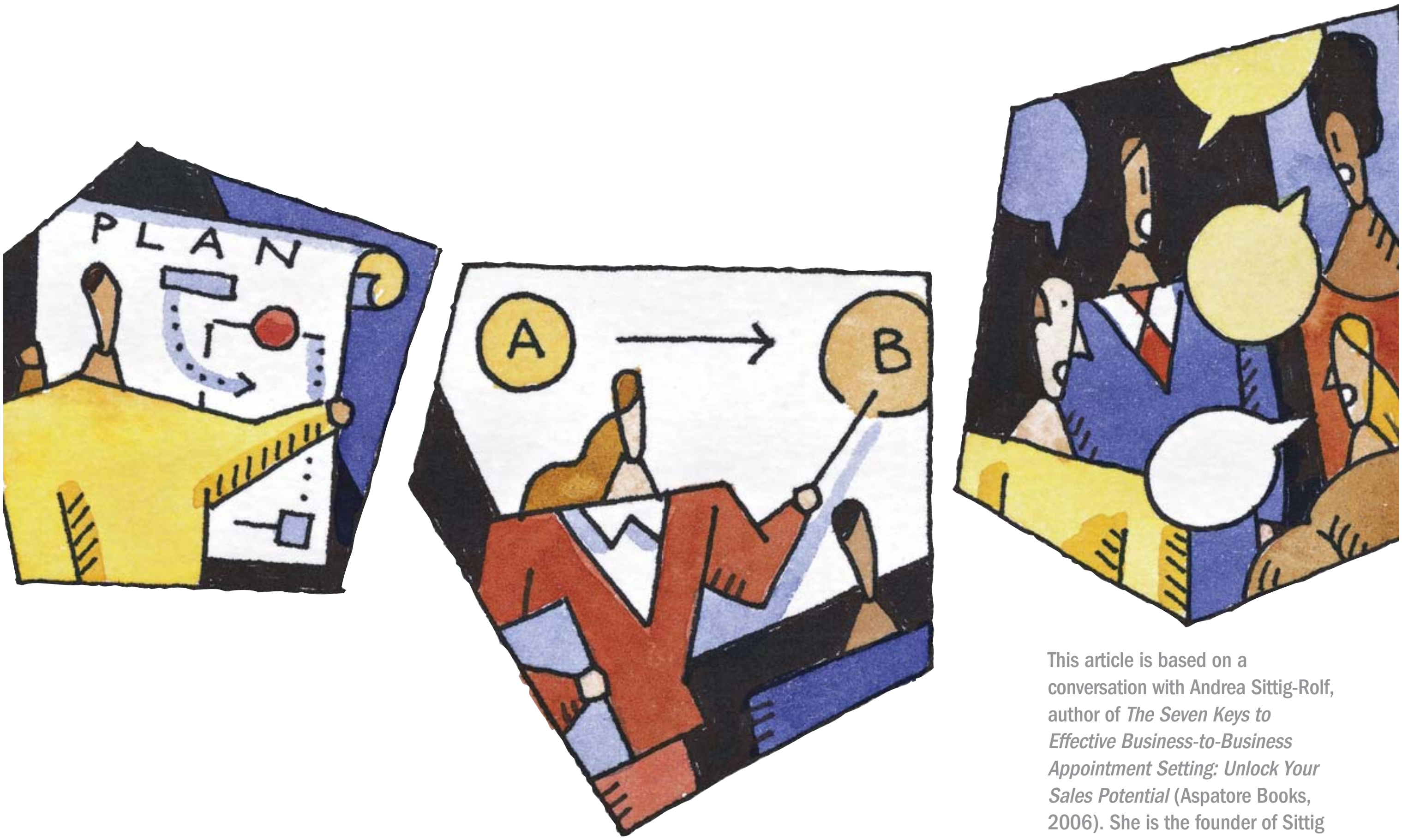

How to Get a Lot More Appointments

Most sales reps have the skills necessary to move a sale forward once they've gotten to meet the customer. What's often more difficult is getting the essential first meeting. The following 10 steps teach practical tactics that can immediately increase the number of prospects in any B2B sales pipeline.

Step 1. Research a list of prospects.

When it comes to achieving appointments, the quality of the preparation predetermines the success of the effort. Before making your calls, spend the time to identify and research 100 prospects. Look for potential customers who have a similar profile to those who have bought in the past. Next to each prospect's name, note any current customers in the prospect's industry, region, job classification, or anything else that might help you to position your offering. The challenge here is not to fully research the company (you can do that before you make the actual in-person sales call), but to find out enough to briefly present what you have to offer in terms that the prospect can understand.

Step 2. Build your script.

Once you know who you're going to call, focus on what you're going to say in order to get the appointment. Write a brief script (no more than three or four sentences) that introduces who you are, what you do, and what you provide. (See "Quick Tips for Your Training Session" for an example.) An effective script asks for the appointment early. Many reps find this awkward at first, but the truth is that prospects say "No" almost out of habit rather than actual intent, so getting that first "No" is an essential part of the process of winning the appointment. Please note that the purpose of the call is NOT to communicate substantive

This article is based on a conversation with Andrea Sittig-Rolf, author of *The Seven Keys to Effective Business-to-Business Appointment Setting: Unlock Your Sales Potential* (Aspatore Books, 2006). She is the founder of Sittig Incorporated and the creator of The Blitz Experience®, an activity-based sales training program that shows salespeople how to quickly schedule appointments with qualified prospects. Sittig-Rolf can be reached at Sittig, Inc., P.O. Box 2423, Redmond, WA 98073-2423 Tel: 206/769-4886 Web: www.sittiginc.com

Based on an interview with Andrea Sittig-Rolf

Use the space below to make your own notes on getting that first appointment

Quick Tips for Your Next Sales Meeting

Here are the top four objections that you're likely to receive during a cold call, along with a suggested response. Note that in each case, you anticipate the objection, handle it, and then ask for the appointment.

Objection	Response
I'm not interested.	You know, that's exactly what [current customer] said too when I first called them. They've since become a customer and as a result have [result statement]. Why don't we just get together so I can learn more about your company and what results we might create for you? How does [day] at [time] work for you?
Send me some literature.	I'd be happy to, but until I learn more about your company and its needs, I won't know what to send. Why don't I come by [day] at [time] and I'll bring an assortment of literature with me?
I'm too busy.	Okay, I won't keep you. What I'd like to do is come by when you have more time to talk. How does [day] at [time] work for you?
It's not in our budget right now.	In that case, now is the perfect time to meet! We've found it very beneficial to discuss future needs and our solution early so that we can be of help during your decision-making process. Why don't we just get together [day] at [time]?

information about your offering. Instead, the purpose of the phone call is to win a real appointment so that you can:

1. Fully research the client at your leisure, prior to the in-person visit.
2. Get the client to make the first decision in your favor (i.e., the appointment).
3. Create a situation where you can move the sale toward the next step.

Step 3. Anticipate objections for easier handling.

Make no mistake – you will get objections. Your job is to anticipate the objections so that each time one of them materializes, you can handle it appropriately...and then ask for the appointment. Most objections are common to all sales situations, so you should have little or no trouble listing them. (See "Quick Tips for Your Next Sales Meeting" for the top four common objections.) The trick here is to practice handling objections until the response is automatic. Note: The most important part of handling the objection is asking for the appointment.

Step 4. Get positive and get calling.

When it comes to cold calling, attitude is everything. Many sales reps enter a cold-calling situation with a feeling of dread, combined with the belief that they're imposing on prospects by interrupting their day. Nonsense. If your offering has value to the customer, you're doing the prospect a favor by giving him or her the opportunity to meet with you. Therefore, have confidence in your ability to provide value. That confidence not only helps you communicate more effectively, it provides the motivation that will drive you to actually sit down and start making the cold calls.

Step 5. Sidestep the receptionist (if necessary).

If a receptionist answers the phone, do not ask for the contact, even if you know the name. Instead, ask for either the sales department or accounts receivable. The reason is simple. Receptionists are trained from day one to screen out salespeople. By asking for

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the sales department, you're implying (to the receptionist) that you're a customer who wants to buy something. Similarly, by asking for "accounts receivable" you're implying that you're somebody who wants to pay the company some money. Once you reach somebody in the sales group or the accounting group, proceed to step 6.

Step 6. Locate the right contact (if necessary).

You've gotten through to somebody in the sales department or accounts receivable. If you already know the name of the prospect contact you're trying to reach, simply apologize and ask to be transferred. If you don't know the name of the contact, ask who is responsible for buying whatever you're offering, but always adding (and this is important) "Would that be [name of CEO here]?". The sudden mention of the CEO will rattle whoever is on the line, because it raises the specter of bothering Mr. Big or Ms. Big – with potential negative career consequences should the matter prove irrelevant. In almost every case, this tactic will elicit a response such as, "No, you need to talk to John Smith over in purchasing; let me put you through."

Step 7. Sidestep the admin (if necessary).

Admins, like receptionists, are trained to screen out salespeople, so you don't want to identify yourself as such, or give too much information. Tell the admin who you are, who you're with, and then say that the call is regarding something that will:

1. Cause the admin to consider the call important.
2. Pique the interest of the contact you're trying to reach.

For example, if you've worked with one of the contact's competitors (e.g., Acme Gadgets) say, "This is regarding Acme Gadgets." Or, if your product or service will help the prospect's company better serve one of its key customers (e.g., Emca Distributors), say, "This is regarding Joe Emca, CEO of Emca Distributors." Chances are you'll either be put through to the prospect or put through to the prospect's voice mail.

Step 8. Leave a message (if necessary).

If you end up in the contact's voice mail system, don't despair. Leave a very brief message based upon your calling script. However, rather than setting a time for an appointment, say that you'll be calling back at a certain date and time, but would appreciate a callback. The next time you call, ask the admin if the contact is in. If not, tell the admin that you've been trying to connect with the contact and would like to know when would be a good time to call. Since you've already been put through to the contact's voice mail, the admin will probably give you a time and date when you can reach the contact.

Quick Tips for Your Training Session

A key element of getting an appointment is the initial contact script. The good way to understand what works is to "de-construct" a successful script. Here is the script that Andrea Sittig-Rolf uses:

> Hi, [prospect]. My name is Andrea Sittig-Rolf, and I'm the creator of The Blitz Experience (1), an activity-based sales training program that empowers salespeople to schedule appointments with qualified prospects the day of the training, resulting in a pipeline full of new opportunities at the end of the day. (2) The reason for my call today is to schedule an appointment to learn more about your sales organization (3) so we can determine whether there is a fit for The Blitz Experience within your firm. How does Thursday at 10 a.m. work for you? (4)

1. Identify yourself immediately. Speak with appropriate enthusiasm. Do not be apologetic. What you have to offer is valuable.
2. The elevator pitch. Keep it short, simple, and focused on the value to the prospect, rather than on the importance of your firm.
3. The key element here is that you want to learn about the prospect – not try to sell the prospect something that may not be needed.
4. Ask for the appointment. Be specific about the time and date If the discussion moves to a better time for the prospect, you've won the appointment.

Step 9. Handle the objections.

Once you've got the contact on the line, execute the script. Remember not to read it, but to put it into your own words, with enthusiasm. In almost every case, you will get at least one, and probably more, objections. Since you've anticipated these objections, you should respond to them as necessary and then ask for the appointment again. If you receive more than three objections, it's fair to assume that the prospect is not going to meet with you, so thank the prospect, offer to help in the future, and end the call.

Step 10. Repeat the process on a daily basis.

If you're determined to excel at getting appointments, commit to an hour a day attempting to achieve two appointments. If it takes 15 minutes to get the two appointments, then you can quit early. Practice this regularly and you'll very quickly have a calendar full of qualified prospects. – Geoffrey James

You can purchase a PDF of this article at www.sellingpower.com/PDF/Apr_2007/

Frequently Asked Questions:

Q: When should I use email, rather than a phone call, to make an appointment?

A: Emails are generally ineffective for making appointments with new prospects. The only emails of this type likely to be answered are those that have a header containing the name of somebody known to the prospect. In most cases, the telephone approach is more likely to achieve the appointment.

Q: What if I make an appointment and the prospect doesn't show up for it?

A: Congratulations! The prospect is now under obligation to you and you will have a better chance of making the sale. The best approach here is to set another appointment date, using the same techniques as before, if necessary.

Q: What if the prospects starts asking me questions?

A: In most cases, that's just the prospect's attempt to get you to give a short pitch in order to save them time. Rather than answer the questions, you should point out that it's clear that the two of you have a lot to talk about and then suggest a time and date to meet.

Q: How do I keep from getting appointments with unqualified prospects?

A: Ask a qualifying question very early in the script. For example, if you're selling high-end multifunction printers, make the second sentence something like: "About how many copies does your facility make every day?" That way, if the answer is less than 1,000 (or whatever the threshold is for your product), you can simply thank the contact for his or her time and end the call.

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