



## Guest Speaker: Warm up to cold calls Reassess the value of telephone prospecting.

By Anne Scarlett, first printed in *the Zweig AE Marketing Letter*

According to the “Future of Professional Services Lead Generation” report issued earlier this year by the marketing consulting firm Wellesley Hills Group (Framingham, MA), 13% of respondents noted that cold calling/telephone prospecting was their most common lead generator. In fact, calling efforts were second only to referrals by clients and others.

Years have passed since I officially ‘cold’ called. And yes, while I often recommend a calling campaign as one component within my clients’ market-sector action plans, these efforts are limited to highly focused, pre-qualified audiences. Upon learning that cold calling is indeed considered to be a valid lead generation tactic, I’ve decided to re-assess. Opinions around this very broad topic are diverse, even opposing. This article proposes select kernels of wisdom for your consideration:

**Making cold calls warm.** Your first instinct is correct: how can we make cold calls warmer? If you have a rich, extensive network, then it’s likely you will know someone who knows someone. Those ‘someones’ may even make an introductory call on your behalf!

Beyond having these common colleagues/referrals, other warmer-uppers include:

- \* **You know their perspectives.** You heard them speak; read an article they authored.
- \* **They know your perspectives.** They heard you speak; read an e-newsletter you sent.
- \* **You are members of the same professional, civic, or social organization.** Review membership lists to find people that can connect you directly with your prospects.
- \* **You have common interests or background.** Perhaps you share alma maters, grew up in the same area, love pets, or focus on the same philanthropy.

**If you don’t plan to nurture, then don’t bother calling.** The ‘Lead Generation’ report confirmed my own calling experiences: if you won’t follow-up again, then don’t bother calling. I have been approached by phone, and am always less-than-impressed when the caller promises to send information, then never follows-up. In truth, I have sometimes desired the promised information. That lack of follow-up reflects less favorably than if the firm never contacted me in the first place.

**The caller must authentically represent your firm; don’t use external telemarketers.** I suggested recently that my client execute a calling campaign to corporate real estate brokers. My client responded with: ‘If we do that, we will hire a professional telemarketing company to make calls.’ Bzzz! These brokers prospect by phone to find new clients. They ‘get’ it, and they expect to be called by architects. These brokers (with short attention spans) would respond poorly to a paid telemarketer that was unable to articulate relevant data or clarify specifics. Most decision-makers and influencers will find telemarketers to be off-putting; it’s essential that your caller is a professional from the inside.

**Believe in what you offer; be inspired.** Even during warm calls, I sometimes need an enthusiasm boost. Three ways I make this happen: 1. Emphatically believe (based on acquired knowledge) there is an opportunity to connect my firm with the prospect to help them. 2. Reflect upon a recent positive calling experience with another prospect. 3. Use another

motivator to recall life's big picture— I am a travel photographer, so my office walls feature global imagery. Hey, if I can survive rough travel to remote developing countries, I can most certainly conquer— and reap success from— a calling campaign!

During execution, practice these tips:

**Deliver well.** How's your phone voice? With only five to eight seconds to capture attention, realize that 15% is about content, and 85% is about tone— volume, speed, articulation, and strength/confidence. Similar to formal presentations, if you start out on a good note, you'll likely maintain that energy throughout the conversation. If, however, you are lame from the start, it will be an uphill battle to pique the prospect's interest, much less elicit important information. Remember, too, practice is key; there is a big difference between being prepared and sounding canned.

**Get it together.** Don't set yourself up for embarrassment by having someone call back and say 'This is Joe Jenkins, returning your call,' only to scramble to remember why you called him. Track your call activity within a running phone log. People do (sometimes) call back, especially after receiving thoughtful, succinct voicemails. If you have your log handy, you can easily flip through to recall the person's name, where they are from, and your intentions.

**Make calls from a quiet location.** Making calls while sitting among the technical staff, or within an area where people can hear your pitch repeatedly, will be distracting and less effective. If you don't have a private office, then relocate to a conference room, huddle/work room, or unused office. Take a laptop (with internet access, if possible) to record conversations directly into your lead-tracking system.

**Group your calls by market.** If you create a plan to call a focused group of folks from the same industry, then you will get into a groove specifically around their issues. You'll have a grasp of the lingo, and you'll build upon things you learn from each new connection.

Remember the prize. In most cases, primary cold-calling objectives are three-fold: to qualify the lead, to get to the right person, and to make an in-person appointment. Keep an eye on your prize. Upon success, confirm details and then sign off!

The subject of telephone prospecting is immense, but in our fast and furious world of computers— web sites, e-mail, YouTube, blogs— a well-executed phone call might be just what the prospect ordered!