

4 common problems when it comes to getting new clients

And how to avoid them

Kim Mason
SALES & MARKETING

I've written a series of guides which will help you adopt a new approach to selling, finding new business (without dropping your prices) and positioning yourself well.

They're all here and available to download from my website if you need any help:

Get clear on your positioning, mission and messaging

New business planning - How to!

How to attract new clients, Without the hard (or even the soft) sell

But sometimes, even with the best of intentions and planning, things go wrong.

Leaving you wringing your hands and or banging your head in despair.

So, to save any further headbanging (and because things that go wrong can normally be corrected with some clear thinking and strategy), I'm going to talk you through 5 really common problems when it comes to getting new clients.

Better still, I'm going to give you the inside track, so that you can make sure these problems don't happen (or happen again) to you.

Ever been stumped when a prospect asks, "Why should we use you"?

Ever had a hot prospect disappear off your radar just when you thought they were ready to buy? Ever found yourself under pressure to drop your prices or worse still, on the end of the phone to your telemarketer listening to a deafening silence when you ask how many sales (signed on the line, get down to work, prospect becomes client kind of sales) have materialised?

If so, you're not alone, so read on and let's get you sorted. So to speak.

Problem 1 - What to do when your prospect asks, "But why should we use you?"

Ever been at a sales meeting with a great prospect when they've said...*"This is all very interesting and your case studies are fine, but tell me, why would we use you?"*

Ever felt that sinking feeling when a prospect tells you they're happy with their current supplier, so they'd need a really good reason to switch – can you give them one?

You can feel pretty small and out-of-control of the sales conversation at that stage. And that's not a good place to be.

You might find yourself resorting to clichés about the wonderful benefits your product has, the great value and ROI you can bring, the big names you've worked with (even if it was 10 years ago).

When what you *really* want to be doing is helping your prospect solve their business problems. Because you absolutely know you could do a great job, they're a great fit and that you can bring more to the table than their incumbent.

Good and bad news

Here are five common reasons that explain why you may be having these out-of-control conversations.

1. **You're using a telemarketer** to get appointments, with little or no supporting marketing
2. **You're not a thought leader** in your area, and your prospect has never heard of you before now
3. **They've never heard you speak**, read your articles or attended any webinars or events that you've held
4. **"Let's just meet for a quick coffee** and I can explain in more detail what we do" – was how the sales meeting was set
5. **"We're up seeing a client really close to you**, so why don't we meet for a quick coffee.... etc." – was how the meeting was set

The bad news is that it's very hard to move a prospect forward towards a sale if these are the things you're hearing, or these are what you're feeling. The good news is that it can be turned around.

Here's how.

Take control of the sales conversation. Prevent this happening in the first place. Always easier said than done, but here are some ways to get you thinking about it – you can see immediately how they link to the points above:

- **Become a true thought leader** - and here's some practical help with that
- **Write useful articles** that help solve your clients' problems
- **Run valuable webinars or workshops** that help your client to do their job

better

- **Give stuff away for free** – knowledge, advice, tips, support, all linked to the first three points
- **Don't telemarket** until you have at the very least, some basic supporting marketing in place
- **Don't aim to get quick meetings over coffee.** These are rarely serious business meetings, these are a coffee, and are often the by-product of a little too much pushing, and a gentle, non-busy or junior-level prospect. (Notable exceptions are referrals and recommendations, where it's a quick chemistry meeting and can easily progress to a business focus.)

But say you do get a quick meeting over coffee. Should you turn it down? Not necessarily.

First, qualify your prospect

Perhaps blindingly obvious to you, but it still worries me how many people I see going into a sales meeting armed with a credentials deck and no real understanding of the prospect's business – or a clear idea of whether or not they are the right company for them to be doing business with in the first place.

Do your homework before you meet. At the very least:

- **Check them out** at Companies House. Are they the right size, head office in the right location (Timbuktu anyone?), right industry?
- **Read** their company website and blog articles.
- **Check your contact out** on LinkedIn. What do they write about and share, who do they follow? Who else works in their team? Which other employees would you ideally need to get to know? Who's their boss?
- **Google them** in the broadest sense – you'll soon find out a bit about their culture and what they like to get involved in.
- **Google them** to keep an eye out for any PR. Positive or negative, you might learn a bit about their wider business ups and downs.
- **Now step into their shoes** and see if you can imagine – from your experience of other clients' problems – what types of challenges they might have that

you could solve.

If they're not a good fit, say goodbye

You would never have had a long term, profitable relationship anyway, so don't waste time trying to make them fit when you could be busy building real relationships with lots of other lovely new clients.

If they're a good fit, then turn that meeting around from a quick chat over coffee to a serious business meeting.

How to create a sales meeting from a quick coffee

Your aim is to provide value every time a prospect has contact with you. And if you manage to do this, then you can meet as equals, rather than as lowly supplier begging a buyer to give you work, even though they're happy with their incumbent.

A useful email to help you turn a meeting around

Hello [prospect],

You and I have a 60 minute meeting in the diary on Thursday 24th February.

I appreciate this is down right now as a coffee and introduction, but rather than just share what we each do (yawn....), I'd rather be useful and have you leave that meeting feeling like you've either learnt something new or gained something that you value.

So, if you can share with me a problem you currently have, or might have in the near future (that's relevant to what we're discussing), then I'll do a bit of homework and run a 45 minute session to help you start cracking it.

We may do some brainstorming, need a flip chart, marker pens... and there may be interactive questioning or facilitation. You might also like to invite a couple more people into the room so you can get early input from others who might be involved down the line.

We think of it this way: if this meeting was a 60 minute session with a consultant from one of the big four, billing £200/hour, (and yes, they do outsource their X to us), then you'd expect a lot more than a chat. You'd have some tough questions for them, that you'd want answers to.

Now think of us as that consultant – and ask away.

How does that sound to you? We're hoping it will be more stimulating than a general

credentials meeting where we wibble on for an hour about our services, benefits and ROI.

Kind regards,

Kim

Changing the mindset of the prospect

This whole approach (tone notwithstanding as I may have been far more casual than you might want to be) is designed to change the mindset of the person you're due to meet with.

No longer is it about them having to listen to a potential supplier sell them stuff they don't necessarily need (or want) for 60 minutes. Wishing they had never agreed to the meeting in the first place.

Suddenly *they* have the opportunity for a spot of free consultancy – and it's all about them and what they need.

Did you see what I did in para 4? "*... like to invite a couple more people into the room...*"

Bring other people into the sales meeting.

That's the invitation for your prospect to get some other people around the table to share in this bit of free consultancy, which might help them all do their job better.

It might also help your prospect to bring a wider team on board – especially where a business case needs to be built, to get the go ahead for a project.

For you, this will help bring in others relevant to the **buying cycle (jargon alert)**. In higher value services, there's rarely only one person involved in buying – there's often a gatekeeper, influencer, budget holder or decision maker as well (hopefully self-explanatory names). The person you're meeting may hold one, none or several of these roles.

You may need to get to know them all

The more people in the buying cycle you have on board, the greater your chances of connecting with your prospect in such a way that you are building the relationship, adding more value – and winning the work.

The role of case studies in a sales meeting

So, you've run 45 minutes of brilliant facilitation, brainstormed their challenges, helped

them with budgeting different solutions and sketched out a rough project plan. (And yes, you do need someone at that sales meeting who can do all this, plus think on their feet.)

Now's the time to whistle up some comparative case studies demonstrating:

- Your approach in action and the type of work that has then followed
- The results you've had for other firms from applying this sort of thinking at the beginning
- The firms most similar to your prospect that you've done this for

What you're doing here is reassuring the prospect that this high-value, consultancy-led approach is what (in part) differentiates you from others. And that you've applied it many times over, with reassuringly similar (and positive) ROIs.

#Your message to them: you know what you're doing, because you do this for a living, you do it all the time and you're very good at it.

So, get on out there, take a different approach to your sales meetings and bring those prospects some serious value.

They will remember you for it.

Problem 2 - Oh no, that hot prospect just disappeared

You know the one. Great client prospect, hot project, then radio silence...

You made contact a while ago, met several times and they've been to two of your events. You feel sure the fit is good, they're the right client for you, and you're the right supplier for them.

You very recently had the in-depth one-to-one conversation about solving a sticky problem in their business. You've talked return on investment. They've bought into the benefits and introduced you to the boss, who looked you in the eye, shook your hand and said they were really looking forward to working with you.

So you price up the details for them – urgently at their request – and put accurate and realistic timescales in, even do a draft project plan, send it over and... nothing. De nada.

Echoing silence. Tumbleweed rolls by.

Your prospect no longer wants to speak to you

Calls go unanswered, voicemails flash feebly and emails sit sadly in overstuffed inboxes (or do they get auto-deleted on arrival – eek!). Colleagues are vague and promise to pass messages on, the receptionist is always helpful but the result is the same.

You even try a friendly text or two, hoping they're well and looking forward to hearing about how the project can progress.

Top tip: stop at two texts unless you suddenly have something new of high value to offer for free, no strings.

Your prospect – your lovely, brilliant fit, high-value, friendly, hot prospect – has disappeared and does not want to speak to you. Arggh! You feel baffled and frustrated.

Various thoughts run through your head, from the practical to the seriously unlikely.

First you tell yourself it's all about them: well, they are very busy. They've probably just picked up a huge urgent project. They are on a (very long) holiday. They have been struck down with a nasty illness (queue guilt for this one)...or maybe they've been sacked?

Then you start thinking it's more about you: they never really liked me anyway, they were just being polite...

What did I do wrong?

Was it the way I wrote that last email?

Did I come across as rude or offensive by mistake?

Your mind can do funny things. This type of thinking is a slippery slope and definitely needs to be cut short so you can get on with acquiring new business and maintain confidence.

The reasons why prospects actually disappear

The first thing to remember is that this – in the B2B world and particularly in professional services – is absolutely normal. It is not just you. It is not *about* you. It is absolutely *not* personal. It's vital you accept this so that you don't waste valuable time questioning the wrong things. (NOTE: If you have been rude, offensive, arrogant or

insulting in any way – it may of course have been you).

In my experience there are four main reasons for the vanishing prospect client which crop up repeatedly. There are of course lots more, but these are the ones I come across over and over again.

1. Your prospect was never the decision maker

This is the most common reason in my experience. This is a tough one, because this is down to you (or the person managing the prospect, and is more often seen in less experienced biz dev/sales people). The prospect was so friendly, talked so knowledgeably, acted like a decision maker, wanted to be the decision maker – so it was easy not to question that assumption and to go with the flow. Now they've overstepped the mark, don't have the authority needed to progress, and you're paying the price.

2. You got the fit wrong

By fit, I mean that this prospect should never have got through your qualification process – and if you don't have one, see this as a timely reminder that you need to set one up (and here's my free guide to help with that). Typically poor fit decisions include – they are much bigger/smaller than your usual clients – the work was very interesting but outside your core expertise – you hadn't qualified them on price sensitivity early on in the buying cycle. Either your overall positioning or your qualification process needs improvement.

3. They have left the company.

This one is more common in certain roles than others. Senior execs who are trying to get a project started or completed before they go are the worst for this. They also can't afford to let anyone know they're thinking of leaving, and may disappear immediately on gardening leave. For their colleagues picking up the pieces, communication with new suppliers and potential projects is understandably the last thing on their mind. If your prospect was your only real contact, there's not much you can do here other than work hard to create helpful new contacts who can get it back on the table.

4. The CEO/MD has resigned

This is an easier one, because usually not a soul has been expecting it, including your prospect. Everything gets put on hold, including your budding relationship. One of

those reasons you can understand. Drat. Wait, monitor and keep in touch.

What should you do?

First, try and find out why they've gone silent. Change the conversation you're trying to have in order to give the prospect an easy and gracious way to back out, rather than worry about how to let you down gently. Offer your prospect a gentle way out.

"I can see this project isn't going ahead as planned, but I'd really like to find out why. Perhaps you could ping me a quick email with a mention of why so I can close the file. We can always reopen it when the time is right or if things change your end, we'll be here!"

I've had luck in the past with this approach achieving two things.

1. It **reopens communication** as all the pressure has gone and they can more easily explain the real reason they have gone quiet. You may find that a new decision maker has appeared and your prospect has lost a bit of autonomy (and face).
2. It can **reignite the project** as the prospect may have simply had so much on – maybe that 'vital deadline' they had mentioned was not a real one – and they start worrying that they could be left without their ideal supplier ready to go at a moment's notice.

And once you find out the reason why, then you can do something about it.

Problem 3 - Reducing prices to increase sales? Try this instead.

Feeling like you've got to reduce prices to try and win a new client is horrible. It saps your energy and enthusiasm for that client and ultimately for your business.

And if you do charge less to bring that prospect in, it can set a very difficult tone for your ongoing relationship – where you feel you aren't being fairly paid for the work you're doing. Because you're not. And, of course, the impact of your new pricing goes straight onto the bottom line. (Or rather, comes off it.)

But what can you do about it?

How NOT to reduce prices – but still win new work

In my opinion, and particularly relevant for any type of B2B consultancy or professional service provider – whether it be technical, creative, specialist or project management related – there is one much more effective and achievable approach.

The better your positioning, the fewer alternatives your client will perceive they have and the more robust your pricing can be.

Let's unpick that statement and look at why it could be true.

Step into your prospect's mind

Imagine for a moment a lovely prospect with a need for an outsourced, experienced management consultant (or... structural engineer/digital strategist/surveyor/market researcher).

Lots of those about, so this prospect (let's call her Claire) can take her pick – and she can stay in control of the buying cycle, and therefore, in control of the price. Claire's first impression is. *Yay, plenty of choice, this should be fine.*

Prospects will search online simply to compare other suppliers to a recommendation. But when it comes down to actually selecting a supplier, Claire wants to get it right. First, she gets a recommendation. Tick.

Then Claire does a spot of Google homework and finds only three firms (from the 25 that first rocked up using an organic Google search) that have what *she* thinks of as decent experience in her sector.

Which *she* happens to think is quite important. They'd understand the industry, the inevitable jargon, the competition and any rules and regs that are going to impact on her project. Without spending lots of time and money (hers) getting to grips with it.

Sector experience counts for more than you think

Of these three firms:

- One of them is a well-known, global operation with a head office in New York and 130 offices around the world.
- One appears to be UK based, about 14 people strong, based in Hampshire.
- The third one's in London, with what looks like about 220 people.

All have professional, easy-to-navigate websites with clear copywriting and suitable

client portfolios. No-one to rule out for just looking crap, muddled or digitally clueless then!

NB. Your website can't *make* you the sale, but it can *lose* you the sale.

Now, our Claire has never been one for the global providers. *Too expensive, hierarchical and you always get shunted on to dealing with the juniors.*

So she digs a bit deeper into the two smaller, UK ones. Looking at their online portfolios and case studies she finds that one of these firms has done a couple of fairly similar projects for her direct competitors.

Hmm ... interesting. Worth getting them in for a bit of intel, if nothing else. Be keen to hear how they tackled stuff, or what they learnt that's relevant to me.

So she sets up calls with both of the UK firms she found on Google. (The supplier that a colleague recommended will get shortlisted regardless).

What a prospect thinks when shortlisting suppliers

1. **One is quick to reply** on email, quick to set up the call, bang on time and has three senior and relevant people on the call, including two directors. This makes Claire feel important.
2. **The other is pretty good** on all counts and has one director, one senior bod and one junior on the call. This is fine.

The phone calls continue:

1. **One tells her all about their offer**, lists their services, runs through an impressive client list of well-known brands and mentions all the different sectors they have worked in. They expand on all the other services they can offer (the word turnkey got used a lot) without seeming to notice that Claire doesn't need – or have any remote interest – in these.
2. **The other asks Claire an awful lot of questions** about the wider context. What type of project does she have, what are the timescales, what are her biggest concerns, how does she like to work, what learnings has she or her firm made in similar projects and what do they look for in a supplier. Claire can feel them listening to her and attempting to understand her position.

Asking prospects' about themselves, and what problems they need help with, is

always a better starting place than telling them about your firm and what you do.

Claire talks a little more about her specific project and need. *So what I'm actually looking for is help with...*

1. **One firm asks even more specific questions** and begins to challenge – gently but definitely – some of her assumptions or thoughts on approach, causing her to stop and think.
 - Initial options for project structure are shared and the pros and cons discussed. She can hear them jotting down key points that are made.
 - Claire feels almost as though the project has begun and she's at the first scoping/briefing meeting.
 - She's stretched her own thinking, learnt stuff and is enjoying the pace.
2. **The other firm does some listening** and explains in more detail about the big-name clients for whom they've done similar projects.
 - They breakdown the process they would use to approach her project and explain how it works in more detail. They use the words we and us a lot.
 - They give her some familiar industry names to contact directly for references. Claire is pleased, and makes a note to call them asap.

Challenging a prospect's viewpoint – nicely and professionally – can demonstrate deep experience and insight. Which (if you provide professional services) is probably part of what they are hiring you for.

As they wrap up the call, Claire asks about pricing:

1. **One firm asks Claire to send a full and detailed brief** through in order for them to be able to give her a full and detailed quote.
 - They explain they will send through their rate card with the quote.
 - Claire asks if they have any rough idea of the costs meanwhile as she's putting the business case forward later today to the board.
 - They explain they wouldn't want to give her an inaccurate estimate, so promise to get a detailed breakdown of costs to her within 24 hours of receiving her brief.

- Claire feels disheartened by the amount of work she'd have to do to get a decent brief done when she's not really sure they've pinned down the approach internally yet.
2. The other firm gets out some paper (it's a Skype call) and sketches out the likely project stages, with ballpark ranges next to them.
 - Fair enough, these are fairly wide ranges, but Claire finds herself trying the costs on for size and feeling confident that her scope and budget fit within those ranges.
 - Claire feels they must have done this sort of work a lot to have the confidence to list ballparks, and feels reassured by that. It's also helpful for her early stage business planning.
 - They give approximate total costs for similar projects with clients in her sector, tackling specifically her problems – but without naming names of course.
 - This firm explains to Claire the main factors that affect costs from their perspective within each stage. This is really useful and gives her a good idea of what to consider when writing the brief.

Giving a prospect even a basic insight into how a project is costed (even if you aren't confident enough to give ballparks) will help them understand you – and their own project brief – better.

Getting the inside track to win new business.

Hopefully this mythical phone call between Claire and her prospective suppliers will have demonstrated two things.

1. **Smaller firms succeed at new business** when they are tightly positioned and target customers who are the right fit for what they do. Prospects can clearly see when a supplier has real and solid experience in what they need doing, for firms which are like theirs. If you need more help with your positioning, [download my free guide here](#).
2. **Any firm can improve their chances of winning new business** by actively listening to the prospect from the very start. Be client curious. By asking careful questions, by adding value and providing useful insight or information

that the client appreciates, they can soon gain an inside track on the supplier selection process. This will give them an advantage.

When a niche positioning and an active listening approach come together, you can price robustly, because you will be the supplier of choice.

And if you have a good reputation too...

Throw in a decent thought-leadership marketing strategy – so the client has heard you speak at a conference, read your articles and e-book or attended your workshops – and suddenly you're the supplier that they want to do business with.

And the one they will be prepared to pay more for. No more reducing prices. Bingo!

Problem 4 - How to keep prospects happy when you're too busy to take them on.

I rang a tree surgeon the other day to get a quote to cut back two sycamores looming over our house. (Bear with me on this).

His immediate reply was this. "I can't do that till at least the middle of December. I'm short staffed and am really, really busy."

"Oh, OK." I replied. "Never mind then." And I hung up.

*Golden rule (or maybe a silver one). Never say what you **can't** do. It'll lose you a customer. And then a referrer.*

What if that tree surgeon had said this instead:

"Sycamores, eh? Lovely trees, but can be a bit intrusive. Why don't I come out and take a look as soon as I can, get you a quote, then if you're happy we can schedule you in before Christmas?"

What a difference that would have made - even though we still have *exactly the same situation*.

He may still be very busy. He may still be short staffed. But they weren't my problems - they were his. In the first scenario, he didn't offer me a solution - he simply talked about his problems, all the while exuding negativity, so I just went away.

Because that's what I felt he wanted me to do.

#Never be too busy. Make sure you explain when and how you can help.

In the second scenario, he still might not work on my trees till after the middle of December. But because it's now "before Christmas", I'm happy with that.

I might have wanted it done in November (conversation being in mid October), but I'm happy to wait because I liked his attitude. And - crucially - I'm happy to wait because I felt he wanted me as one of his customers.

Now add in the fact that he's clearly busy (though he didn't tell me, it's implied), and I assume he's in demand and has lots of customers to look after, so he must be good at his job. Bingo! Wonderful perception to leave behind.

Odd that I didn't get that same feeling in the first scenario. Hmmm, all a matter of communication.

Dealing with availability in a business or B2B environment

Feeding this conversation back to my husband that evening, we compared it to our own lines of work.

As a director in a large engineering consultancy, with responsibility for both project delivery and bringing in new clients - it immediately struck a chord with him.

"We come across this a lot. Clients or prospects want something done yesterday and of course we already have work scheduled in and engineers committed to other projects. I've had to teach quite a few of my team how to respond positively on availability. Absolutely **no** teeth sucking and frowning. Definitely **no** "Ah, I doubt if we can do that until next spring..." or the real classic "It's a shame you didn't come to us last month, we could have got straight onto it then".

He continued, "How is any of that going to help anyone? The client still needs the work done, and we still want their work. All we need to do is think a little more carefully about how we respond when we **are** really busy."

Discussing what the best responses would be, we came up with these pointers.

- **Always be (honestly) interested** in the work, however busy you are. It just takes an hour or so out of your week - and that time may make the difference between keeping and losing a potential client.
- **When clients ask for 'done yesterday' or 'ASAP'**, treat the conversation as

meaning 'as soon as you are able'. That keeps you in the right mindset for a good result.

- **Never panic and lie.** Don't say you *can* do it this week, when you clearly and absolutely can't. Over-promising and under-delivering is the worst possible outcome. (Clients have memories like elephants for suppliers who do that.) Do, however, tell them when you can definitely do it by - then bring that forward if at all possible.
- **Your first responses** need to begin to solve their problem. Tell them when you can meet to take an extended brief. Tell them when you can *start* on the work (even if not yet clear exactly when you complete it).
- **Bigger projects** typically run in stages. Talk about which specific elements you can start and/or complete in order to get the project moving.
- **Explain to them how they can help** you meet their timescales. Is there some prep they can do? A clearer briefing? A chunk of the work they can do internally - perhaps with a bit of guidance or lighter input from you - until you are ready to begin?

There are so many ways to respond to a client when you're busy, so that they still feel like a valued customer or prospect - and not like someone causing you a problem.

You might need to break a habit or two (in yourself or your team) to get there, but it's simple, doable stuff.

And when you're really too busy - spread the love!

There are other options open to you when you're very definitely too busy to take on the work at all - it just may take a little time and effort...

*The first and best option, because **two** people will love you for it, is to get out and find another great business that does what you do and refer the client to them.*

You've got to be careful here though, and don't just refer them to a similar firm willy nilly, because (rather ironically) your reputation is still involved here. If it doesn't work out for the client, some of their ill-feeling will bounce back towards you, however unfair that feels.

So you need to do your research carefully.

Find a firm with the same sort of ethos or values as you have, a similar price point and standards, and (if possible) a similar general approach to the work. Meet with them, get to know them, check out the whites of their eyes and ideally arrange a mutual quid pro quo for you both to refer.

When this works, it's brilliant. And worth all the time you spent finding that other business.

It keeps the clients happy - the work gets done to the standard they wanted. It keeps you happy - because you never have to let a prospect down. And it keeps the other firm happy - they get your overflow work.

What's not to love about that?

Problem 5 - When telemarketing isn't working for you - what to do next.

You've got that nagging feeling that your telemarketing isn't producing the results you need. And when you delve deeper into your telemarketing stats - past the emails sent, proposals produced and meetings set - into the territory of actual new client acquisition, you find the hard-nosed proof.

Yes, 85 new companies were 'contacted' last month. 55 or so were '*made aware*' of who you are and what you sell. 39 '*were keen to receive*' your marketing collaterals by email. 11 '*decision makers*' were introduced to your offer in detail. 6 '*meetings*' were set.

This are the stats - give or take - for the past four months. But you've got no new clients. So what the hell is going wrong with your telemarketing?

Let me first say this is a far more common situation than it needs to be, and one that a lot of my clients find themselves in. The good news is, you can fix it.

The less good news, is that it's not a quick fix. (Which often means it's the right fix, just not good news for the desperate, the impatient or both).

Things to get right before you start telemarketing

Let's start at the beginning with some of the things you really need to get right before you even consider telemarketing.

Positioning

If you only do one thing, then get your positioning sorted. It nearly always comes back to positioning, so please, if you haven't already, download my free guide and start working through it before you go any further.

Find, agree, articulate and be really clear on what your positioning is, or should be. By positioning I mean your business focus, your niche - what you do best, with a good profit margin, for the right customers.

Once, and only when, you are clear on your positioning - will you find that you know exactly who you're targeting, why and with what story.

The first clear outcome should be that you have a smaller prospect list because you're targeting a more narrowly defined group of people. Yay - this is good!

The right data

If you go through the right process to get to a properly focused positioning, then you will have identified the target audience that you really want to work with.

It needs to be a much smaller list than you expect (unless you're a big corporate who needs hundreds of new clients per year to survive).

Because with a small, targeted, closely connected prospect list you can talk to them all about the same things. They will have similar problems and issues that you can solve. They will share the same networking groups, events or conferences. They will be in the same place (marketing wise that is - they can of course still be scattered across the UK, the continent or the globe).

Clean data

Now make sure your lovely, small but perfectly formed list is clean. What does clean mean? Well, I've got a free guide that can help you with this, but clean means the right people are (still) at the right companies. Clean means they are spelt correctly. Clean means you have email addresses for them, and telephone contact numbers. Switchboard is find to start with.

Clean means you have permission to contact them. Hop over to the IDM (Institute for Direct Marketing) if you aren't sure about this one.

It's worth investing money in cleaning your data before you market to it. Far (FAR) better you contact the right prospect two or three times with the right message, than contact the wrong ones fifty times. Just do the maths.

CRM (Customer Relationship Management) system.

I'm not an expert on CRMs. At all. But I know that you do need somewhere technically robust, cloud-based, flexible and up-to-date to keep your data. Otherwise it gets too hard to manage, and you will waste a lot of time fiddling around with your data to make it work for you when it comes to any form of marketing, including telemarketing.

Don't sell, help.

There's a lot to say on this one, so much so that I've written a short book on the subject which you can download for free here.

It's the principle that matters here. Your role as a supplier is no longer to sell stuff to people - no one likes that, it's the bygone era of sales - but it's to add value to your prospect, solve their business problems or reduce their work headaches.

If both you - and your telemarketer - are coming at introductions from this angle, then you would approach a new conversation from the perspective of whether or not you can help them. Typically this help comes from offering advice, as you're likely to be more of an expert in your area than they are.

This advice - regardless of whether or not the prospect ever buys anything from you - must be valuable to them. It should be useful, specific and relevant. And given in the right spirit, for free.

Qualifying prospects

One of the main roles of telemarketing should actually be to qualify your prospects.

Connected to the point above, you're NOT selling, you're helping. The way that you're helping is by working out - nicely - whether or not it's relevant for the person you're talking to, to ever use you as a supplier. Because it might not be! (Ice and eskimos spring to mind here).

If qualified out, they can be removed happily from your database. If qualified in, you can be happy in the knowledge that any relevant communications from you will be relevant to them. If they are relevant, they are most likely to be received by your prospect in the spirit in which they were intended - to advise, inform and be useful - not to sell.

Telemarketing cannot survive without other marketing

If you do no other forms of marketing, your telemarketing will almost invariably fail.

Unless, that is, you have invented a world first and have no competitors. Even then, it's going to be a challenge to persuade people that you're either a reputable firm or your product is legit.

Think a moment

Would you rather be contacted by a firm with a good reputation, that has spoken at industry events, or one you'd never heard of?

One whose directors are active on LinkedIn with relevant industry commentary, articles and advice, or one whose directors seem to barely exist (except for that lovely photo on their website, of course)?

One which runs breakfast briefings and workshops you're regularly invited to (some of your contacts have been, you'd love to go but you've never had the time) or one which no-one you know has ever had contact with?

One which rocks up on the first page of Google when you're doing some initial supplier research, or one that you can't find unless you type in the actual company name?

Not so hard to see which you'd prefer. And that's exactly what your own prospects will prefer too.

Other signs your telemarketing is going wrong

Apart from the stats I quoted at the beginning, which speak for themselves, there are other clear signs that tell you **your telemarketing is going awry**.

Think of them as **red flags** which should point you to do a thorough review of your telemarketing activity and look very closely at your return on investment, if you have any:

- You start to dread going to sales meetings that have been set through telemarketing.
- When you attend prospect meetings, they aren't expecting you at all and you hear, "Oh, we're so sorry, but Jim/Jane/Jamil is out at a meeting all day."
- You go to meetings with prospects whose first question is "So, remind me who you are and why you are here?"
- When you get to meetings, you are fobbed off onto a junior prospect, rather than the person you expected to meet (the decision maker). Or the person

who you understood was the senior decision maker turns out to be an intern/short-term maternity leave cover/not a prospect at all.

- You are sent to meetings with people who are in specialist sectors that you aren't and your firm really doesn't have great experience in or solid knowledge of. Or you're meeting with much smaller/bigger businesses than you've ever worked with before. Businesses that your products and services have never been a very good price fit with.
- Prospects are friendly and happy to meet, but more and more they ask "Your X product sounds great, but why should we use **you**?". You know how to prevent that one now.
- You have tens of thousands of contacts in your database. And you're actually a B2B SME who needs about **four to six new clients a year** to grow at a sensible, sustainable rate. For this size, it's likely that your prospect database should be nearer to 200-400 companies strong.
- Your telemarketer keeps asking for more data, or different data. Or whether you're happy to move into the retail/construction/property/healthcare (delete as appropriate) sector yet?
- Your telemarketer starts asking if they can run some of your supporting marketing initiatives instead of you. Or they ask for more detail on specifically what marketing you have been doing to date - how long for, who to, what key messages?

Keep an eye out for these red flags. If they start to show up, you know things aren't right. But better still, you now have the insights to make sure that they don't show up in the first place.

Kim Mason

07827 297569

kim.mason@allthingsnewbiz.co.uk

allthingsnewbiz.co.uk

I help determined SMEs acquire the right new clients