive emotional state.

And then get back into the ring. Pick up the phone and dial another number. Close the next deal. Focus on the work in front of you.

Don't put a lid on your emotions

There is a time and place to talk about bad feelings. Don't keep it all inside. You absolutely should have an outlet for the stress bad sales calls causes.

But do it in the right setting and at the right time. Have a framework for expressing emotions that lead to a productive outcome, rather than a destructive one.

It's best to have a designated time and place, rather than just impulsively letting it out:

- When you're at lunch

- At team meetings

- Have somebody in the sales team whom you regularly share your challenges and successes with—sometimes colleague can be the best coaches

By creating a structure for this, you avoid carrying the negativity over into other sales calls (or even worse, your personal life).

Ask yourself these questions to turn bad sales calls into growth opportunities

These questions direct your thoughts and feelings into a positive and productive direction:

- How can I deal with people like this better?

- What could I have said better?

- How could I have managed the situation differently?

- How could I have responded to the external *and* internal challenges better?

- How can I deal with feeling bad?

- How can I develop more emotional stability, and have more state control?

Come up with your own questions too. This isn't a complete list, it's just a starting point.

How real sales pros think of asshole customers

If selling was easy, everyone would be doing it.

If you can turn an asshole into a friend, if you can turn no into a yes, if you can turn rejection into affection—that's when you're great at sales!

Next time when you have a shitty sales call … don't do the easy thing and use it as a reason to bring the entire team down. Instead, do the hard thing and turn it into an opportunity to become a better (sales)person.

THE 5 MOST COMMON SALES MISTAKES

Talking like a telemarketer

If you're doing cold calls the way most sales reps do it, you're already losing out with the first words coming out of your mouth.

It's a really bad opening move that determines the outcome of the battle from the get-go.

Want to know what I'm talking about?

Take a moment to think back to the last couple of cold calls you received, where someone whom you didn't know and never heard of called you in the middle of the day and tried to sell you something.

Go ahead, close your eyes and play back that mental movie. How did those cold calls start?

Here's a typical scenario that probably matches your experience: You pick up a call from a number you don't recognize, wondering, "Who is this?"

What you hear from the other end of the line is a monotonous telesales rep delivering a high-speed staccato speech filled with big words no human being would ever use in a real conversation.

Whatever the actual words are, the message you get as a recipient of such a call is: *THIS IS A SALES PITCH! I'M DIALING HUNDREDS OF*

NUMBERS A DAY AND SAY THE EXACT SAME THINGS TO EVERYBODY, AND IF YOU DON'T END THIS CONVERSATION I WILL JUST KEEP ON BLABBERING UNTIL YOU BUY!

If you confuse prospects, you lose prospects

As a sales rep who's done tens of thousands of cold calls, you know exactly what you're saying. You've said it so many times, I could wake you up in the middle of the night by throwing a bucket of ice water at you, and you'd be able to immediately recite your lines.

You know your script inside out.

But your prospect doesn't. Your prospect doesn't have the context you have.

You need to speak clearly and allow people to process your message. Don't cover ten different points if your prospect still hasn't caught up to the first point you've made.

What's the first question you need to answer on a cold call?

You need to let them know who you are! And you don't do that by saying:

"Hithisisjohnfromdynamicgrowthaccelerationandinnovationincorporat edweprovidecompanieswithcuttingedgecustomeracquisitionsystemsw hichdrivetargetedrevenueincreasesyaddayaddayadda".

It's almost impossible to decipher this when it's written that way, and you can't understand it when the words attack you as if you're under heavy machinegun fire.

So instead, clearly communicate who you are. Give your words some weight and allow them to sink in.

So you say: "Hi, this is Steli." [Pause a second]

Prospect thinks: "Steli, Steli … do I know this guy?"

"I'm calling from Close.io" [Pause a second]

Prospect thinks: "Close.io? Hmm … should I know them?"

"What we do in a sentence is we help sales teams close more deals. Is this a bad time to for a quick chat?"

Now if they say "No, it's not a bad time", you've got their permission to pitch! They know who you are. They know what you do. They know your company. And now you've got their explicit permission to pitch.

Get yourself in the right state

When you're cold calling, the tone of your voice is of crucial importance. Especially in B2B calls, people often try to be "a professional salesperson"—even though nobody, neither you, nor me, nor anyone else, wants to speak to that kind of person.

Don't optimize for "professionalism", optimize for high energy. Optimize for being the kind of person people want to talk to.

A high energy yet calm demeanor works fine. A high energy and infectious enthusiasm work fine too.

What doesn't work is low energy.

If you don't convey the value of what you're offering on an emotional level, then you're conveying that it has no value. Even if you say the right words, if you deliver them ineffectively, they will fail to have an impact.

Part of being a great salesperson is being a great actor. Great actors don't *fake* emotions. They *trigger* emotions, allowing them to access and utilize them at will.

It's not about faking enthusiasm, but about putting yourself in a high energy state where your genuine enthusiasm shines through.

How to speak so people listen

You don't need to have a voice like Morgan Freeman that'll naturally make people want to listen. Just use your own voice more effectively.

Slow down, enunciate, speak loudly and give your words space and weight.

Listen to yourself talk, both while you're on the phone as well as listening back to your call recordings.

At first, you might be shocked at how often you fall back into that habit of sputtering out words, but very quickly you'll become more conscious of the way you speak and will be able to communicate with more clarity and impact.

Talking too much

One of the most powerful lessons I've ever learned in sales was actually one of the very first lessons I learned in the trade when I was just 18 years old.

I was a young kid that thought that selling was all about **talking**.

I was taken under the wing of one of the most successful sales directors in my area. One day, he decided to do a little sales training session with me.

The setup was simple. I was to role-play a hypercritical customer. He would be the salesman. My task was to throw as many objections his way as possible.

Senior Sales Director: "So Mr. Customer, what are your biggest concerns when it comes to the offering I just proposed?"

Me: "Well, the truth is I don't know if I can trust you. You experts all sound great and your pitches make total sense. But then another 'expert' will come along and sell me on something totally different and he will make sense to me as well. I don't know enough about this area to make a good judgment call and have been burned before."

Senior Sales Director: "Hmm ... I see ... that makes sense. What would you propose would be a solution to this dilemma?"

Me: "Ummm ..."

I remember this moment very, very well. I remember my inner dialogue going NUTS over his question. I wanted to be smart and thought, "Shit ... what's a good solution to this problem ... better say something smart!"

Me: "Well ... I could have all of you sales guys show up at the same time and argue it out in front of me and whoever makes the most sense wins my business!"

Senior Sales Director: "That's a good idea! Any others?"

Now I was even more stressed out thinking, "Holy shit, another idea?!? I don't know any other good solution to this. Umm. Better say something fast ..."

Me: "Well I could also ask around in my network to see if I know anyone who knows more about this and that I trust and that could advise me on the subject."

Senior Sales Director: "Another good one! Any more options you can think of?"

At this point, I was totally out of ideas ... I spent a few minutes thinking as hard as I could and came up with some stupid idea that I can't even remember anymore. I just said something to say something.

Senior Sales Director: "I see. You think there are any more ideas?"

Me: "No, I don't think so."

Senior Sales Director: "Well, let's recap then. We have option #1 which is to get all the salespeople in a meeting and have them present their ideas together to you. Option #2 is to tap into your network and see if you can find an advisor. Option # 3 is [insert stupid idea]. Which of these options do you like best?"

Me: "I think #1."

Senior Sales Director: "Great. Let's do that then!"

At that moment, he came out of the role-play, leaned forward, looked me dead in the eye and said:

Senior Sales Director: "Now who had to do all the work?"

Me: "Umm ... me?"

Senior Sales Director: "Exactly! And that's how you always want it to be. Empower the customer to do all the work, come up with all the solutions and guide him along the way. Sales is easy."

I'll never forget what he said next:

"He who asks all the questions is controlling the direction of the conversation. Sales is all about asking questions and actively listening, and very little about talking."

That was probably the most profound advice I have ever gotten regarding sales and it triggered a major mind shift in me on what good communication is really all about.

Trying to make friends

Pretty much every sales expert will tell you how important it is to build rapport with your prospects. Along with that, they'll offer you various techniques and strategies to teach you how to do it.

I say, screw that.

You don't need rapport. You need to close deals. And sometimes, to close deals, you need to break rapport and just be real.

Here's an example of this.

Kevin, who used to lead our sales team, was on a call with a prospect. A few minutes into the call, we could hear the guy shouting through Kevin's headset. The prospect was upset about some non-issue and was probably just having a bad day.

Most sales reps become apologetic and try to appease a prospect in such a situation.

Not Kevin.

Kevin started shouting back. He wasn't angry, emotionally involved, hurt, or upset. He just stood his ground.

Everyone in the office was now listening to this shouting match between Kevin and the prospect. After the call was over, Kevin

started grinning: "I don't know if they are going to become a customer, but I think the chances are pretty good."

Guess what happened next?

We all went on with our work, but two hours later, our HipChat integration notified us that the prospect Kevin had yelled at just put in their credit card information and became a paying customer.

Don't be scared to rattle the cage

Too many founders optimize for likability. They're too timid to break out of their fake politeness. Their modus operandi is automatic amiability.

They carry through the conversation with a forced smile on their face, always staying in that safe zone where they don't offend anyone.

A well-behaved & worthless cold call

Let's call this founder Affable Alfred. He cold calls a prospect and introduces himself and his offer. The prospect clearly isn't interested and is just looking for a convenient way out of the conversation.

Prospect: "Just send me some information so that I can review this."

Affable Alfred: "Of course, I'll send you our brochure! Is there anything else I can do for you?"

Prospect: "No, thanks. I'll let you know if we're interested."

(The founder clings on to that distant glimmer of hope even though he knows that realistically, the chances that this prospect will ever turn into a customer are about as good as the chances of winning the lottery. But he is just glad to not be rejected even though a non-decision is the worst result you can create.)

Nothing will come of this. It's just cluttering up Alfred's pipeline.

The no-BS approach

Same scenario, but this time it's our Kevin who's on the call.

Prospect: "Just send me some information so that I can review this."

Kevin: "Sorry, but I won't do this. I'm not going to just send you some information."

Prospect: "What?! What do you mean?! Then why are you wasting my time even calling me if you don't want to give me any information?!"

Is the prospect upset? Yeah! But at least he's now emotionally engaged in the conversation. Now you have their attention, and you've created a memorable moment. Is it ideal? No, of course not—it's still negative. But it's a lot better than zero engagement and attention.

Kevin: "I get that you find this upsetting, but you know what I find upsetting? The idea of wasting both your and my time by sending you something you'll never even look at. The only reason why I called you is because I want to figure out if we can make this work, and we won't figure that out in an email or a generic brochure. Let's not waste each other's time. Let's just take two minutes—we've already taken two minutes—to figure out the answers to two simple questions I have, and then we'll both know if this is a waste of time or if we can help you manage your sales pipeline better."

Bottom line: Don't be liked, be respected

Granted, this may or may not work, but the chances of it working are much better than those that you'll have after fulfilling a feigned request for more information.

You've moved the conversation from a hollow spiel to an authentic interaction. It's like opening the door: now you're able to make the next step.

Stop politely wasting your own and other people's time. Create results even if that requires you to step outside your comfort zone and piss people off. Sometimes that friction is just what it takes to light a fire.

Why most sales voicemail messages suck

Most sales voicemail messages lack purpose. They usually express no clear intention for the prospect.

Too many sales reps speak too fast and ramble, filling the message with lots of "um's" and "ah's". Then, potential clients have to listen to the voicemail three to four times, just to write down the callback number.

That's why messages are deleted, and prospects never return calls.

A good voicemail sparks interest. It's well-planned and compels the recipient to phone the caller immediately.

Let's revamp your sales voicemail messages right now.

The typical (terrible) voicemail

As technology continues to advance, people are beginning to dread certain types of communication tools like voicemail. From October 2013 to April 2014, voicemail deposits dropped by 8 percent.

Moreover, Millennials dislike listening to them. And rightfully so!

For a moment, put yourself in the shoes of your potential client:

You receive a voicemail from a sales rep. He leaves a two-minute message talking about a product you should purchase. The rep

rushes to describe all the product details and why you would be the perfect fit for their "Manager's Special Offer."

Only at the end do you sorta hear the salesperson's name and phone number. Then, the rep says, "If I don't hear from you in a day or two, I DEFINITELY will call you back."

Ugh. What a waste of two minutes!

You basically volunteered to listen to an advertisement on your phone, and most people don't want their voicemail to be used as a commercial spot. It's a nuisance.

In this example, the sales rep failed to leave a short message. He decided to sell, rather than inform the recipient.

And how does he know that you're a great fit for a specific deal if his company doesn't know your current needs?

The rep didn't even say his name or number clearly. In addition, he made an explicit decision to call you back, defeating the purpose of you calling him back.

Don't let your team leave inexcusable voicemail messages. There's a better way.

How to structure a voicemail

A sales rep leaves on average 70 voicemails per day, requiring 60 seconds each, which adds up to approximately 25 hours per month. If you had a team of 50 sales reps, they would spend 1,277 hours per month leaving voicemails—unless they're using Close.io. Our platform allows you to leave a pre-recorded voicemail message with just one click.

As a sales leader, recognize that your team is vying for a prospect's attention. And prospects want value, not a sales pitch.

Therefore, short, purposeful messages will always defeat long, selfish monologues. You want the receiver to take action, which requires a compelling reason.

Michael Arrington, founder of TechCrunch says, "Think before you voicemail."

Voicemail is a selling tool that can make a good first impression, start an ongoing relationship, or close your next deal.

The way you present yourself matters. The goal is to leave a voicemail that says: *I'm worth engaging with right now.*

Co-founder of inventRight, Stephen Key, states that a phone call "requires confidence and courage and allows you to find common ground more quickly."

Instead of selling within 30 seconds, entice the prospect with insightful ideas. Here's a sales voicemail template your team can use:

- (Optional) Establish a connection: "I learned about your company from John Doe."
- Introduce yourself: "My name is Steli with Close.io."
- State value: "After researching, my team found that we can shrink your costs up to 25%."
- Share insight: "We've accumulated over 100 positive reviews on the same issue."
- Add contact information: "Let's talk. Contact me at 123-456-7890."
- Give urgency: "Reach out by Nov. 1st, before the holiday rush."
- Repeat your contact information: "My name is Steli. 123-456-7890. Thanks."

5 tips to create a worthwhile voicemail message

Want to give your team some pointers? Here are a few tips to help turn deleted annoyances into callback-friendly messages.

1. Smile

Prospects don't want to hear a dreary message that will put them to sleep. It won't grab the person's attention and it hurts your company's brand.

To leave an upbeat voicemail, "say your message with a smile on your face." Show some excitement and engage the individual as if you were talking to him or her in-person.

2. Repeat, please

The purpose of your voicemail is to receive a callback. Make sure the receiver can complete that action. So, repeat your name and phone number at the end.

Pro Tip: To increase your callback chances, leave your message from 6:45 AM to 8:00 AM and from 4:30 PM to 6:30 PM local time.

3. Test multiple versions

Similar to other sales techniques, you should test what works. Create a simple A/B test for your voicemail.

What happens when you say your name and company last? Or should you state your reason for calling first? Track your response rate with each variation.

More conversations equal more closed deals.

4. Create a sense of urgency

Life is busy and people who really want to contact you sometimes forget. To speed up your prospect's response time, create a little urgency by adding a time constraint.

Don't be pushy though. Establish urgency, not a state of panic.

5. Follow up

It's easy to get ignored today. Thanks to caller ID, people generally disregard incoming calls from people they don't know.

To counter any neglected voicemails, send prospects an email that will pique their interest. Give them a reason to actually check your message.

Make sure you include a simple yet compelling subject line.

Leave a purposeful message

Sales voicemails don't have to be lame. Leaving a long, boring message for a potential client only leads to wasted time and unreturned phone calls.

To improve your voicemail conversions, record a voicemail in 30 seconds or less and test multiple variations of the message until it produces results.

Not following up enough

Life is all about the follow-up. Especially when it comes to the startup hustle.

It's easy to focus on the initial contact. The first meeting. The email you've sent to someone important. You reach out to someone and then feel good about yourself. You've done your job, you've pitched and reached out. You've asked for a meeting/call/etc. Now all you have to do is sit around and wait for them to respond.

And that's the problem—**you have no follow-up hustle**.

I get it. You don't want to be a pain in the ass. We all want to avoid being annoying at the risk of getting rejected. The key is to keep it short and sweet yet remain persistent.

Most people will contact someone once and then wait around for that person to get back to them. That's the completely wrong approach.

My follow-up philosophy

I have a simple philosophy: I follow up as many times as necessary until I get a response. I don't care what the response is as long as I get one. If someone tells me they need another 14 days to get back to me, I will put that in my calendar and ping them again in 14 days.

If they tell me they are busy and they don't have time right now, I will respond and ask them when they feel like a good time would be for me ping them. The key here is to actually keep following up. If someone tells me they are not interested—I leave them alone.

But here is the kicker—if they don't respond at all, I will keep pinging them until they do. And trust me, they always do. :)

Once I followed up with an investor 48 times until I got a meeting. Now mind you, this investor was introduced to me and had responded positively to my initial email, but then disappeared in limbo and I couldn't get hold of him anymore.

He finally responded, we met, and he ended up investing.

Another story of someone who followed up relentlessly? James Altucher wanted to work for a billionaire investor. He got his foot in the door by cold emailing the guy for a whole year.

How to follow up like a pro

Following up is more art than science. The more you do it, the better you get at it. Nothing can replace building strong follow-up habits. To give you a starting point, here's how I think about following up.

How often should you follow up?

If you reach out completely cold and never had any interaction with the other person, follow up a maximum of six times. You really

don't have the type of relationship that gives you permission to do much more than that.

If you already had some kind of interaction and that interaction was *not* a clear, definite NO, then follow up as long as it takes to get a response. Never stop till you get a response.

The right follow-up frequency

Here's a general framework for timing your follow-ups:

- Day 1: First follow-up (+2)
- Day 3: Follow-up (+4)
- Day 7: Follow-up (+7)
- Day 14: Follow-up (+14)
- Day 28: Follow-up (+30)
- Day 58: Follow-up (+30)
- … (from there on once a month).

I use our sales CRM to create simple follow up reminders.

I also set up tasks with due dates, and create lists using smart filter functions.

For example, I can create a list of prospects whom I haven't emailed in 14 days, and with whom I've had a phone conversation that lasted longer than 4 minutes in the past 3 months.

You can stack all kinds of filters on top of each other to match it to your requirements, but if you're not a Close.io customer, you can use Google calendar or tasks, but I find those suboptimal—too much friction.

These are not hard rules, they are guidelines

It all depends on the context, the situation, the relationship and interactions you had with the other person.

For example, if you follow up with an incredibly busy and important CEO of a large enterprise, don't send another email tomorrow and two days later and four days later. Give them more time, maybe 4–7 days until your first follow-up. Maybe follow up once a week. If you know this person gets 5,000 emails a day, be respectful of that fact.

Which medium is best for following up—email or phone?

This depends on what you're after. Do you want to optimize for *a) quick response* or *b) positive outcome*?

If you optimize for a quick response (because an issue is time-sensitive) then a phone call is the best medium. However, it's also a lot easier to come across as annoying, so the risk of turning a "maybe" into a "no" is much higher.

If you call me ten times in two days, I'm probably going to turn you down *even if I was actually interested*. Because I'll think, "Geez, working with this person is too much pain, I'll pass."

If you optimize for a positive outcome, then email is the best medium for follow-ups. But sending me a monthly email might take years.

Following up by email

Keep it short, upbeat and professional.

Email #1:

"Hey [first name], how is it going? Can we schedule a time to talk this week?"

Email #2:

"Hey [first name], we got some new press coverage [link]. I'd love to pick up on our conversation. When's a good time to chat?"

Email #3:

"Hey [first name], can we hop on a quick call Wednesday 4 p.m. or Thursday 11 a.m.?

Cheers,
Steli

PS: thought you might find this article interesting [link]"

You get the idea.

Following up by phone

When you call, there's a higher risk that your follow-up will annoy the other person.

If you tried to call three times and the other person didn't pick up the phone, call again and leave a voice mail.

That's it. More than three missed calls and one voicemail can be perceived as too invasive, annoying and desperate.

Following up in person

If it's a do-or-die situation, you can show up at their office. It's the best way to make sure you get attention, but it's also intrusive. So, make sure you play this trump card only when it's warranted.

Following up on social media

I don't do this, but some people like to tap into social media as another way to stay on the other person's radar. Doing things like retweeting or favoriting a tweet, sending a LinkedIn invite, liking or commenting on their status updates or posts.

The main piece of advice I can give here is to not overdo this and don't come across as a creepy borderline-stalker.

Following up with handwritten notes

Depending upon the interactions you had and the relationship you share with them, a handwritten note can still make an impression.

If you can make it work and it's authentic and it makes a difference—do it. If it's awkward, forced and cheesy, don't.

Following up by fax

"It's 2014. We're a startup. Fax? Are you serious?"

Yes.

If they didn't respond to your emails, and they didn't pick up the phone, why not send them a fax?

Because nobody uses fax anymore!

Exactly. It's the least cluttered medium you can use.

Again, view it as another tool at your disposal. 99% of cases you won't need it, but occasionally, it might make a difference.

Do's & don'ts

Stay persistently friendly and nice. Have an attitude of indifference if they don't respond. Impress them by staying on top of your game.

Keep it short. Avoid long-winded formalities. If they're a good customer, they'll probably be busy individuals who value their time.

It's annoying to read through three paragraphs of meaningless pleasantries, and smart people will know they're meaningless copy and paste phrases you use on every lead. Be nice, but get to the point.

Provide value. *(optional)* Know and understand their wants and needs well enough to be able to offer them something relevant. It can be an article or something else that they'll appreciate getting. (In general, clear, simple and concise works best). But keep your objective in mind—giving things away is not selling. It's a jab, not a right hook.

Never ever make them feel or do anything guilt-inducing. Avoid saying things like "Why haven't you responded to me so far? I've sent you 10 emails already!!!"

The fortune is in the follow-up

Most people will assume that there is no interest if they don't get a response to their email and will stop following up.

I don't. I simply assume that the person is busy and that I need to follow up until they have a moment to respond. If I keep reaching out, my chances of getting to that perfect moment are massively higher. I'm a salesperson—it's my responsibility to maintain the relationship and move the conversation forward.

That's how you get things done that others don't. That's how you get

meetings that others don't. You follow up. And you never ever stop

… until you get the job done!

CONCLUSION

That's it. You've made it all the way through

Congrats! Whether you've read the book front to cover, or just read the sections that matter most to you—it's time to take action. Start making those calls.

Here's something I've seen again and again: people who take action quickly have the highest likelihood of success in business. It's not the people who get things perfect or make the best possible product. It's not the smartest or most talented people who often win in business. It's those who JUST DO IT RIGHT THE FUCK NOW.

There is a time for deep thinking, and it's very important. But most of the time, we're not really doing deep thinking. Most of the time, we're just using thinking as an excuse to postpone doing what we should be doing next (because many times in business, what we should be doing next is exactly the thing that we feel like doing the least).

You've got this book. There is a lot more sales knowledge in here than anyone really needs to be successful at cold calling. You don't need to read 10 more books, or watch 50 more videos. You need to start dialing.

It's ok to start dialing really low-quality leads whom you don't expect anything from, just to warm yourself up if that's what you

need. But start ASAP. And if after reading all this you run into trouble or need more help—I'm just an email away: steli@close.io

Now, I wouldn't be a salesman if I'd end with a pitch here:

Try our sales software completely free

My team and I have built a piece of software that can make you a lot more productive if you're doing cold calls. In fact, it has changed the way sales software is built in general: in the past, sales software was mostly built with *management* in mind. CRMs were a tool that the higher ups would force sales reps to use so they'd be able to track sales activity and have better reports. It was a burden for the person actually doing sales, and it added to their workload, instead of helping them to do their job better.

We wanted to change that. We wanted to build something that would help make the individual sales rep more successful.

Close.io will help you make more calls and close more deals. It'll automatically track all your sales activity, and make it easy for you to create meaningful reports that lead to actionable insights.

Unlimited calls

Make as many calls as you want within the US and Canada (+ many other countries worldwide).

1-click calling

Call your leads with just one click. All your conversations will automatically be logged—no manual data entry.

High call volume

Use Smart Views or our upcoming Power Dialer feature to make more calls in less time.

Voicemail drops

Your call went to voicemail? Simply click the "Leave voicemail" button and Close.io will leave your pre-recorded voicemail.

There's much more: call transferring, forwarding, recording, follow-up reminders, and real-time calling metrics anytime.

So sign up for your free Close.io trial now. It takes two minutes, and there's zero risk (you don't even need to enter your credit card—email is all it takes). If you don't want to become a customer, there's nothing you need to do—the trial will automatically expire.

Start your 14-day free Close.io trial now (no credit card required)