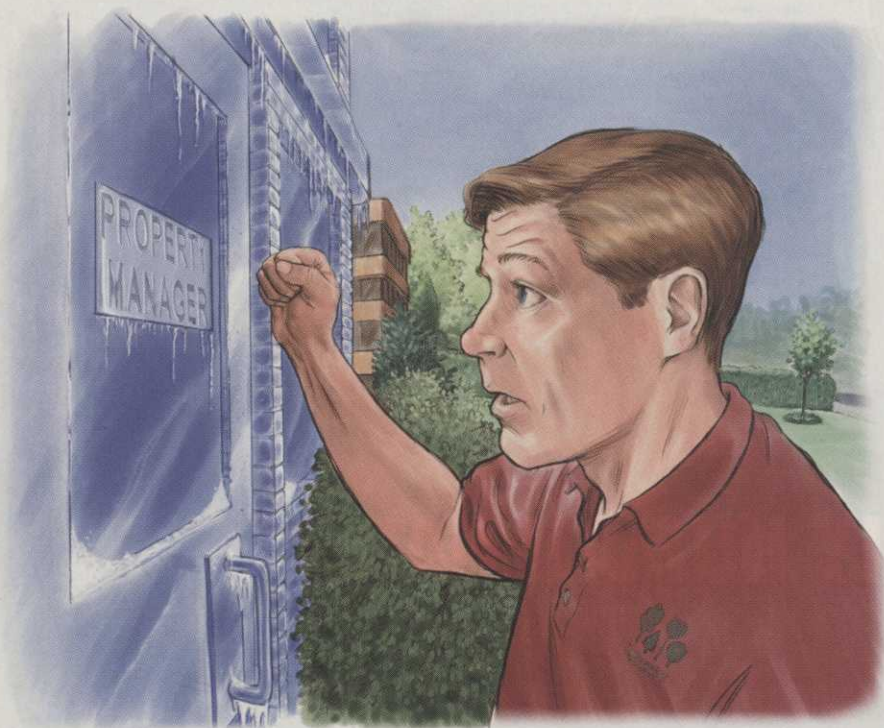


20 WAYS TO make cold calling work



Most people fear cold calling, but it's a proven way to boost sales. Learn how to make your landscape calls more effective

BY MR. PER

Two words that strike fear into the hearts of even the most experienced sales people are: cold calls. What is it about approaching an unfamiliar door that tightens the stomach and messes with our minds? I was physically pushed through my first "cold" door and ran out before the prospect could say anything.

Before I worked in the landscape industry, I sold coupons door-to-door for comedy clubs and paintball fields. In just under three years, I made more than 50,000 in-person business cold calls. You think your employee turnover is high? Try coupon sales.

Time to meet and greet

Have you ever gone to a meeting, met someone for the first time and ended up talking like friends? If you have, you can cold call. Successful cold calling is meeting someone new, starting a conversation and leaving on friendly terms.

Selling has nothing to do with successful cold calling. When was the last time you made a cold call and walked out with a contract? It's probably been a while, if at all. Successful cold calling in the landscape industry is about gathering information. Rather than cold call, go on "property visits." Stop by, visit the property, gain new information and leave a friendly success.

Here are 20 ideas to make this process work. It's not complicated if you plan ahead.

7 ways to prepare

Preparation is everything. Try these steps first:

- 1.** *Dress for success.* Good options are cotton khaki pants, a golf shirt with a company logo (if available) and casual shoes. Carry a clean shirt in your truck.
- 2.** *Plan your visits the day before.* Emergencies do come up, but remember to block out time to visit the properties the day before. And don't forget to tell the crew.
- 3.** *Focus on seeing people — not writing proposals.* Don't worry about submitting a proposal at first — focus on and engage people. Give them your full concentration and you will end up submitting more proposals.
- 4.** *Work around your current properties.* Start at a property you maintain well and go to the next suitable one. Use that current property in your introduction. "Have you noticed how nice that property down the street looks?" After they answer "yes," add, "I'm glad to hear that because my company does the landscaping. Who here oversees your landscape contractor?" Remember to stay in the neighborhood. You don't make money driving your truck around.
- 5.** *Drop names.* If one of your property managers gives you permission, use his or her name. You could say, "Sue at Pine Ridge Apartments uses us for her landscaping and she suggested I stop in and introduce myself."
- 6.** *Leave the phone in the truck.* If your crew cannot go an hour without calling you, you may need to manage your operations better before growing your business.
- 7.** *Lead from the front.* If you want your foremen to go on property visits, you need to be out front and go on some yourself. I've always found it challenging to inspire someone to visit properties while I'm sitting in the office.

Tough numbers, but it works

According to Mr. Per, cold calling on property visits results in the following approximate numbers. (These are for acquiring commercial landscape maintenance contracts.)

- ▶ It takes 20 to 25 cold property visits to find one highly qualified proposal (meaning they're going to change contractors and will seriously consider a proposal.)
- ▶ It takes four to five proposals to close one sale.
- ▶ It takes 80 to 125 cold property visits to result in one sale.

Make face time work

Face time is the most critical element of your cold call. These ideas have worked for me:

- 8.** *Pick up trash.* When you visit a property, pick up some trash. The office manager will never tell you "no soliciting" or "we're not interested" when you walk in with two handfuls of trash. Treat a potential property as if you already maintain it and you're more likely to get that job.
- 9.** *Walk quickly.* Move from your truck to the door as fast as you can without jogging. This builds your energy and leaves less time to think, and we all know what we think about when approaching a "cold" door. When you pick up trash, do it quickly.
- 10.** *Always stand while waiting.* If you have to wait, always stand to command more respect and attention. The receptionist is more likely to take action on your behalf when he or she realizes you don't expect to wait long enough to sit down.
- 11.** *Get your hands out of your pockets.* Jiggling coins or keys is a great way to annoy or distract someone.
- 12.** *Avoid questions that can be answered with "yes" or "no."* The worst question to ask is, "Are you looking for proposals?" Regardless of the answer, you'll gain no relevant information. Ask questions that use "how" in them or lead to other open-ended options. Examples include, "How long has your current contractor worked with you?" or "What's your biggest property maintenance challenge?"

Selling has nothing to do with successful cold calling.

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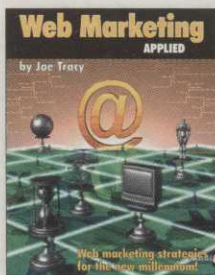
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13. *Be short on practice, long on experience.* Practice only tells you what you're good at practicing. Real life tells you what you need to practice. Get out of your truck and start talking!

14. *Write down the most common questions you hear.* Then, write your best answers to these questions, and read that list daily. Practice doesn't make perfect, but it builds confidence.

15. *Be positive in all you say and do.* Everything you say and do will be associated with you. If you tell someone that his or her current contractor is giving bad service, he or she will associate this negative comment with you. Be professional and concentrate on problem solving or positive ideas.

16. *Offer your business card at the end of the meeting.* If you walk in and offer your business card right away, the receptionist may say, "We have your card. We will call you." Now what do you do? Offer your card when you leave, unless they ask for it earlier.

Follow-up right away

There are several methods for following up, but these have worked well:

17. *Send your thanks — today.* Hire a local creative person (college

students are great at this) to make a good-looking and unique company postcard to send as a follow-up. Write a thank you note for every business card you collect. Your handwriting can't be any worse than mine, so don't skip this step.

18. *Write down all you learned.* You'll have it for later reference.

19. *Schedule your follow-up before leaving the property.* What action are you going to take next — another visit, a mailing?

20. *Get out of your truck.* Truck time doesn't make you any money. Make that call!

I suggest you add 80% to 90% of your new properties from referrals and 10% to 20% from cold calling. Cold calling isn't the answer to everything, but it will give you confidence to use in all areas of your life. I also think you're more likely to close a referral proposal because of your confidence from "cold" visiting.

The author moved on from selling coupons to working with Environmental Care and U.S. Lawns in marketing and sales support. He now serves as a consultant to the Green Industry and can be reached at 407/210-3666.