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# How Hot Is Your Prospecting?

by ED BUDANAURO

Unless a prospect calls you, there are only three ways that you can put yourself in front of a prospect: 1) A cold call, 2) A referral or 3) A personal introduction.

Each has its place, and its share of success stories. All three can put you in front of a prospect. No doubt about that. The question is: Which of the three methods is the most likely to predispose your prospect to buy from you? It does not require an MBA to answer this question. A student selling band candy can tell you that it is the personal introduction.

Put yourself in the shoes of a prospect. When a stranger calls you on the phone, your first instinct is to guard your wallet or purse. There is a good reason for the term cold call. When a different salesperson calls you and tells you that your friend Roger suggested he call, your first thought is, "Why is Roger doing this to me?" It's usually only a warm referral at best. However, when Roger calls you himself and tells you a lot of great things about what this guy did for him and says you would be doing yourself a favor to talk to this guy — now that's hot.

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## Mind Games

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Obvious, right? Then answer this question for me: Why do so many otherwise competent, grown-up, professional salespeople shy away from asking their clients to introduce them to prospects these clients know personally? It happens all the time. The consulting firm I work for has compiled a list of the excuses given by salespeople, and they are all over the lot: The right time never came up. I don't want to look like I need the business. I don't want to appear greedy. I've tried it before, and it doesn't

work. I'm afraid what they might say about me. I haven't done an outstanding enough job to deserve it. Blah, blah, blah!

The common denominator in all these rationalizations is unjustified fear. In fact, if you have served your client well, the chances are heavily in your favor that he or she would be happy to introduce you to some prospects. All you need to do is get over your fear and ask.

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## You in 60 Seconds

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Then the question becomes: How do you get your client, when

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he calls the prospect to introduce you, to present you in the best possible way? How does he do a commercial for you? Let me give you a little cheat sheet for your conversation with your client before he makes that phone call. It's called SODAR.

SODAR is an acronym for a process you can use to remind your client what a good job you've done, and to rehearse him on what to say. Let's go through the steps:

- Situation — Ask your client to remember his situation when you met, the reasons your client decided to work with you.
- Opportunity — Then ask your client how he saw working with you as an opportunity. What did he think you could help him solve? What approach did you take to solve it?
- Decision — Ask your client what the good things about you were that prompted his decision to hire you. What stands out in his mind?
- Action — Then ask your client if you took the right action. Get him to recall the specific actions you took to improve his situation.
- Results — Finally, ask your client to recall the results. How did it affect his sales, efficiency, productivity or bottom line? Can he quantify the difference it made? Or at least make a fair guesstimate?

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### Shotgun Blasts vs. Laser-Guided Missiles

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The benefits of a personal introduction are so powerful that it is truly astonishing that more salespeople have not made it the essential, indispensable core of their prospecting efforts. It's the difference between firing shotgun

blasts at everything and aiming laser-guided missiles at specific targets.

Compared with cold calls and referrals, personal introductions allow you to:

- Tap into the "hidden" market of prospects who are not actively looking.
- Meet fewer prospects in order to put yourself in front of the same number of people favorably disposed to do business with you.

There's another compelling business reason not to pass up the opportunity for introductions. Your client base is not merely a source of revenue. Because of the prospects your clients know, your client base is a major asset — one you should leverage. If you are not, then you are letting this untapped resource go to waste.

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Cold-call when you must. We all do. Ask for referrals every time you get the chance. It's a smart use of your time. But if you want your prospecting to be hot, hot, hot, start with your clients and then move on to your prospects.



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