How to maximise the opportunities from your lead generation team

Our 7 top tips

forrest marketing group

Success through conversation

We've built a robust best practice process for what the most successful salespeople and teams do with the leads we provide, making sure they maximise their conversion, their sales and their ROI.

Here's our Best Practice Process for Converting Cold Call Sales Leads:

1 Send your prospect a meeting invitation – within 2 hours

This might sound obvious, but if it hasn't been done for you, make sure you get a meeting invitation email to each prospect as soon as you receive confirmation of the meeting. This way they get it while the conversation with our sales agent is still fresh in their mind, it gets locked into their diaries (and into yours), so there's less chance of it being missed.

Make sure that you include your contact details and those of your organisation, in case they need to change the meeting at the last minute. And add an agenda for the meeting or call to ensure the valuable time is utilised by you and them.

2 Reconfirm the meeting

Do this by email the day before the meeting/call. Then do it again with a call on the morning of the appointment and ensure that your prospect is in the office – not away on leave, sick or called out to another site. This call does not have to be with the prospect directly, often reception/EA's can assist. Here's a useful tip: use the confirmation call to enquire about parking or check directions. This way you ensure the meeting is going ahead but without asking directly which can lead to a prospect asking to reschedule.

3 Conduct background research on the company and the prospect

The best way to do this is using the company's website and LinkedIn. At this point, your research does not need to be thorough and in-depth, but you want to be able to use what you know about the company to guide the meeting, investigating areas and issues that may be affecting the prospect. Uncovering areas of common interest with your prospect is a great platform for building rapport. Look at their LinkedIn profile to see where they went to school or university, look at their work history and the contacts they know that you have in common. Then if you can find information about the company's annual turnover and finances, this can help guide you in terms of their likely budget for your services.

4 Don't write off missed phone appointments

It is very easy for a prospect to miss a phone appointment. All it takes is for them to go and make coffee and be a minute or two late getting back to their desk, or to be chatting to a colleague at their desk when you call and you've missed them. So, when this happens, rather than giving up at this point, call back the receptionist and explain that you have a phone call booked with the prospect and ask them to locate the prospect for you. In most cases (especially if you have reconfirmed the meeting) the prospect will be nearby and your meeting will go ahead as scheduled. If something has come up and they miss it altogether, don't just leave it. Call again later that day, send an email or even send an updated rescheduled time for your meeting invite so it goes straight into their diary.

5 Have a defined structure to your meeting/call

Planning for each meeting is vital, so make sure you read any meeting notes that you have been given and if you have a recording of the lead generation call, make sure to listen to this too. Prior to the meeting, develop ideas of how you think you can help the prospect and find real-life examples of how you've helped other businesses that are similar to them, if at all possible. By understanding some of the challenges that may be affecting them will build your credibility and help to build trust that you understand their business, allowing the conversation to open up.

It is important to remember that cold call sales leads are prospects who are much earlier in the sales funnel than those that make an online enquiry or are referred to you, so you have to have a different sales approach for these leads. Your expectations are likely to be different too. A brand-new sales lead is unlikely to buy from you after the first meeting – they will take time to work their way through the sales cycle with you.

So, if you start your meeting by asking 'how can I help you?" you're going to go nowhere. Remember that we have called the prospect and have organised the meeting for you based on that conversation, rather than them asking you for the meeting, so they will expect you to lead the meeting.

Most prospects will want to know about you and what you can do for them and at this point they are probably unsure whether you can help them or not. But don't let that lead you to pitching them by talking to them about your company and what you do. Uncovering their needs and determining whether there is a fit between your solution and the prospect's situation is what this meeting is all about, so do this first.

The following 5-step process is what we have found to be most successful for these meetings and the approach is just as good for phone calls and online meetings, as it is for face-to-face meetings:

STEP 1: Build rapport

Start by breaking the ice and getting to the know the prospect. You will find that some prospects are more matter-of-fact, so keep the rapport building short when you encounter this. Equally, don't let a prospect derail your meeting by keeping you in the rapport building phase too long, leaving you too little time to uncover their needs. If your sales leads are for phone appointments, rather than face to face, then read our 10 key steps to success of how to build rapport on the phone here.

STEP 2: Positioning

At this stage of the meeting, your prospect doesn't know what to expect from the next 30-60 minutes they are going to spend with you. We find it helps to explain what you'd like to get from the meeting, what the process is likely to be and what the next steps will be after the meeting. This should only take a minute or two and the points to cover are:

- ✔ Tell them what you know/think you know about them already (from the initial conversation notes and your research)
- ✔ Let them know that you'd like to ask them questions to learn more about their situation
- ✔ Tell them that the objective of the meeting is simply to see if there is a good fit, and whether you can help them at all. And ask them what the next steps will be if there is a fit: will they want a proposal, or would they need a second meeting first?
- ✔ Encourage them to ask questions
- ✔ Finally, get their permission to proceed and check that they understand the process

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STEP 3: Discovery

This is the critical step. Instead of talking about your products and services, this process has you asking as many questions as possible (without turning the meeting into an interrogation, of course). Your focus is on understanding the prospect's needs and issues (and therefore how you can help them). By doing this well, you equip yourself with all the information you need to sell the prospect on the benefits of your solution. We've found that an easy way to segue into this stage is by saying something like:

"You spoke with my colleague [NAME] on the phone recently and they said that you were interested in what we do. He/she has given me an overview of that conversation and I understand that [SUMMARISE A COUPLE OF KEY POINTS FROM THE CALL]. I wanted to get a bit more detail about your current situation, so can I ask you a few questions about what you are doing in this area just now and then I can tell you about what we do and how we might be able to help?"

From here start asking your discovery questions. Remember to keep these questions "open", by using Who, What, Where, When and How (avoid Why as it can make you seem to be challenging their decisions/thoughts). Start broad and use questions to dig deep to uncover areas that you can help fix/improve.

STEP 4: Introduce your Solution

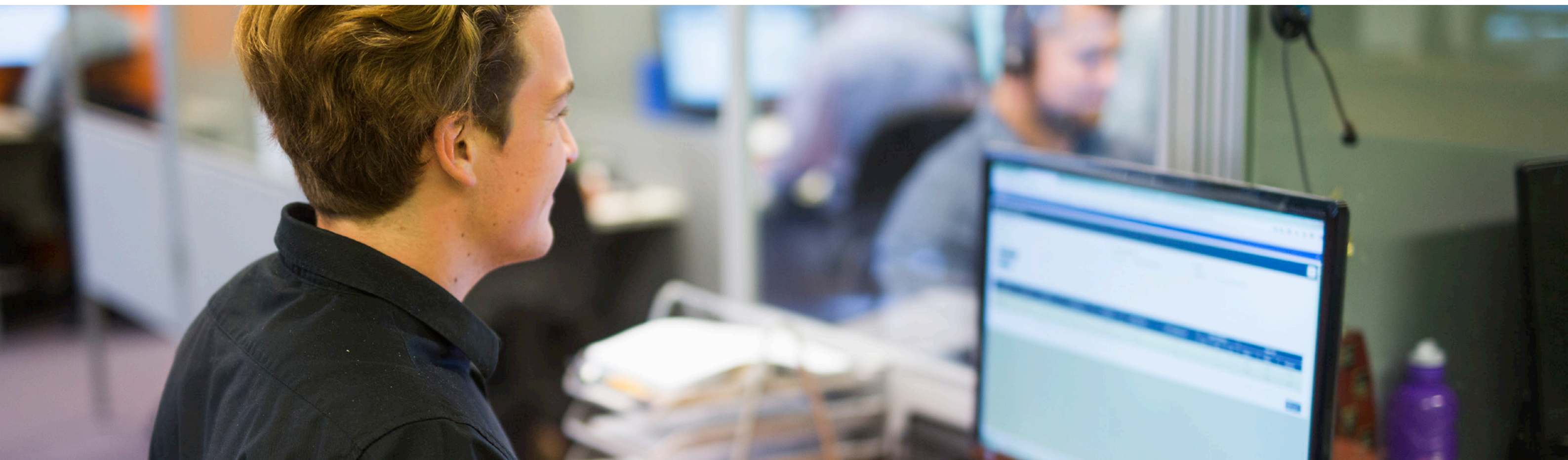
Now you can tell them about you/your company/your solution. Armed with the information from your discovery questions, you can tailor your presentation to your prospect's needs, showing them what you can do for them and how you can help their situation. Keep this short and succinct though, letting the prospect ask questions as you go.

STEP 5: Agree next steps

This might be for them to gather information for you, or for you to put together a proposal for them, tailored to your understanding of their needs from this meeting. Make sure you agree a timeline for your follow up beyond this too. We recommend scheduling the next step into your diaries there and then. Even if it's just a 10-minute call in 5 days' time to discuss the proposal you are going to send. Sum up the meeting with the 3 key challenges you think you can solve for them.

6 Keep good notes

By taking good notes during and after the meeting, you have the details you need for a customised proposal, and also for making sure that your follow up calls are "on-message". Make sure that you use a good CRM to keep these notes in, and to schedule your follow up steps so that nobody gets missed.



7 Follow up – persistently and professionally.

As we said earlier, prospects from cold call meetings often take longer to move through to a sale than those that are from an inbound enquiry or a referral, because you are engaging with them earlier in the sales cycle (often, they won't have been actively searching for your services prior to our call to them). They may want to get others in the organisation involved before they are ready to move ahead and they may need to find the budget and organise approval for a purchase, all of which takes time. This means that you need a good follow up process (hence the need for a good CRM). Follow up should include a combination of phone calls, online meetings and possibly face-to-face discussions too, as well as a series of emails and articles to keep you top-of-mind with them in between your calls. Don't get disheartened if they don't answer the phone every time. Persistence is key. Our experience shows that on average it takes between 8-12 follow ups with a prospect to complete the sale.

And remember that if your prospect needs to complete their due diligence by getting competitor quotes, try to support this process by helping them to create their request for proposal (RFP) specifications.

Here's an interesting reminder of the importance of following up: According to Martin Walsh, Chief Marketing and Digital Officer at Ansarada, 70% of the prospects in your sales funnel will leak out, due to a lack of follow-up. However, 86% of these lost prospects will buy what you are selling at some point. In other words, they have a need for what you sell, but it's not an immediate need. By failing to follow up consistently, these great prospects will leave your sales funnel and once they've gone, the chances are they'll end up buying from your competitors.

Could you benefit from more sales leads for your sales team?

Forrest Marketing Group are a sales prospecting and inside sales agency, with over 13 years of experience, based on the Northern Beaches of Sydney. If you would like help implementing and conducting a successful lead generation campaign, get in touch. Our expert team have years of experience across a wide range of industries and will be able to help you reach your business goals. Call: **1300 396 888** or email **enquiries@fmgroup.com.au**

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Note about the author: Richard Forrest is a leading authority & writer on B2B selling, lead generation, business communications and customer services. You can find Richard's book here.