

The Importance of the Discipline of Appointment Setting

An Excerpt from the upcoming book, *Contrary to Popular Opinion—Cold Calling Does Work!*

By Barry D. Caponi
March, 2011 Newsletter

Two salesmen who haven't seen each other in weeks meet in a coffee shop for lunch.

"How's your day?" asks the first salesman.

"Great! I'm following up on several good leads. I've got a great prospect I'm working with—and I'm waiting on a PO from another client."

"Yeah," says the other salesman, "I haven't sold anything today either."

There are three morals to this story.

1. Conversations like this emanate from an empty pipeline.
2. A continuing flow of closed sales comes from a full pipeline—and a full pipeline comes from a continuous flow of Initial Appointments.
3. "Make no mistake," I said in, *Is Cold Calling Really Dead? Searching for the Elusive Silver Bullet*, "at the end of the day, whether the call is cold or warm, it almost always falls to one of us sales professionals to pick up the phone and dial the number that starts the dialogue that begins the buying process."

What this somewhat humorously attempts to point out is that the ability to set the Initial Appointment that begins the selling process is a critical process to all of us in sales. What it doesn't point out is that it is typically a neglected process. We like to say that it is the elephant in the sales bullpen. Everyone knows it's there, but because no one knows how to solve it, we just gingerly step around it.

Case in point, there are several books and websites out there today devoted to the concept that cold calling doesn't even work—or that it has become an obsolete or unnecessary discipline. (You can find some of them in the Other Resources section of the book.)



If you read through the literature from those who say cold calling is obsolete or dead, you'll find a common theme: replace cold calling with pull marketing programs designed around technology and other activities to eliminate the need for it. Ideas such as website optimization, staying in contact through newsletters, e-mail, networking, and asking for more referrals from our existing customers are good ones, and they all work. As a matter of fact, we do them all and suggest that we all do as many as make sense in our own organizations to cut down on the number of cold calls that our teams must make. But here is the reality: if these pull programs don't generate enough Initial Appointments to fill the pipeline, we must still cold call. And, for the majority of us, they don't and we must.

For most of us in sales, the selling process begins with what we like to call an Initial Appointment. Initial Appointments may be face-to-face, over the phone, or through a web-based technology, but somehow or another, we've got to convince people (we call them targets) that it is in their best interest to open their calendar and make some time for that first meeting with us.

Here's what you need to know about this process. There are basically three sources for an Initial Appointment with a target. They are:

1. Lead-generation marketing campaigns that are designed to get people to raise their hand and tell us they are interested (this includes traditional advertising such as print, TV, radio, and direct mail, plus newer approaches such as social media);
2. Networking and referrals; and
3. Cold calling

But here's the rub with lead generation and referrals: just because someone expresses interest in our solution through one of our marketing programs doesn't mean that we'll get the appointment every time we call for one. Even strong referrals tell us no in exactly the same manner that cold call recipients do—they're just nicer about it because they don't want to offend the person who referred them to us. In other words, the process we follow when asking for an Initial Appointment is exactly the same—regardless of whether the call is warm or cold.



Therefore, the skills, tools, and processes we need to call marketing leads, to follow-up on referrals and networking connections are exactly the same as the ones we need to cold call. That also means that almost everyone who is charged to find new customers—or even expand his or her presence within existing customer accounts—must be able to efficiently and effectively set appointments.

Caponi Performance Group, Inc., along with Contact Science, LLC, provides a holistic solution to Appointment Making by providing a proven methodology that addresses both the effectiveness and efficiency of the process. Visit us at <http://www.coldcalling101.com> and at <http://www.caponipg.com>.

