



65 Making appointments

Why are appointments important?

Sales appointments are your opportunity to get in front of your potential customers face to face and explore how you may be able to help them. Having agreed to an appointment with you, your prospect has taken the first step forward, a move that says ‘yes, I want to know if you have a solution for me’. Getting to that stage in the sales process gives you that important opportunity to find out first hand what their needs are. It is much easier to do that face to face than it is over the telephone or by email.

Your challenge

Your challenge will be to make sure that the sales appointments you set up are with properly qualified decision makers. You can waste a lot of time, money and effort making appointments with poorly qualified people who cannot make a decision to go ahead.

Ways to make appointments

Using the telephone

You can make appointments as explained in the previous section by telephone prospecting. You may need to go through a number of stages before an appointment becomes appropriate. This may require a number of telephone follow ups, and the provision of information about your product or service.

Networking

Appointments can also be made when you meet a potential prospect at a networking event, business conference or exhibition. A brief exchange with someone may create an opportunity to suggest a further more private conversation to discuss their needs in more depth. This can be kept casual and informal initially.

Entice with the offer of a free consultation

The offer of a free consultation, product demonstration or business health check can be a way of giving your prospect something of value with no pressure to buy.

This can motivate them to see you face to face. Having created this opportunity you can start to build a relationship with them. I offer a free marketing consultation as the first step in my appointment-making process. The consultations last for one hour and are held at our private meeting room. I offer the free consultations whenever I speak at networking events, run seminars or write articles. I also promote the consultations on our website. Not all the people who take up the free consultation become clients immediately. It does, however, start a relationship with a potential client which could lead to further business in the future.

There are many examples of small businesses that use this kind of approach to generate appointments. A financial consultant offers a free personal finance assessment and reports back, a health and safety consultant offers a free health and safety check with a report highlighting *must do's*, *should do's* and *could do's*, a website marketing company offers a free 'how well marketed is your site' report that highlights all the areas for improvement. These are all the kind of reports that potential customers find valuable. They can learn something about themselves and their business.

Make your recommendation for an appointment sound like an opportunity for your prospect.

HOW PRODUCTIVE IS YOUR APPOINTMENT MAKING? – SPECIAL RESPONSE CHECKLIST

- ▶ How do you make appointments?
- ▶ How successful are you at pre-qualifying your prospects?
- ▶ How successful are you at getting appointments with key decision makers?
- ▶ How could you attract more people to request an appointment from you?
- ▶ How could you make your appointment recommendations seem like an opportunity for your prospect?
- ▶ How could you improve your appointment-making process?

How to use this information

Consider what you can do to utilise these ideas to help you and your team get more appointments.

Think appointment and convert more prospects to customers