

Improve Your Cold-Calling Results

Start by building up your reputation and credibility in the community, so prospects will know you and your services

By [Karen E. Klein](#)

I own a coaching business and do a lot of cold-calling. I frequently leave messages, either with assistants or on voice mail, explaining what I do and leaving my call-back information. However, I get no results. What should I be doing differently? —S.C., Grants Pass, Ore.

It's tough to [sell professional services](#), such as executive coaching, through cold calls. This is because you must first explain to your targets why they need your service and how it will improve their bottom line and then persuade them that you are the right person to deliver those services. Cold-calling may be better suited to selling products like office supplies or copy machines.

If you want to continue using cold calls, however, you'll definitely need to do more than leave your name and phone number. You'll have to explain the benefits of coaching and how it can contribute to your prospects' bottom line. "A common refrain is that professional services cannot be sold; they only can be bought," says David Cichelli, senior vice-president of the [Alexander Group](#), a sales consultancy. "Your best chance of success is to make a compelling offer: 'Hello Mr. or Ms. Prospect, I am in your area next Thursday visiting other clients, and I was wondering if you would be interested in the results of our study on how great leaders use great coaches. If you have 15 minutes, I can give you information on how to improve the impact at your company.' "

Mike Schultz, president of the Wellesley Hills Group in Framingham, Mass., agrees. "A conversation about recent research is just one of many potential value propositions for the meeting. You might not want to present research because it might not be the best entry for you. But if you're worth your salt as a professional services provider, a conversation with you should be able to offer something of strong value," he says.

While not all your prospects will respond to your offer, if you've got a well-segmented target list, at least a few will. "When you get in front of them, the topic of conversation will be recent research, work, and expertise—not a get-to-know-you-and-sell-you meeting," Schultz says. This is the important second part of your task: Persuading potential clients that you are the right person to deliver on this vital service you're introducing.

If cold calling is not working for you, you might think about changing your [sales strategy](#), says Joanne Black, founder of No More Cold Calling, a speaking and consulting firm based in the Bay Area. "I'm not at all surprised that you're not getting calls returned. Would you return a call to someone you didn't know?" she asks.

Commit to building a referral business, she advises, which guarantees that you'll have credibility and some familiarity with the prospects you are calling. "Typically when people are referred for new business, they get a new client well over 50% of the time. And in this economy, it's particularly important to know that there's no hard cost to referrals—you just have to put in the time," she says.

Start by asking existing and recent clients to refer you to both their internal and external colleagues, Cichelli says. You can also do writing and speaking in your community for groups like networking clubs, the Chamber of Commerce, and executive roundtables. These groups always need compelling speakers, and if you present yourself as someone with expertise and valuable advice, the contacts you make can refer you to new business. Doing research, posting white papers on your Web site, and hosting Webinars will all help build your reputation within the business community as well.

As you make contacts with business targets, nurture the gatekeepers at their firms, Cichelli recommends. "Provide information that gatekeepers can use in their day-to-day work. Large corporations have professional development staff that is in search of ideas and resources. Help them to do their jobs better, and they will help you," he says.

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