

Is True Prospecting a Lost Art?

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If a salesperson gives out three business cards every business day, at the end of a month the individual would have passed out about 78 cards. He or she would have met and talked to 78 new opportunities, referral sources and leads. Multiply that by a full year and the salesperson will have touched nearly 1,000 people. Imagine the difference it will could in your performance if you keep doing it, if you gave out only a minimum of three business cards each day. That's why we say relationships → opportunity = money.

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In most businesses today, it's rare that anyone teaches salespeople how to prospect. Some people work tirelessly doing what they consider prospecting: they make calls, they send emails, they go to meetings and hand out cards almost 24/7. They never leave you alone, and often seem like pests. That's one form of prospecting, although perhaps not the most effective. Is true prospecting a lost art? It better not be since most people would rather do business with those they know, with people they have a relationship with and trust. So, how do you start a relationship? With carefully planned, effective prospecting.

Everyone Prospects

In the automotive industry, statistics show that customers who come into a business through a referral cultivated by a salesperson purchase a vehicle 60% of the time. The same is true in most businesses. Relationship building increases the quality of the customer and the potential to close, especially if the customer specifically requested a particular salesperson. That's the true value of prospecting, or building relationships. On the other hand, if a customer comes through the door because of an ad, the closing percentage drops to 12 to 15%. Why wouldn't salespeople prospect for relationships?

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Where do you find these "people?" Realistically, you can find them everywhere! They are

at the doctor, pharmacy, grocery, school meetings, gyms, church, at lunch, dinner or the drive-thru. They can be anyone you meet throughout the day. They are family members and guests who come to holiday gatherings, like Thanksgiving dinner.

The New York Times reported that the average American knows approximately 240 people. So, a salesperson attending a Thanksgiving celebration with 20 other guests has the potential to reach 4,800 people. If even eight of those are legitimate leads, then you might have 600 opportunities. These people only become opportunities, however if the salespeople prospect. They tell people what they do and provide their contact information, over and over again. Even if that number is reduced by two-thirds for various reasons, there are still 200 potential opportunities from one single evening. Everyone knows someone somewhere.

Prospecting or relationship building can never stop. It has to happen every day. It's a process that when done repeatedly, every day, will pay off. The more people a salesperson gets in front of each day, the higher the percentage of sales. Unfortunately, when sales are good most salespeople and managers get comfortable and only focus on the business in front of them. They fail to think about and plan for the future until it's too late. They start to prospect when they urgently need new opportunities. While it's human nature to focus on the business at hand, especially true during peak sales periods, there is never a day when salespeople are too busy to prospect. When prospecting becomes part of the everyday process, every customer, every contact and every sale – even if the prospect didn't buy – has the potential to provide new leads or referrals.

Prospecting for relationships and opportunities is essential. When you do this daily, the results will be higher sales, increased productivity, greater profits, and an exceptional customer service experience. A relationship built on trust and confidence makes it easier for people to buy from you.



Richard F. Libin has written two acclaimed books that help people of all walks of life improve their sales skills, because as he says, “everyone is a selling something.” His most recent book, *Who Knew?* (Who-Knew.com), was published in early 2017. His first book, “*Who Stopped the Sale?*” (WhoStoppedTheSale.com), is now in its second edition. As president of APB-Automotive Profit Builders, Inc., a firm with more than 48 years experience working with both sales and service professionals, he helps his clientele, through personnel development and technology, to build customer satisfaction and maximize gross profits in their businesses. Mr. Libin can be reached at rlibin@apb.cc or 508-626-9200 or www.apb.cc.