

How to Better Manage Your Prospecting
System to Pour Out Customers

Upturn

POINTING YOU IN THE RIGHT DIRECTION

Sales Pipeline

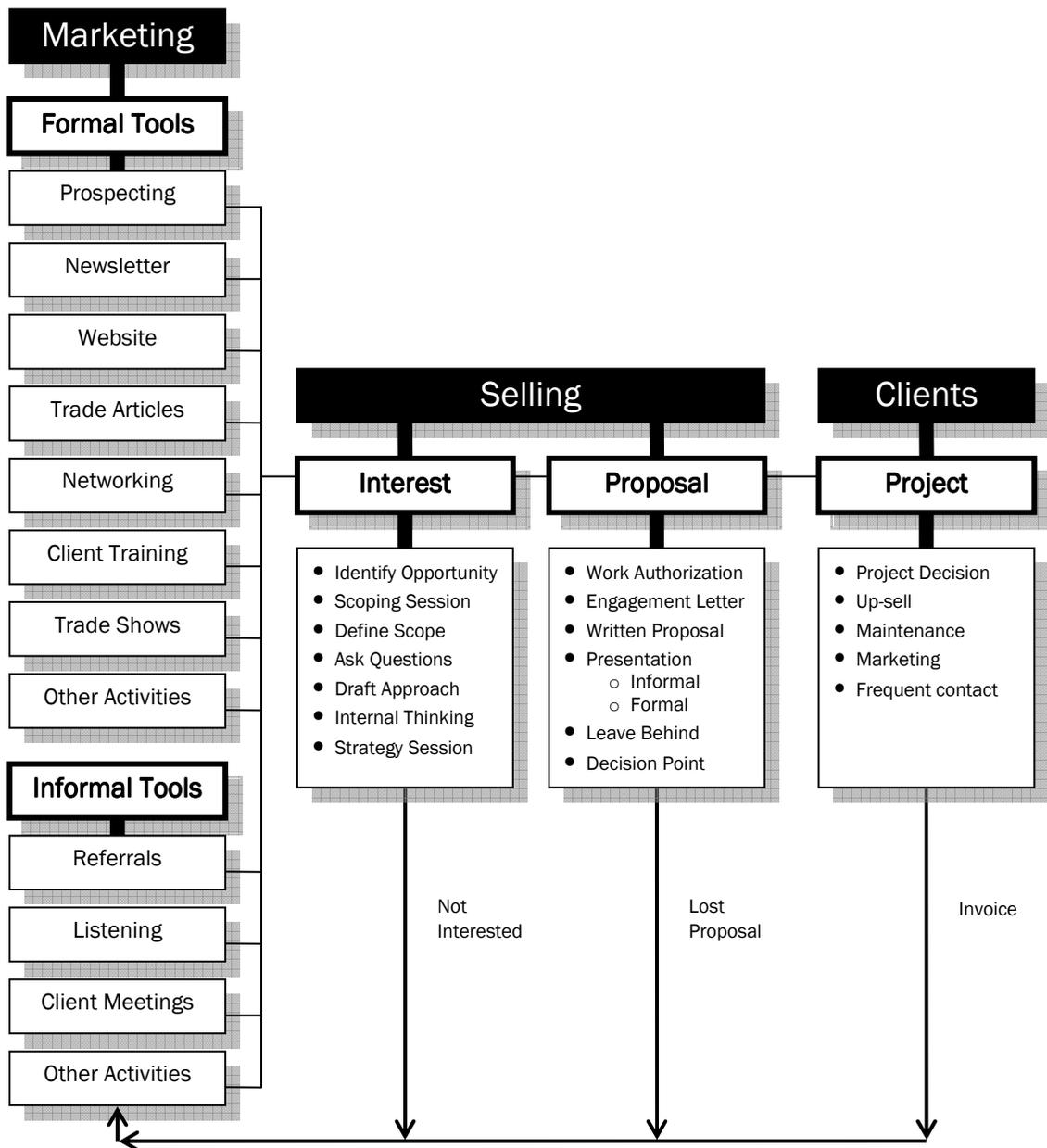


CorCom, Inc.
Research & Consulting

Lloyd Corder, Ph.D.

Your Sales Pipeline

Marketing and selling is a continual process and an ongoing effort for all companies. In order to convince current clients to continue working with you and to find new clients that you can start to build lasting relationships with, you must focus on the basic aspects of the marketing and sales pipeline.



How the Pipeline Works

Working the pipeline successfully is a continual process. Your pipeline should consist of three distinct processes: Marketing, selling and managing client relationships. By mastering your approach to these three processes you should be able to keep business booming at all times.

- **Marketing:** In this step you attempt to find companies and corporations who may be in need of your services. You can do this by using a variety of formal and informal techniques.
- **Selling:** Once you have found prospective clients with whom you may be able to work, the sales process can begin. There are many different ways to sell a product or service to a client, but for the most part these processes usually include two parts:
- **Interest:** To begin you must spend time with your prospective clients. What are their needs? Often, they are not sure themselves and need assistance establishing the scope of the project at hand. Other times they have prepared a specific RFQ (Request for Qualifications), RFP (request for Proposal), or some other form of bid document.
- **Proposal:** Once it is established that a company or corporation is interested in working with you it is time to prepare an actual proposal. These proposals can vary greatly from project to project. Sometimes a proposal is as simple as filling out a work authorization form, but other times a proposal requires a detailed one to two hour presentation done in PowerPoint.
- **Managing Client Relationships:** As soon as somebody accepts a proposal the work begins. Depending on the situation a proposal may have to be adjusted and some additional work may need to be completed. There is usually an opportunity to secure a second project with the same client as long as you make a commitment to keeping in touch and having frequent interaction with them.

The fuller you manage to keep your pipeline, the more projects you will be able to choose from, and the steadier your workload will be. Referrals are an effective means of getting new customers because these leads are already pre-qualified. People trust their friends, colleague's or family's recommendations. A referral transfers that trust to you.

The Value of Repeat Business

Over the years there will be an opportunity to continually win projects from clients you have previously worked with. This kind of business is very important to a firm because:

- It is considerably easier to produce quality work when you are familiar with the client and their needs.
- If you have built up a level of trust with the client over the years then you will be trusted to do larger and more important projects.
- It is simpler to convince an existing customer to do another project with you than it would be to find a new customer to do work with.
- A single client has the potential to be very valuable to a single company.

Just think about the number of projects you have completed, the number of referrals they have given you, plus the recommendations and support they have given over the years.

Marketing

There are many formal and informal ways to find new clients (as well as to inform current clients about other services offered.) You must remain in regular contact with your customers and potential clients and be continually developing new ways of informing clients of potential services you could provide. Possible ways of keeping a client informed are:

- **Prospecting:** Most companies have marketing representatives who put a lot of effort into introducing possible services to potential and existing clients. Managers should also be continually involved in recruiting new clients. This can be done through a number of activities such as follow up telephone calls, attending networking events, asking satisfied clients for referrals and other techniques.
- **The Newsletter:** Many companies distribute a monthly or a quarterly newsletter to their clients and prospects. The content of these newsletters focuses on topics that clients and prospects would find extremely valuable. An effective newsletter could contain feature articles, testimonials and other information that would help describe the full range of services a company provides—and position you as an expert.
- **The Website:** A website is a vital marketing tool that helps to inform prospects of services and capabilities via the world-wide web. A website must be well maintained and constantly updated to make it more useful for both clients and prospects. A neglected website can symbolize a lack of organization and can work against you just as it had previously worked for you.
- **Trade Articles:** It is important to develop and publish trade media articles, especially in journals and publications that clients are reading. Once an article has been printed it can then be reprinted later for your own use. Many companies distribute their publications again with their sales literature, or often they will include an article as part of their monthly newsletter.
- **Networking:** Many clients and employees often belong to similar associations, such as Rotaries and Chambers of Commerce. Employees should be encouraged to take on leadership roles within the community. When employees belong to organizations such as these they are representing both themselves and your company to the community and to possible clients.

- **Client Training:** Another way to diversify your services and to get your name out there is to offer client training sessions. Here you can offer training sessions in which you develop a program designed to inform the clients' staffs about your area of expertise as a firm.
- **Trade Shows:** You could attend trade shows and other similar events. Such events are a fantastic opportunity to “see and be seen.” It's a great way to network with potential clients and learn more about what your competitors are and their marketing efforts.

Create a Sales Cookbook to Build Success

If you're not familiar with the concept of a cookbook, it's a plan that connects your marketing and your sales effort—and it's especially important in B2B selling, consulting and many other professions. In essence, you must know:

- **How much** “marketing/networking” you need to generate one “contact.”
- **How many** contacts you need to generate an “appointment.”
- **How many** “appointments” to generate a “proposal.”
- **How many** proposals to generate one “sale.”

By knowing the typical ratios between each step, you can better manage your firm. For example, if you want to make four sales and you have a 20% closing ratio between each step (or one if five moves to the next step), you'll need about 125 contacts to make one sale (125 contacts, 25 appointments, 5 proposals, 1 sale).

If you improve your selling efficiency slightly between each step (say from 20% to 25%), you can dramatically improve your sales results (125 contacts, 31 appointments, 8 proposals, 2 sales). Or in this example, double your sales!

The cookbook is a simple way of managing your behavior. While you have several client projects going on, do you also have enough marketing/networking? Do you have appointments set? Are clients or prospects expecting proposals? If not, now's the time to start rather than wait until the work has dried up and you have a crisis.

Interviewing Skills

How do you get people who don't know you to talk with you on the phone? From telemarketing calls to marketing research interviews, talking to professionals, consumers and other individuals by phone is one the most important—and most difficult—tasks to handle. Have you ever hung up on someone who was cold calling you?

Over the past 20 years, people working for me have completed thousands and thousands of telephone interviews with people they didn't know. We've tried, tested and refined our introductions, tone of voice, pace and virtually every other variable we could think of.

During this time, we have come up with some potent techniques that work to warm up strangers. Give them a try when you're making important calls where you need to gather information and qualify prospects:

- **Pay attention to detail**—Details will make or break you. If you are looking for information, pay attention to what they give you. Take notes.
- **Be pleasant, friendly and confident**—There is nothing worse than receiving a phone call from someone who is rude. If you're friendly, you'll have a lot better chance of keeping the other person on the phone.
- **Listen carefully**—Listening is the most important thing you will do during a phone call. You should avoid distractions like listening to the radio, playing computer games and looking out the window. You should listen to every word they say. This will make the information you gather much more valuable.
- **Act interested**—Not every call you make will be interesting...some may be painful. Has anyone ever called you when you were sleeping? They ask, “Were you sleeping?” The tone of your voice speaks volumes. Make sure it is saying what you want it to say.

- **Practice taking the respondent's point of view**—This works on a couple of levels. You need to remember that you are calling someone at his or her home or place of business (i.e., you are bothering him or her on some level). It is best to position what you're doing as a high value to the person your calling.
- **Help respondent feel at ease**—Making the person on the other end of the line feel comfortable will not only make you more comfortable, but will enable you to elicit the information you are looking for.
- **Don't argue mentally**—Even if you disagree with what the person has to say, try to keep an open mind. Your purpose is not to argue, but to gather information.
- **Respect other's rights**—If someone is busy, or not interested in talking with you, apologize and hang up. Arguing with unwilling participants will ruin your mood, and make you less effective.
- **Know your questions (practice, take a trial run, etc.)**—Knowing the questions you are going to ask will make the conversation run smoothly. The last thing you want is for the call to be awkward, with you constantly apologizing for being unprepared.
- **Stay on track**—Most likely, you will go into every call with a script, an outline or talking points. Stick to it! The script is written for a reason. It will make the call move forward in the most efficient manner possible.
- **Keep your target dials, completes and production in mind**—In most cases, you will have a quota to fill. If you're dialing consumers, you should be making 30-40 dials per hour. Less if you are contacting businesses. Be aware of where you are calling, and keep an accurate record of the quotas you are trying to meet.
- **Ask one question at a time**—The respondent will only be able to answer one question at a time, thus you should only ask one question at a time. It will keep the interview moving quickly, and keep the answers straight.
- **Ask for an appointment or permission to call again**—You're in the business of building relationships so build them.

Picking for Pain

Behind every one of your actions (even the ones that are unconscious to you) is a motivator. There's something that drives you—even if it's deciding to lay down and take a nap. Your motivators are a set of attitudes, beliefs or perceptions you hold about your world that are strong enough to require action. Do you know what they are? Do you know which ones work with your prospects and customers?

Believe it or not, the super achiever and the couch potato are both MOTIVATED. It's just that they are motivated by different things. While one is driven by accomplishment, the other likes the comfort of the sofa and TV.

The simplest way to think about motivators is to divide them into one of two categories:

- 1. Pain:** Pain is a deep-seated problem, challenge, concern of desire. It's something that has gotten strong enough that it needs to be taken care of. We satisfy pain motivators when we do something to get rid of them. Buying a “solution” reduces—and sometimes eliminates—pain.
- 2. Pleasure:** Pleasure motivators make you “feel good” when you think about or do something. It's the opposite of pain. Going out for a nice dinner, watching a moving, a clean house—common motivators that make you feel good and motivate you to spend money on satisfying this feeling.

Each of us has hundreds of pleasure and pain motivators. And so do our customers. The trick is finding out which ones are strong enough that they might be used to influence a buying decision.

I've found that the best way to discover someone's motivators is to ASK QUESTIONS. Then listen for their response. Then ask some follow-up questions until you have a very good idea how much a problem is costing your customer in terms of money, frustration, embarrassment, lost opportunities and any other relevant obstacle.

Asking the right questions during sales calls—to find your prospect's true pain—is the secret to selling. Once you've found 3-4 pains and quantified them, it's much easier to sell your product.

It usually takes me 30 minutes to an hour to do this, so make sure you're spending enough time getting to the real pains.

In working with marketing managers over the years, I've found most have some version of the following 14 pains. I use this list to think of my products' and services' features and benefits. I constantly ask myself what pain they might satisfy. Then, I create questions I can use to uncover these pains:

1. Figuring out how to make products and services stand out in a crowded marketplace.
2. Selling products that only a few people are aware of or understand.
3. Determining the most effective way to increase their company's visibility.
4. Educating customers and prospects to the point that they understand why they need a product, service or idea.
5. Shortening a long sales cycle (the time when someone starts getting interested in your product, service or idea until the time they buy).
6. Writing, developing and designing effective sales materials.
7. Understanding prospect's buying decision processes and learning who the real players are.
8. Building consumer confidence in regards to product quality.
9. Spending a limited amount of money on the most effective marketing techniques.
10. Generating enough sales leads so the company can be successful.

11. Effectively following up on sales leads.
12. Establishing clear marketing objectives and developing a plan that works.
13. Implementing a coherent marketing and sales system.
14. Evaluating and measuring results.

What pains are driving your prospects and customers nuts? If you're not sure, pay attention over the next 3-4 sales calls and they'll come through loud and clear. Once you get a good list of common pains, create questions you can ask in your future calls to help you uncover and quantify them. When you do, you'll find you're discovering their true motivations faster and more precisely.

Writing Proposals

The amount of time and energy you spend writing proposals can have a dramatic impact on your business. Do it well and you'll grow your business. Do it poorly and you'll waste a lot time, energy and frustration in the process. I find it fascinating to look at proposals from different industries and especially from competitors. Both can tell you volumes about how you're coming across compared to what others are doing.

Why is it that some proposals, even for significant dollar volumes for some industries (e.g., \$250,000 for a marketing consulting project), are only one or two pages, while other more detailed proposals (7-10 pages) are for a \$5,000 project?

Let's take a deeper look at proposals and some of the techniques I've found to be most effective in selling marketing and consulting services.

Proposal Skeleton

A proposal is a statement of purpose that is written for someone to accept or reject. To be successful, the proposal must persuade that person to fund (or recommend) your project. Most proposals have the following elements in common:

- **States the problem and analyzes the situation.** Consultants are supposed to solve problems. Most situations can be summed up in a few sentences or paragraphs. This section often sets the tone for the entire project and proves that you were listening to your prospect.
- **Offers a plan, with clearly stated goals, objectives and strategies for solving the problem.** What are you going to do? What methods or approaches will you use?
- **Demonstrates probable success, showing you are capable of doing what you say and offering specified measures to show you have accomplished what you agreed to do.** Client examples, recommendations for how you'll track results, bios, deliverables, etc. are typically included in this part of the proposal. The more you can quantify your return, the easier it is to sell a project—or to help your prospect sell the project internally to his or her company's decision-makers.

- **Outlines the amount of resources that are needed to accomplish the plan.** I like to call this the “investment,” which has a significantly different connotation than “expense” or “budget.”
- **Investments provide a return.** Expenses and budgets are simply spending money tasks.

More and more, the trend in recent years is to write shorter proposal. We're busier now than ever. I've even seen a new book about writing a 1-page proposal. Keep this rule in mind, however. Shorter proposals are almost always more difficult to write than longer ones. They force you to quickly get to the issues and use your words efficiently.

The Long Proposal Format

While it's always best to try to find examples from leading firms within your industry, the following sections (although not necessarily in this exact order) work for a longer (15-100 page) proposal:

1. **Cover letter.** This most likely will be written last, but it is the first thing that will be read by the recipient. It is important to gain the reader's trust and support. They should be printed on your letterhead (not photocopied) and signed (I like blue ink since it stands out more than black).
2. **Title or cover page.**
3. **Table of contents.**
4. **Proprietary Notice.** This is an optional consideration, warning the client that the information in the proposal is confidential and is to be used solely for the purpose of evaluating the proposal. It is not to be disclosed to anyone outside the discussion group without consent. If you've ever had your proposals “stolen” you'll know what I'm talking about. You work hard to come up with a customized plan, only to have all or part of that plan implemented by someone internally or by one of your competitors. I've seen some proposals that go so far as to say that all of the materials provided are the property of the selling firm, until they are paid for in full. Be careful not to become too jaded. There are still plenty of good, honorable people in the world who will respect your materials.

5. **Summary.** The summary should provide a brief background to the project and outline the need for the service or product.
6. **Introduction.** The main purpose of the introduction is to gently lead into the subject, rather than jumping right in. The summary element can be part of the introduction. The introduction can also include a summary of what follows in the remainder of the proposal. This section should generally be less than two pages.
7. **Problem or needs statement.**
8. **Goals and objectives.** Make them specific and quantifiable.
9. **Methodology.** The technical approach to solving the problem is outlined in this section. A task must be measurable and assignable.
10. **Evaluation and Assessment.** How are you planning to measure what you're recommending and know whether it's actually done what you said it would do?
11. **Dissemination of results.**
12. **Timeline and deadlines.**
13. **Project team and their bios.**
14. **Relevant experience.** This section must establish the qualifications of your team and must create a sense of confidence that your team has the technical and organizational expertise to perform the project.
15. **Facilities and resources.**
16. **Budget.**
17. **References.**
18. **Appendices.**

Strategies for Winning More of Your Proposals

Proposal writing isn't easy. If you're winning all of your proposals, you're either extremely talented, simply lucky or not charging enough. The most helpful techniques I've found for winning a proposal (where there's a level playing field) include:

- **Focus on your prospects "pain," their deep-seated concern or desire.** Quantify that pain. What's solving that pain going to mean to them in money, opportunity, less frustration, time, etc. Always look for things you can count. Then find ways of including those items in your proposals.
- **The more "conceptual agreement" you have before you write a proposal, the greater chances you have of winning it.** I like to say, "I'm going to probably come back to you with a plan that does a, b and c. If I can bring that in between \$X and \$Y, does that make sense for now?" This does two things for you. First, it sets an initial framework for your prospect, so they generally know what to expect when you come back. Second, it often tells you before you write a proposal what their budget tolerance might be. Even if they say, "I don't have a budget for this," you have to try to find a way to get a feel for what they might spend. If not, you often waste time writing the proposal.
- **While it's good to know someone's general budget parameters, it's better to give them a lot of ways to say "yes."** Instead of only one approach or one option, give them several approaches and options, each with different price tags. This way, they can buy as much of you as they can afford.
- **No matter how much you love your words, drop them quickly and, instead, use the words of your prospects.** Your prospect wants to buy their words, not yours. Listen carefully for how they describe their problem or situation. What words do they use for customers (clients, patrons, users, etc.)? What do they call their markets? If you have your ears and mind open during the preliminary meetings and discussions, you'll find plenty of cues. When I hear something, I like to jot it down in my notes, which I always reread before writing a proposal.

- **Put yourself in their shoes.** Is your prospect the final decision-maker or will they have to get other people involved? Is there any way you can be there (or at least help them) to sell your proposal? What questions are they likely to have or be asked? Is it clear what you're recommending for each step of your workflow or plan?
- **Use the K.I.S.S. principle—Keep It Short and Simple.** Favor simpler words and shorter sentences over longer ones. While writing in plain language is more difficult, your readers will respect this and you'll have a better idea of what you've promised.
- **Care about your format.** Is it easy to read? Is your spacing good? Limit your document to one or two fonts or one or two font sizes (one for the titles and one for the text). If your budget permits, use professional graphics help to design covers, layout styles, graphics, etc. A few, well-placed visuals can make an entire proposal come alive.

Sales Call

Big time selling is typically the result of doing a lot of little things right. It involves the intangibles that go way beyond the questions you ask, the literature you use or the proposals you write. Start by being prepared. Before meeting with your prospect, make sure you are both mentally and physically prepared for the meeting.

Getting Ready to Win

- **Dress Appropriately.**
- **Do an attitude check.** Make sure you are in a positive state of mind.
- **Clear your head.** Focus on what you can do right now—not on other things you need to take care of after the meeting.
- **Review your notes.** Take a couple hours in advance of the meeting so you're ready to go.
- **Decide to make a good first impression.** Research shows that it takes about four minutes for someone to decide whether they like you or not, how credible you are and how much they should trust you. The rest of the time during your meeting, they will try to confirm or deny this first impression. Very rarely do we hear of stories of people overcoming bad first impressions and going on to land a major deal with a very important customer. First impressions go a long way toward closing a business deal. By going into a first meeting with confidence and handling the situation properly you are laying very important foundations for a business relationship.
- **Be a product of the product.** If you don't use the product or service you're selling, why should your prospect? If you sell Hondas, don't drive a Jeep. In order to be a successful salesperson you must be able to talk personally about your products and services.

Jim Rohn, one of my favorite motivational speakers, once said: “Learn to work harder on yourself than you do on your job. If you work hard on your job, you'll make a living. If you work hard on yourself, you'll make a fortune!”

People who are passionate about what they do rarely stop thinking about it for very long. They are constantly looking for new ideas, new strategies and new customers to contact. This does not mean you should strive to be a workaholic, but use your time wisely to improve yourself. Read articles and publications to keep yourself current. Stop daydreaming. Think of productive ways you could better your business.

Qualifying Prospects

- 1. Determine quickly if you really can help.** A good salesperson should know the type of customers they work best with, and they should also know if the people they are meeting with are the right kinds of customers for their organization. After a few questions, you should be able to determine if it makes sense to keep talking. If not, end the meeting. I recently got a call from a prospect who wanted help completing interviews. It took me about 2-3 minutes to find out that their budget was too small for me to do a good job for them. I politely offered a referral to another firm that might be able to do the job. I didn't want to waste any more of their time, and I didn't want them to waste any more of mine.
- 2. Address concerns completely.** When a concern is brought up, do not attempt to glide over it. Stop for a moment and consider what could be causing this concern. Is it a real objection? If so, take a moment to prepare your response. Then fully address the concern with the customer. There's no point trying to get a prospect to purchase a product or service that they truly cannot use.
- 3. No mutual mystification.** Miscommunications are a major problem in our society and often waste loads of time, money and effort. Missed appointments and missed calls can tear down in minutes, what you have spent months preparing. By spending the time to pay more attention to detail and checking everything twice, you will increase your productivity and success. When both sides are clear on what the other wants and needs, your results will increase dramatically.
- 4. Give every presentation 110%.** Never sell a customer short. By doing this, you are showing a lack of respect for the customer. Do not take short cuts in your sales approach; you will only lose the sale. By giving your all in every presentation you give, you are showing the customer that they are important to you.

5. **Ask for the decision.** As a salesperson it important to know whether or not an individual is able to make a decision. This is a big trap for some salespeople, because they are afraid to ask for the sale. If you ask your prospect for a “yes” or “no” decision—and they say no—you've lost nothing. You have also saved yourself a lot of time and frustration. When someone says, “maybe,” I start worrying.

6. **Tell your prospects about other customers who are using your products and services.** Prospects do not want to be lab rats. The idea of being the first to try something is frightening, and many prospects want to know about others who have made such a decision before them. By telling prospects about other customers like themselves you will help set their minds at ease. Use examples of customers who have bought your product or use your service and it is as if you are giving them a permission slip to invest in you and your service. By setting the customers minds at rest you will gain ground in convincing them to buy through you. Whenever you can, use examples from companies or individuals your prospect already knows.

Asking for Referrals

Most successful consultancies and professional service firms are built through referrals-- recommendations from people you know to people you don't know who might be able to use your services. Sure, web sites, literature, listings and other techniques can help you identify prospects, but nothing beats a qualified referral. And referrals are likely to remain the lifeblood of many businesses.

How to Ask for Referrals

Referrals are an effective means of getting new customers because these leads are already pre-qualified. There's already a belief that people they referred you to has a need for or would benefit from your products or services. People trust their friend's, colleague's or family's recommendation. A referral transfers that trust to you.

How do you get referrals? There are many ways, including:

- **You have to ask for it!** Don't wait for your customers to volunteer information. Providing referrals is a learned behavior. You have to train your customers to think of you--and think of you frequently to get referrals.
- **It's important how you ask.** Don't say, "Do you know anyone who could use my products or services?" This is far less productive than, "Do you know anyone in this situation? Or, do you know someone who works in this industry or this type of organization?" It's hard for most people to think of everyone they know right off the bat. Getting them to think of people in categories is much easier.
- **Be grateful.** No one has to give you referrals. They are gifts. It's expected that you'll treat this gift accordingly. This typically means two things. First, you'll actually follow-up with the lead. Second, you'll thank the person who gave you the lead. Simple thank you notes (hand written) work great. Small gifts are nice too. I recently referred a friend to a real estate agent. He bought a house. The real estate agent sent a beautiful blanket with a picture of a house and my name on it. Every time I see the blanket, I think of the real estate agent. Then I start thinking of who else I might send her way.

- **Give more than you get.** Instead of always waiting for other people to give you referrals, give some to them. This means you have to learn what other people are capable of and listen for problems. You connecting the dots is the first step. Make sure you refer people you trust to other people you trust. I think it's a lot better to make a few qualified referrals rather than a bunch of wild possibility referrals that typically only waste everyone's time.
- **Build a mastermind or referral network.** There are plenty of formal lead groups where a limited number of people (one from each non-competitive business category) exchange leads. You don't have to be this formal. Four or five of the right kinds of friends and contacts can produce a lot of productive referrals. Make an effort to touch base with each of these contacts at least once a month.
- **When appropriate, set up incentives for referrals.** Discounts, literature swaps and other tools can be used to reward individuals who give referrals. A medical researcher offers physicians who find qualified patients for pharmaceutical drug studies \$50 for each patient they refer. This incentive helps the referring physicians listen more attentively and reduces the overall marketing cost of recruiting patients.
- **Make it easy for people to refer you.** Give them your cards. Make it easy to find your web site. Keep in touch with them. Call them once in a while when you don't want something. Send them copies of articles or other information that they might find interesting or helpful. Give them phone numbers you're likely to answer (so they don't have to track you down or leave constant messages).
- **Remember that lost prospects, non-buyers and other people who didn't or aren't qualified to buy your services might be able to provide you referrals.**
- **Remind your professional service providers—accountants, bankers, financial planners, lawyer, etc.—that you appreciate referrals.** Many of them know the intimate details of other companies and can make high level referrals for your services.
- **While it's often assumed, make sure that you have permission from the person who gave you the referral to use their name.** Find out something about the relationship between the person giving you the referral and who they are suggesting you contact. Use some of these details when you contact the referral.
- **Ask the person making the referral if they would call the referral and mention that you'll be following up with them.** This is a great way to warm up your prospect before you call and a gracious courtesy if you're giving the referral.

How to Make a Positive Impression on Referrals

Getting the referral is only half the battle. Actually contacting the referral, setting up a meeting, writing a proposal, closing a deal and receiving repeat business won't happen automatically. Here are some thoughts on how to make an initial contact to a referral that you've been given.

- **Go to their company web site and spend a few minutes looking around.** This will help you at least understand the size of the company, how they are organized and give you a little time to remind yourself of the kinds of work you have done for their industry or companies facing similar situations.
- **Use the person's name who gave you the referral and the relevant circumstances.**
- **I like to call by phone to introduce myself, but email has also worked.** It should depend upon the person you're trying to reach.
- **When on the phone, try to get your referral talking as quickly as possible.** Ask questions. “Do you know why they suggested I call you? What's your current situation? What are you trying to do? What's working and what's not working at the moment?”
- **Have your elevator presentation ready to go.** This is a short 30 second to one minute description of what you do and who you do it best with. This is something that should be practice, flow naturally and be customized based on what you know of your prospects current situation.
- **Request a face-to-face meeting.** As soon as you can, see if you can set up a face-to-face meeting where you can talk in greater detail and have a better chance of controlling the sales dynamics. If you're doing inside sales or the prospect is too far away to justify a meeting, schedule a follow-up call to spend more time exploring their situation.
- **Send a thank you note after your first conversation—even if you don't get a face-to-face meeting or a request for proposal.** I've won a lot of projects several months after I thought they were dead. It turned out that the prospect just wasn't ready to make a buying decision. When they were, they thought of me.
- **If appropriate, include the contact in your ongoing marketing program (newsletter, periodic updates, etc.).**

Building Relationships

Lifetime Customer Value—or the total amount that a customer invests in your business over the length of their relationship with you—is one of the most important marketing concepts you can use to grow your business. By its very definition, lifetime customer value forces us to focus on and build the relationships with customers we already have. It gets us away from the “acquisition” and “transaction” mentalities that trick us into always looking for the next new customer and the next sale.

- 1. Refer a lead to them.**
- 2. Send notes.**
- 3. Introduce them to a good contact.**
- 4. Send thank you notes**—especially written ones.
- 5. Help them with a problem.**
- 6. After learning about a challenge they are facing, ask them how things worked out the next time you see them.**
- 7. If they need a new job, do whatever you can to help them find one.** Your contacts, referrals and introductions may not lead to their next offer, but it’s the right thing to do and your support is always appreciated.
- 8. Recommend a good supplier to them.**
- 9. Send your newsletter, news releases or other information about what you’re currently working on.**
- 10. Meet for breakfast, lunch or dinner**—and pick up the check!
- 11. Send tickets for a special event.**
- 12. Send articles to them about their industry, competitors or other areas of interest.**
- 13. Send information about an interesting seminar or conference.**
- 14. Ask for their advice**—customers always have great insights about your business. Many have already successfully addressed the problems you’re currently facing.
- 15. Send a funny cartoon, quotation or story.** Everyone enjoys a good laugh.
- 16. Warn them of a potential problem.**
- 17. Call from time to time.**
- 18. Send them a book you think they will enjoy.**
- 19. Visit their booth at a trade show.**
- 20. Send a post card.**

Two-Minute Think

Success that is unmeasured—and not quantified—is not success at all. Marty Napolitano, a cofounder of the Pennysaver publication in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania and self-made millionaire, is a master salesman. It's a pleasure to watch him work. He knows how to overcome resistance and objections. He is sharp and fun to be with.

The Pennysaver is a publication that lists classified ads. It grew from a start-up rag to a respectable marketing vehicle.

I remember the first call I ever went on with Marty several years ago. The meeting went well and we sold a \$5,000 consulting and training package. As we walked back toward the car, he stopped, looked straight at me and said, "We have to do a two-minute think."

"What is a two-minute think?" I asked. He went on to explain that it was a technique used for thinking about what went well and what didn't go so well during a sales call, a meeting, telephone conversation or presentation.

So, for the next couple of minutes, we stood there and talked about what went well. What we said, how we positioned our bodies, our prospects' reactions were quickly covered. We also talked about what we might improve during the next call.

Marty later explained to me that this technique played a big role in his success. He had used it to coach his sales staff at the Pennysaver and in virtually every aspect of his business and professional life.

He had developed a habit of quickly reinforcing successful behaviors and identifying problem ones. By conditioning his mind about what worked well, he could continue reaching his objectives. By identifying problems, he had a feedback system that could be used to make corrections.

I've used the technique ever since. Try it. It will improve your business too.