

Senior-level telemarketing – the top ten success factors

A Guest Article by Jonathan Silverman
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Planning a telephone marketing campaign

I'm often asked what the most important things are when clients want to undertake a telemarketing campaign. I have therefore detailed below some high-level thoughts and top planning tips for you to consider when planning a new business campaign by phone.

A lot of focus is often given to the skills of the telemarketer. I often hear various techniques bandied about, and that it is down to having a good telemarketer who loves to talk, to get on the phone and to close sales.

It is a "given" that you need a quality, well trained, unscripted person on the telephone, especially when making calls at senior decision maker level. However, while the quality of the person making the calls is paramount, I feel that often too much is made of this as the primary success factor, and not enough importance is given to other elements of the new business process.

Definition and differentiation

We live in a commoditised world where there is little true differentiation. Most propositions are relatively well trodden paths. At GSA, we spend most of our time with our clients on two areas:

- audience and target decision maker definition
- proposition differentiation.

The challenge, in many ways, is for the client to find something that stands out. This is tough and not always possible. But it's about finding a *reason* for prospective purchasers to see them that won't disappoint when the client comes face to face with the prospect.

Then it's about encapsulating that proposition and marrying it up with the prospect's issues (or pain) or opportunities and what they have the appetite and budget to purchase.

There isn't generally a silver bullet. I do feel that the value of sale to deliver return on investment (ROI) is crucial. Senior-level telemarketing is often not a quick fix but can be extremely lucrative. For one of our clients, we generated over £20 million worth of sales, and clients can more regularly pick up £100k-plus contracts.

The success of a telemarketing campaign usually depends on the following factors.

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Ten telemarketing success factors

1. A clearly defined and segmented audience

Nothing slows telemarketing down, increases costs and lowers ROI like a poorly defined market. Using relevant credentials to build rapport and emphasise your strengths enhances the likelihood of potential buyers engaging with you.

I often say that if you specialise in food and drink but want to target pharmaceuticals, you'd better brush up on your compliance knowledge or find someone who knows their stuff.

In the main, people still buy people, and rapport is often built through using common frames of reference. In a short time on the phone, you don't want to create hurdles to overcome before you've started.

2. Identifiable decision-maker roles

Who in the company hierarchy would buy your services? Big companies have multiple layers and gatekeepers. It already takes time to reach a decision maker. So try to make sure it's the right one. Is it the MD, FD, line manager, HR person or some other role that makes the decision?

Getting bounced around the company from branch to head office and from one manager to another drains time and reduces effectiveness. So try to identify who, in what sector, in the size of company you're targeting, would make the decisions. That way you can cut time and wastage, reduce costs and, of course, speed up success.

3. A strong differentiated and relevant proposition (with pertinent credentials for the audience) and a good reason to meet

Have you got something that prospects need? Do they already have a supplier? Are they contracted for the next 12 months or more? We often find that most clients run headlong into these barriers that they can't overcome because they have ill-defined the reason why a prospect might want to see and engage with them.

Since people still buy people (see above) and most sales cycles have long gestation periods (from idea to research to pitch to decision), it often pays to build rapport early in the cycle. That may mean speculative meetings with

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receptive decision makers (assuming that you've defined them correctly as above). They probably won't want to see you simply for you to present your credentials. Therefore, think about why they should see you – and also why they should see you *now* as opposed to in the future.

4. A sector that is sizeable enough and active in terms of purchasing

This may be stating the obvious, but if you limit your target market and the market is suffering, you may find yourself in a cul de sac that leads nowhere. What sectors lend themselves naturally to what you offer? Who has challenges that you can solve? Who has money and is spending?

5. A value of sale that is in many thousands, not hundreds

Senior-level telemarketing isn't a cheap option. It can generate significant rewards. However, the ROI must work for, rather than against. While conventional marketing will tell you that you need to look at lifetime value of a customer to measure true ROI, most clients look at initial sales and possibly on a 12 month basis.

Thus, what is the value of sale? If it is low, you may be better using an online new business approach. If it is higher, the time and cost of telemarketing would be a great option.

6. Momentum in terms of regular and sustained calling (but not over-calling or stalking) and follow-up/call-backs

Momentum is key. We find that most success comes from call-backs, especially at review time. So, record when the next review period is for suppliers and call back at that time.

Make enough calls to stack the odds in your favour. If perhaps 10% to 25% of calls reach a decision maker and only a percentage of those will see you now and then another 20% will buy, how many calls do you need to deliver the sales you need?

Make sure the list is big enough so that you don't over-call and risk stalking and damaging your image with prospective customers in your chosen sector. There may be no way back if you do that.

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7. A confident and well trained unscripted telemarketer

A well briefed and trained caller is an asset. Confidence should be both with the proposition and with calling as a discipline. The caller doesn't necessarily need deep expertise, but they do need to understand why clients would need and buy what you're offering and how good you are at what you do. Passion, confidence and knowledge are excellent ingredients for success.

8. A supportive client who has reasonable expectations, understands the process, and provides back-up to the calls

Senior-level telemarketing is unlikely to produce floods of appointments unless a lot of hours are allocated to calling. Most of our clients want a select number of quality appointments each month. That might mean two, four, six or ten per month.

Given that each prospect could generate significant revenue, trusting in the process is key. Allowing it to build momentum is crucial, as is supporting the caller to tweak and refine where necessary. If the approach isn't working, change it.

Recognise that it takes time to reach decision makers. If your caller achieves two quality appointments per month and it takes 24 appointments to achieve one sale, that may not sound good. However, if that sale comes in December for £1 million, that is a great ROI.

So, understand what it takes to convert a sale. Understand how long it takes. Read call notes. Engage with your callers. Listen to calls, Provide support in other ways. PR, advertising, direct mail and so on all raise awareness and support calls. Don't necessarily expect immediate success. Support your caller and don't ignore them.

9. Follow-up promptly in terms of info (email, post, etc.)

While many prospect requests for more information are fob-offs, some aren't, and the stuff you send also has to do its job to support sales. If it is timely and relevant and targeted, it can generate response – especially after a call. Send out information quickly and make sure any emails or direct mail letters sell the benefits of seeing you, as well as the benefits of your offering.

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10. Integration with other activities, e.g. events, exhibitions, workshops, webinars and seminars

Don't forget that you may have opportunities to undertake telemarketing that are perhaps less "cold" than to a cold list. If you are providing useful information for prospective clients, they may want to engage with you by visiting you at an exhibition or seminar, or attending a breakfast with an industry speaker.

All of these are potential levers and provide a time-sensitive reason to meet that your telemarketer can use to their advantage to make appointments.

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If you would like more information on any of the points covered in this Guest Article, please contact **TCii** on **020 7099 2621**.