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Rain Making

Attract New Clients No Matter What Your Field

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Sales

Take-Aways

- Most professionals prefer to leave marketing their services to someone else.
- That's not possible when you're first building a practice, and it's not practical when you're enhancing an established practice.
- To bring in new clients, keep a steady stream of prospects on tap.
- Bylined articles are a classic way to showcase your professional expertise.
- Speeches and seminars can spotlight your capabilities and talents.
- To gain valuable publicity, become a trusted expert source for print, broadcast and Internet reporters.
- Professionals (and everyone else) dislike cold calls – but they work.
- If you do enough networking, you may never have to make cold calls.
- During sales calls, focus on the prospect, not on yourself.
- The purpose of a sales call is to get the prospect talking.

Recommendation

Professionals are highly educated individuals who deal with consequential matters: Attorneys present life-and-death cases in court. Architects design graceful buildings. Engineers turn designs into stone and steel realities. Accountants decipher complex tax rules. But while these and other professionals are often remarkably able in their fields, many have no idea how to market themselves or their services. This manual by professional-services marketing expert Ford Harding covers all the marketing techniques you will ever need to know. The sales tactics section alone is worth the purchase price. *getAbstract* considers Harding's comprehensive book a refresher for salespeople and required reading for professionals who think sales was someone else's job.

Summary

Gaining Exposure

Professionals did not enter their fields to sell. Most have no sales or marketing training. Few want to take time from their practices for these kinds of activities. Unfortunately, clients do not fall out of the sky. Whether you work at a large firm or as a solo practitioner, you must sell your professional services to survive. Only by contacting numerous prospects, most of whom will never become clients, will you generate new business. The fewer prospects you have, the fewer clients you will secure.

"Marketing is a numbers game."

One way to showcase yourself is with bylined articles that position you as a respected and available expert in your field. Find a topic that is timely, that you can write about authoritatively and on which you have a unique perspective. Find out which publications your potential clients read: trade journals are often good targets. Pitch your idea to the editor. Then develop and submit your article according to the magazine's specifications. Most bylined features are eight to twelve double-spaced pages in length. Be sure to include a brief biography (only a few words) and your contact information.

"Selling is more listening than talking."

Create positive publicity about yourself and your firm – but indirectly. Never contact a reporter to talk to him or her about your firm. Instead, make yourself available to reporters as a source of expert information. Reporters need to understand the details of their stories. As a professional, you can help them, while gaining valuable publicity for yourself in the process.

"You must sell yourself to sell your firm."

Speeches or seminars are good ways to market yourself. If your seminars become popular events, extend them into all-day or two-day affairs and charge for attendance.

Direct mail, including e-mail, is a classic way to market your services. In fact, e-mail is the text-communication vehicle of choice for people under 50. So, e-mail should be the main way you communicate with prospects. Not only is it efficient, it is also cheaper than printing and mailing your material. However,

whether you choose e-mail or regular mail, plan a marketing campaign that involves numerous mailings. As much as possible, personalize each letter or note. Make sure e-mail subject lines are direct, clear and interesting.

“Even if it is not stated, the professional within a firm who does not market and sell has a far higher probability of seeing his career plateau than one who brings in new business.”

Create a user-friendly Web site. People who are browsing the Internet have no patience with Web sites that take more than a few seconds to open. Avoid animation elements that slow things down. Make your Web site easy to find.

Cold Calling

All professionals loathe cold calling, and many refuse to do it. They claim cold calls are not effective. However, the facts prove otherwise. Cold calling works for all types of selling, including the marketing of professional services.

“You need to get face to face with a prospect to make a sale.”

The cold call process is straightforward. Generate a lead, probably through e-mail. Keep the e-mail brief. Its purpose is to persuade the prospect to take your call. Phone the prospect and request a meeting. One good way to insure an affirmative response is to tell the prospect you’d like to share inside information or something else of value. This works much better than merely asking to come by and introduce yourself.

The Purpose of the Sales Call

You’ll never benefit yourself by a sales call if you do not understand what the meeting is about. All sales calls are about the prospect. They are never about you. Many professionals do not grasp this basic fact. Instead, during sales calls they promote their own brilliance, accomplishments and expertise. They focus on themselves. This is exactly the reverse of what they should be doing. On a sales call, you want the prospect to do four things:

1. **“Open up”** – The prospect should do the talking, not you.
2. **“Trust you”** – Prospects will never share important or confidential information if they don’t trust you.
3. **“Be clear”** – Prospects should explain their problems and how you can help.
4. **“Set a goal”** – Reveal their primary objectives.

The First Five Minutes

The opening minutes of the sales call are crucial. They set the tone for the meeting to follow. Therefore, always start your sales call in a positive manner. Use the initial period – which should take no longer than five minutes – to establish rapport. Follow this five-part script:

1. **“Personal link”** – Immediately getting down to business is counterproductive. First, establish an emotional connection, to make the prospect feel comfortable about doing business with you rather than someone else. Comment on something in the prospect’s office. Mention a shared interest, experience

or friend. But keep your comments brief. And if the prospect reacts negatively, quickly become more business-like.

2. **“Agenda statement”** – Explain what you hope to accomplish during the meeting. Get the prospect to agree to your agenda. For example, say, “I would like to describe my firm so you know what we are all about. I would then like to discuss [the special information you referenced in the phone call], and any issues relating to it from your company’s perspective. Is this OK with you?”
3. **“Positioning statement”** – Explain why you can speak credibly about the issues in your agenda. However, do not provide a minihistory of your firm or a summary of its services. Be brief. The whole idea of the sales meeting is that the prospect talks, not you.
4. **“Stage-setting anecdotes”** – Provide an anecdote or two about issues that are relevant to the prospect. Keep the details about yourself and your firm to an absolute minimum.
5. **“The Big Question”** – Now that you’ve set the stage, the Big Question moves the meeting into the “Production Zone,” where both you and the prospect benefit. A good Big Question gets the prospect talking about a business problem his or her company has that you may be able to solve. If the prospect initiated the meeting, asking the right Big Question is easy. You can simply say, “Why did you contact us?” But if you initiated the call, the right Big Question is tougher to nail down. Choose your words carefully. For example, say, “You agreed to this meeting to talk about [...]. Are there any aspects of this process you would like to focus on today?” Or, try this approach: “Please tell me about your company and why the information I described over the phone may be useful to you.” This informs you about how your services may complement the prospect’s needs. However you phrase it, the point of the Big Question is to move quickly out of “Me Zone” (discussion about you and your firm) and into the Production Zone. Get the prospect to talk about a subject of interest to him or her – something where you may be able to assist professionally.

The Production Zone

The Production Zone is the all-important period during which the prospect speaks and you listen, take notes and ask occasional questions. Use open ended questions, such as “Why is this issue important to you?”, to elicit the prospect’s “needs, opinions, values, priorities and sensitivities.” Use closed questions, which require only yes-or-no answers, to determine the facts or confirm your understanding of something the prospect said. By the time you reach the end of the Production Zone, you should have a thorough knowledge of the prospect’s concerns and how you can help. If you don’t, continue to probe with additional questions to nail down exactly what the prospect wants to achieve.

“Speeches are articles with faces.”

Finally, offer your solution to the prospect’s problem. Never forget that during this portion of the sales call, the first sentence will stick more than the rest. Make it count. Briefly summarize the prospect’s concerns. Credibly differentiate yourself from other professionals. Link your services to the prospect’s goals. Focus on the benefits you will provide.

“People attend seminars and conferences not only to hear the speakers but to talk to their peers at other companies.”

Don't be the only one asking questions during a sales call. Always welcome questions from prospects. Ask for clarification of those you do not understand. Answer every question directly and concisely.

Get the Prospect to Commit to Something

During the sales meeting, do your best to secure some form of commitment from the prospect, either to hire you or to meet with you again. Don't hesitate to ask for leads during the meeting. Always send a thank-you note afterward. Work hard to secure additional meetings until you convert the prospect into a client.

"If a prospect has read about you in the papers or heard you quoted on the radio or television, his willingness to give you a meeting or include you among the firms being considered for a project increases."

Making cold calls and sales presentations is never easy. You'll need to develop a tough hide to deal with the many rejections you're bound to receive. However, they are powerful marketing tools. They enable you to meet potential clients face to face. Indeed, the more cold calls and sales presentations you make, the more new clients you will secure.

Networking

The antidote to cold calls and sales presentations in front of strangers is networking. Knowing people who know people is often the best way to get your foot in the door of a potential client's office. And because you and the prospect belong to the same network, you automatically have credibility. The best networkers are those who help others. This only makes sense. A prospect or referral source will feel more inclined to meet with you or refer you to others if you do something nice for that person. Certainly, this approach is much better than shoving your business card under his or her door.

"Your Web site is treated the same way you might be judged in a singles bar – a very rude and busy singles bar, where everyone is impatient and always looking."

Effective ways to network include learning all that you can about everyone at client meetings, attending trade or association events, delivering speeches, asking for referrals and being friendly to the people you meet on business trips. Joining groups is also a good networking technique. Members of groups help and look out for each other. Many people join groups to network. Thus, they will not object to putting you in touch with their contacts.

"The underlying logic of networking is simple and the same for all networks: Identify the right people to know."

Aim to develop a network of 200 to 300 people. A group of this size provides an adequate flow of leads. The quality of your network is just as important as its size. In most cases, you will do much better developing clients if your network includes CEOs and other senior executives rather than junior managers or nonprofessionals, since CEOs and senior executives are the ones who can make the decision to hire you or to refer you to business associates who are looking for professional assistance.

“Many professionals lose opportunities strictly as a result of poor selling skills.”

Sometimes you must go out of your way to network. One business consultant moved into a Chicago apartment building solely to become friends with a resident whom he wanted as a client. Some professionals move to Greenwich, Connecticut, a New York City bedroom community, because they know it is the home of many CEOs and Wall Street executives. Others join philanthropic organizations because they know that the people with whom they want to network are active members.

“Eliciting information on a prospect’s needs requires good questioning and listening technique because prospects don’t talk freely.”

The professionals who benefit most from networking are those who are willing to spend the time to cultivate their contacts. You won’t gain clients through contacts during your first week or month or even year of networking. Networking that pays off almost always takes time and effort. Attend events, participate in group activities and be solicitous to the people in your network at all times. You never know who will deliver the most helpful leads.

You Won’t Get If You Don’t Ask

The most direct way to develop leads from networking sources is to ask for them. People in your network will not automatically supply you with referrals or ask to become your clients. Unless you request referrals they may not even know that you want new clients. However, don’t be pushy. You may wish to ask for referrals or new clients indirectly. For example, you could say, “The last time we spoke, you were worried about [...] How is that situation going today?” Of course, just because a contact mentions a business problem does not mean that he or she wants a sales pitch from you. Handle this type of conversation gracefully.

To enhance your practice and make it exactly what you want it to be, think and act strategically. Choose the mix of marketing techniques that will get you what you want. Use your time wisely – it’s your most precious resource. Study your market and understand your most compelling professional capabilities.

About the Author

Ford Harding heads a firm that trains professionals to secure new engagements. His articles have been published in *The Harvard Business Review*, *The Wall Street Journal* and other magazines and newspapers.



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