



About the Author

Carl Davidson is the president of Sales & Management Solutions, a consulting firm specializing in sales and management video training and live seminars. He is the author of several books including *Secrets of Accountability Management*. His articles are read by more than 60,000 sales professionals monthly. Send comments to davidson@salesco.net. For a free demonstration video, list of products and topics and to order the video *Million Dollar Management Secrets*, call 800-941-0068.



Cold or Gold?

Opportunity is Calling, But Who is Answering?

It's one of life's ironies that some of us spend so much to get the phone to ring and so little to turn those calls into appointments.

What's the problem? Many dealerships have a receptionist or bookkeeper who answers the phone. This person rarely is trained on turning calls into appointments. He does his best to answer the customers' questions and the call often goes like this.

"Thanks for calling ... Yes, we sell them ... Yup, we can fix that ... The cost? It's \$2,995 for a softener and \$1,200 for an RO. OK, thanks for calling. If you are interested, call us back and we will send one of our consultants out to see you."

What's wrong with that call? It broke a cardinal rule of selling. Never tell the customer the price until you make them fall in love with the product, and you are in a position to close. The way the sample call was handled, the customer will keep calling companies in the directory

until he finds either the lowest price possible or a good salesperson who sells him into an appointment.

A more efficient way to answer the call would be to say something such as this.

"Thanks for calling Acme Water, how can I assist you? ... Yes, we have that type of product. What is troubling you about your water? ... How long has that been happening? ... What is the most important thing for you to solve? ... It's good you called for two reasons. First, we have exactly the equipment that will solve the problems you have outlined and can do so at a very low cost. Best of all, at Acme, we just received our 10th award in a row for service excellence. We've been in business here for almost 10 years and have made many people in your area happy customers.... The price? I can't tell you exactly what it would cost without testing your water and seeing your current equipment. What I can do is send one of our technicians out to do a free house call.

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There are a lot of improvements packed into the sample script. Allow me to highlight a few.

Investigation

The first stage of any sale is asking enough questions to know how to present the product. Train whoever answers the phone to ask enough questions that he knows what the customers really want solved and what their motivations are.

Selling the Company

If a customer called you, chances are they have a directory or newspaper out and will call others. Oddly, very few people say anything good about their company in sales calls. Make sure you tell them why you are a great company to work with and why they will be happy.

Softer Nomenclature

Always refer to the test as a "free house call" and the salesperson as a "technician."

These are softer, nonscary names. It's easier for the customer to want this than a "sales call" by a "sales rep" or "consultant." Is it just me or when someone says they are sending a consultant, you know it's going to be very expensive. Go over your script and soften your terms.

Using a Range

If you have to quote a price, use a huge range. Notice in the example, I quote from a counter top carbon filter to a large equipment package. This way, they cannot compare your price on the phone but it sounds very good without tying you to a specific price.

Expecting an Appointment

The goal of every sales inquiry is to get an appointment. Whoever answers should be fully trained on how to get an appointment.

Who Should Answer Incoming Calls?

Not an administrative staff member. Remember that to administrative staff, that customer call is not an opportunity, it's an interruption. You have two hours left today, and you have to get the payroll completed and some customer calls. You are not going to give the customer the time it can take to get an appointment. Also, If admin staff was good at selling, they would probably be in sales. They are usually friendly and helpful but they are not

salespeople by nature. For all these reasons, we do not recommend that you allow admin staff to answer incoming calls ... not even overflow.

Definitely not a service person. Some companies allow service people to answer the phone. Technical people know too much to be patient with customers and lack the sales skills necessary to get appointments. They tend to answer questions, not stimulate interest. I recommend that you never allow service staff to answer incoming calls.

Not a salesperson. Here is a controversial position. I suggest you never let a salesperson answer incoming calls. If you have territories and the caller is out of the salesperson's territory, they tend to be abrupt. Also, salespeople tend to prequalify. If they think the customer is too old, too poor, etc., they tend to get rid of them. Salesmen shine in the home but usually are not really great on the phone. See for yourself. Call your store and several of your competitors and see how incoming calls are handled.

So Who Do I Recommend?

I suggest that the owner/manager answer incoming calls. I know you are thinking, "What are you nuts? I have more important things to do." But, are you sure about that? If you get 10 calls per day and could turn

five of them into appointments but your receptionist answers and turns one into an appointment, you are losing four appointments per day. If your sales team could close half of those appointments, you could sell an extra two systems per day or 40 per month. That should mean an extra \$60,000 per month in gross profit or \$720,000 per year. That is the power of squeezing out as many appointments as you deserve.

Answering all incoming calls also keeps you aware of what advertising is working and what is happening in the marketplace.

You also could hire a special person and train them to get appointments. At many dealerships, this person takes all incoming calls and schedules appointments. This a very important area to think about. I recently came across a person who sold his water equipment business because business was bad and advertising wasn't working. The new owners started answering all phone calls and the company had its biggest month in history just from making this one change.

Remember that opportunity is calling your company every day. Take a moment to ask who is answering and are they turning those calls into cold or gold? **WQP**

For more information on this subject, write in 1013 on the reader service card.