

Why cold calling doesn't work

It's 9:30 a.m. and I am trying to concentrate on a project when my phone rings. It is a representative from my credit card company. She is selling some additional service like travel insurance or some such. She is speaking in a monotone, and barely letting me get in a word edgewise. I speak over her and tell her to remove me from the marketing list. She goes away but only after she has interrupted my work and made me lose five minutes listening to her spiel.

I'd bet you have had the exact same thing happen to you. Everyone has. Unsolicited telemarketing calls are the bane of my existence, and worse yet if they are recorded calls (robo-calls). And we get pounded with them—I get at least two or three a day. Luckily, most of us have caller ID and don't pick up calls from numbers we don't recognize or that are places we don't do business with.

One time, I got a call from a real estate agent who went on and on about “listings in my area” and when I asked her what area that was, she referred to a place I hadn't even heard of. I told her that she was calling the wrong person, and she had the nerve to be huffy at me.

Cold calls just don't work. Why?

- Because you are quite literally interrupting someone or catching him/her at a time that is inconvenient.
- Because with caller ID, people can choose to ignore your call.
- Because these calls are not invited or welcome.
- Because they are blindly selling something based on broad factors like ZIP codes or business codes.
- Because there are too many variables that must align to make a sale: person answers call, person is receptive to talking, person is interested in the offer.

The best type of marketing is targeted. Cold calling by its nature is not targeted. Even if you a home insurance sales person cold calling ten people who just bought a home, you aren't really targeting because you don't know whether those people already have home insurance.

The best type of marketing is customized. With cold calling, due to volume and your lack of knowledge about the target, you will likely follow a script, which, by its nature is not customized.

The best type of marketing is inbound marketing. Cold calling is outbound marketing at its very worst. It's sending out messages to people who don't necessarily want or need these messages and hoping that through some margin of return, you will get enough business to justify the expense.

Ah yes, I know. You got the biggest client you have through cold calling. I think you were lucky. You called someone at a convenient time, with a message to which he or she was receptive. And you were able to get him or her to actually pick up the phone. Or that person did not have caller ID. Or that person was in a very good mood that day.

Why not put effort into other things that do work and that don't leave your prospects cold?

P.S. Plus of course, fewer and fewer people are using landline telephones these days, and cell phones are not listed.