# 6 STEPS TO GET A FIRST MEETING WITH YOUR TARGET PROSPECT

by Leigh Wallinger

Salespeople the world over are struggling with the challenge of getting to meet their target prospects. This is an issue if you are selling to large Corporates and it is an issue if you are selling to SMEs. To get an initial meeting with a prospect you have to follow a 6-step process. You need to be patient and you should expect obstacles to be placed in your way.

Before we look at the 6 steps in some detail, reflect on the circumstances of the person you are looking to meet. Your prospect is over-whelmed with information, being bombarded every working day by a torrent of emails, voicemails, direct mail and advertising. This is overlaid onto an already time-poor lifestyle.

If the person you want to meet works for a large Corporate, they will be struggling to cope with the demands on their time. If your target is a senior executive (and if it isn't, why?) they will have a P.A. to help protect their diary from unnecessary meetings and commitments. In particular, he has no time to see every salesperson that makes an approach. Your job is to clearly and concisely communicate what he will get as a result of agreeing to meet you.

If your target works for an SME, you will probably be approaching a member of the Board. These people are also time-poor. In particular, they will also be inundated by sales people making approaches. In smaller SMEs, there may be no P.A. which means the executive must find ways to field these calls. The majority resort to using voicemail to filter their incoming calls.

1. **Get your message clear**

Before you can even begin to work on getting a first meeting with your target prospect, you have got to make sure your message is clear and unambiguous.

Firstly, you need to identify all the "pain points" that your product / service will address. It is unlikely this will be a single pain point. With a little bit of creative thinking, you will identify several pain points your product / service will alleviate.

Let's say your company undertakes website design and development. Your target clients might want a website that is static – that is, like an online brochure. They might want a more dynamic website which they would like your company to update on a regular basis. Alternatively, they might want a website that is capable of being updated by the prospect's own staff.

In this example, we have 3 groups of client and each group will have a different set of pain points. It is your job to find out what they are and to address them better than your competition. The clients wanting a static website won't be interested in the easy incorporation of updates – this is not a pain point for them. Similarly, the clients who want to update their own website content won't be interested in your world–beating turnaround times for updates.

Before approaching your target prospects, identify all the pain points that you can address and, for each one, develop a list of benefits that will be realised if they were to choose your product / service. At the same time, you should develop a 30-second and a 60-second "elevator pitch" – a few key sentences that succinctly summarises your business. Ensure you describe what business you are in and focus on what your product / service does for your clients.

## 2. Do your research

Once you have identified the variety of pain points that your product / service can address, the next step is to undertake some research on your target prospect. This is a step that has become much easier in recent years, thanks to the Internet.

Research is often the step that experienced sales people skip. They believe their experience means they can get away without spending time performing desk research. This is often a fatal move as they fail to make their approach relevant and compelling enough for the prospect to open up his or her diary.

Back to the web design / development business. Your desk research might involve looking at your target prospect's current website (if they have one). You might be able to deduce how new it is – look for Copyright statements at the bottom of every page. Similarly, you can tell from the content whether it is a static or dynamic website.

You might be able to find out more about the company and its Directors by reading the "News" and "Investor Relations" sections of the website. More information can be obtained by using tools such as Google to search on Director's names etc.

Sometimes, this doesn't yield enough information and you may need to undertake a more direct form of research. You might telephone or even arrange to meet with employees of your target prospect to gather the necessary background information. You might be able to identify which pubs, restaurants or coffee shops their employees tend to use regularly. Just being there at the appropriate times and striking up conversations can be incredibly informative.

In summary, research to get yourself into a position of knowing some of the pain points your target prospect is encountering so that your first approach can be both timely and relevant.

## 3. Make more than 1 or 2 attempts

Recognise that it may take several attempts before the person you want to meet even acknowledges you. There is a variety of views as to how many attempts it takes to get your message to "stick". A good rule of thumb is 7-10 attempts.

Many salespeople seem to give up after 1 or 2 attempts and move on to their next prospect. For each prospect you target, develop a strategy to approach them up to 10 times over a 3 to 4 month period. Vary the methods you use – don't send 10 emails or leave 10 voicemail messages. Some senior executives prefer emails, others respond better to voicemail messages.

Emails are usually received directly by the individual. So too are calls to their mobile phone – if you can get this number, try it.

## 4. Get the P.A. on your side

Inevitably, unless a direct approach via email or mobile phone works for you, then you may have to deal with and through the P.A. As noted before, if you are working in the SME arena, not all senior executives will have a P.A. – in these cases you might find the Receptionist takes on some of their role.

Whether it's a P.A. or a Receptionist, this person can either help you in your endeavour to meet the boss, or completely block your progress.

Don't try to use smart manipulative techniques to either get through to the boss or to get an appointment in his diary. Explain why you wish to speak / meet the boss. Explain in terms of their business. Use the benefits you listed during step 1 to powerfully present your case in terms of how you can help the boss.

### 5. Be professional, courteous and persistent

Treat everyone you encounter in exactly the same way you would wish to be treated if the roles were reversed. Remain in control of the conversations by asking good questions and be persistent – don't give up too soon on your objective. Give yourself at least 7-10 attempts at getting to speak to or meet your target person before backing off. Keep in touch periodically and keep reading the business news for something that might trigger some interest in your product / service and make renewed efforts to secure the meeting.

### 6. Keep conversations at a business level

Don't ever get drawn into describing your product / service when speaking to your prospect on the phone. Keep your focus at the business level until you get in front of the person, when you will have more time. When you keep the conversation on business matters, and their business in particular, you should continue to use open-ended questions to help you gather as much background information as you can.

### Summary

Getting that 1st meeting with a prospect is difficult. However, it is not impossible. Follow the steps outlined above to give yourself the best chance to persuade your prospect to open up their diary for you.

When you have secured that 1st meeting, turn up with a list of pre-prepared questions that will help you to keep the discussion at a business level. If you are working in the Defence, Telecommunications or IT sectors, take great care with the use of acronyms. These are completely unintelligible to most people so if you do make use of buzzwords and acronyms, then make sure your prospect really does understand them.


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