

B2B sales and pitching

Sales calls are an essential part of any business growth activity. Mastering this skill means you and your team can maintain and win market share with direct relationships, contacts and connections that your competitors won't see or know is happening on public and social media platforms. Being able to pitch, get to the point, take instant feedback is all part of developing a tough skin in business and being able to hustle when sales are down, or you are in a growth phase.

I like to do a couple of sales calls at a time, sometimes at the end of a busy week when I'm tired but relaxed, so sound more grounded, plus I'm 'mentally warmed up' about my purpose. It's also nice networking at the end of the week, even if calls come to nothing, you are engaging with your market directly with your tone, voice and manner. People generally like being sold to if its relevant to them and you are not from a call centre! You can also find out all sorts of things that will give you information and intel on who's who, people's priorities, upcoming opportunities, where to pitch next, and how to do it better/differently.

A Business Development role normally leads this action, but in small business everyone is responsible for bringing in sales so anyone can do sales calls to their own networks, even if only 1-2 a week it builds capacity and collective networks over time.

Step 1 – Decide who to call

Do your homework. Who are the companies you want to work with who would benefit from your service? Start with low hanging fruit. Who has called and enquired about your services already? Go back to them and follow up to build confidence. Search on Linked In and visit their website at least, to know your ideal contact's activities, members, markets, customers, to save yourself the likelihood of rejection if there is no relevance. Work out what they might want.

Aim high. Find the person with the job title most linked to what you are pitching. Get to the decision maker if you can, but it doesn't always mean the CEO. Some officers can be very influential and some CEOs do listen to team recommendations.

What's in it for them? Before you pitch, work out one of two key value propositions that your ideal contact person would relate to.

Develop your hitlist or just go with one or two at a time and don't get overwhelmed by trying to be too efficient. Just get started. It's quality over quantity.

Step 2 - Get past the gatekeeper

The receptionist or PA is critical to get on side. You want to give them enough detail to pass on and be quick about it, within 10-15 seconds; cut to the chase. Introduce yourself and business and purpose of the call.

Ideally you will have a name of the person you are trying to reach, but it's not always necessary. If you don't have a direct contact in the business, finish your intro with "Can I please speak to the events manager / exhibits lead/ best person in that area?" And let the receptionist decide where to send you.

They may not give you a name but will check with that person who will either decline, where you then ask for an email address to follow them up directly; or they put you through.

Step 3 – Pitching to the contact

Demonstrate value early as possible – You’ve interrupted their day, are a cold caller and they don’t know you. This person will be thinking where is the value? So don’t muck about trying to be their friend or chatting about the weather (unless they initiate). Feel out the tone of the person. Are they harried, stressed, relaxed and warm? Speak calmly and be grounded, take a breath.

Establish credibility/ relevance – restate your name and business and you may need to describe in laypersons terms what you ‘do’. For e.g., “I’m Susan Lee and I’m a tourism consultant and author of a new business book. I’m in your region next month to tour a new book and wondering if it’s of interest to your members?” Or “We specialise in architectural light projection and immersive displays and work with similar firms to yours and we were wondering if we could be included on your consultant list for any future opportunities?”

Ask for what you want. “I was wondering if there’s opportunity to work together when I am in town next?” Or “Is there any interest in our services in your region or town/among members?” Do not falter at this point. Practise saying this aloud if you are uncomfortable. This is the essence of your pitch.

Be powerful and assertive in your tone and be ready for ‘no thanks’. Generally, I pause and let people give their reasons so it’s not so rejecting. But sometimes it happens. Be professional, thank them for their time and move on.

FOMO can be effective. “We ran workshops with (similar business) in (another region) and members found it useful.” Be careful not to skate too close to their competitors though as it may repel them.

Try not to dominate the conversation. If you can get them talking that is a bonus, but if they are interested and happy to give you their email, then you have achieved a result! All you want to do in this conversation is build a relationship, establish mutual interest, and permission to follow up so they can on send or consider details.

Early bird – I like to make these cold calls early as I’m fresh and you get in before they get distracted with other priorities. I keep calls brief and then they are done for the day.

Step 4 - Follow up

After you hang up email the detail of what you’ve discussed. If you didn’t manage to give examples or ideas in your verbal pitch add them in the email.

Add them to your database if you don’t have an automated system.

Attach a profile or capability statement so they know you are bona fide.

Connect on social media. No, it’s not stalking if you then find and friend them on your socials, especially Linked In which is a more professional network. You now have license (more than most as you’ve *spoken* to this person) to connect and show them who you are, your projects and community status.

Congratulations, you have mastered sales calling and gone up a notch on your network’s social chain; one step closer to winning the next job.