



64 Opening a cold call

Making direct contact with your prospects by telephone can be a good way to research sales opportunities and set up sales appointments.

Many people have a fear of cold calling and this can get in the way of using this potentially powerful way of generating good sales leads.

Make a cold call warmer

It can make it a lot easier to open a new telephone call when you are following up a letter or email of introduction.

What do you want to achieve?

To start with it is much more useful to think about these calls as research as opposed to cold calls. The word 'cold' infers that the person you are calling is likely to be cold with you. Not a pleasant thought! What you are doing is using the telephone contact as a way of finding out if there is someone who has a problem or requirement that potentially could be solved by your service. You will not be using the telephone for any more than setting up a face-to-face or telephone appointment with a decision maker. Not thinking that you have to sell something can take the pressure off and make opening a call much easier.

Get the name of the decision maker

It is important to find out in advance who the right person to speak to is. You can do that very easily by making a separate call to the organisation and asking very politely if the reception team or department member can help you. Be very clear what the responsibilities are of the person's name you want. Give a good reason for asking for the person's name. Once you have the correct name and title of the person you can make your call on a separate occasion.

Opening the call from your prospect's point of view

Imagine that you are standing in your target prospect's shoes for a moment and living a typical day in their busy business life. Most people are distracted when their phone rings, their mind is on other things. You will need to show that you understand their position and can provide a good reason for them to listen.

So how do you do that?

Good morning/afternoon [name of person you have been put through to as the decision maker] my name is [your name] from [our company name]. I understand that you are the person who manages/deals with [add the area that is important to your call]. Have I called at a convenient time? (If not, arrange to call back.)

At this stage the person you have called does not know why you have called so asking if you have called at a convenient time is common courtesy and will show them that you have some empathy with the pressures of their work load.

Once you have their ear you will have an opportunity to explain again who you are and what the purpose of your call is. Be straightforward, up front and honest.

My name is Jackie Jarvis from Marketingco; I am calling to follow up a letter I sent you last week. We work with small to medium sized businesses helping them to make their marketing work. I don't know at this stage if you are currently looking for help in this area, but I wanted to follow up and find out if you might be interested in our free one hour consultation.

The following approach may work if you have not sent a letter in advance.

We are looking for organisations which are interested in [mention a generic need or experience you can fulfil or solve] that we may be able to provide/solve. I have no idea if this is something that you are exploring at the moment, but I thought I would call to find out. Is this something you have on your agenda right now or are likely to have in the future?

Find out if you have a business prospect

Create the opportunity to ask a couple of quick questions to establish if the person you have called is, in fact, a prospect.

What you ask will depend on the business you are in and what you need to know about the person on the end of the phone to establish whether or not they are a prospect. Choose your questions wisely and find out as quickly as you can if they have potential.

You may need to ask the person if they currently use *x* product or service. If so, do they have anything that they need at the moment? Are they looking for any of the solutions you have or are they experiencing any of the challenges you describe?

You may need to find out the process they go through to choose suppliers and whether they are open to meeting with you at some stage. You will need to close the call by arranging the appropriate follow up activity.

The result of the call may be

- an appointment
- another opportunity for a longer telephone consultation
- a note on your CRM system to call back at some stage in the future when a demand is more likely to exist
- no we are not prospects.

Then thank the person for their time and their information and confirm any follow up you have arranged by email.

How to use this information

Use the basic structure of the call as outlined in this section and consider how you could adapt it to suit your products and services. Try it and monitor what works and what doesn't.

Think research and make your cold calls warm