

20 Ways to Discover a Gold Mine of Prospects

I had a call the other day from a client concerned with her newest sales representative. It seems she was struggling to develop new leads. Then, a prospect I was qualifying told me that the top two people at her company had recently lost some major clients and were fighting to rebuild their client base. Seems like a common problem. Finally my friend, Ken, who just recently returned to sales after a four-year career detour, confided in me that developing new business was always his strength, but he was at the bottom of that big hill now. The two of us spent some time and developed 20 ways to generate leads. Most of them can be done on an individual basis, some will become stronger when your sales team partners join you.

1. Referrals

Always have been, always will be the best way to generate leads. Make sure you are asking current clients, former clients, turn-downs and fellow employees (yes, your receptionist knows somebody).

2. Trade associations

Every industry has one. Join your association, today. The important step is to become active on committees or in projects. This is when you meet and gain the respect of contacts.

3. Network groups

They're everywhere. Some are very formal, others informal. Scout around your town for two or three. Take advantage of their free visit offers until you find a group you are comfortable with. Again, join and be active. When you give, you will eventually reap.

4. Speech Making Classes

A different approach, but where else can you have a captive audience of eight to 20 people and deliver talks about your business? This is not a formal network group, just a way to meet and develop your network. The added benefit is the improvement in your presentation skills.

5. Write

The power of the printed word is amazing. Start easy with letters to the editor of business papers, trade magazines and your local newspaper. Move up to articles about your area of expertise.

6. Speak

There are numerous groups that are looking for speakers. Offer Chambers of Commerce, business groups, and your own trade association talks on your area of expertise. Level 2 is to have your own/company seminar.

7. Charity/service groups: Lions, Rotary and more

Service groups and charities are full of business leaders exercising their sense of community. Join and help. This allows these leaders to see first hand your ability to get the job done.

8. Charity auctions

Donate some of your goods or services to a charity auction. The winner gets to sample your product (hot lead) and can then point you to other leads.

9. Directories

Visit the reference librarian at your business library. Ask to see directories such as SRDS, Cole's, Gayle's and others. These will list companies and key contacts. Also, check if there is a local business directory.

10. Look left/look right

Cold calls are reality. Who is the business next door to the one you just called on? Stop in and introduce yourself.

11. Local business newspapers/business section of paper

Read these on a regular basis. You will find articles on companies, key people and other gems to generate leads and contacts.

12. Want ads

Cruise through the paper and find out who is hiring. Hiring means expansion or growth. When companies grow, they need products. Often the ad is the first indication of a new company/business.

13. Legalise

Check out the new home purchases, births, new business filings and other legal notices. This is another area of change or growth meaning a need to purchase.

14. Surf the Web

In today's world you must be on the Web to survive in sales. Get surfing, and you will be amazed at the resources.

15. Internet news groups

Find a few that relate to your industry. Just read for a while, and then start to post. Remember, when people see you as an expert they want to do business with you.

16. Develop a home page

It can be effective if your page is designed well enough to attract attention. This is best done as a company with leads shared.

17. Strategic Alliances

Identify other business professionals with whom you can form an alliance. These are people in associated fields who call on the same types of clients that you do. An example is an insurance agent with an estate agent.

18. Be a PR agent

Wear your company clothing when appropriate, use golf balls with your logo, get a vanity plate on your car, have a company bumper sticker. The idea is to put your company name in front of as many people as you can. The interested ones will ask for more information.

19. Know your neighbours

They live with you. They see you and know you. Let them know how proud you are of your company and what you do. Show interest in them. I've had neighbours become clients.

20. Advertising

Be a sponge for radio, TV, newspaper and direct-mail ads. Track the companies. Healthy ad budgets also indicate companies with growth and new business. As they grow, they need more services and products.

A laundry list of 20 ideas can be intimidating. Start off by determining which of these you are doing on a regular basis. Take the time to discuss with your sales manager or supervisor if you are covering that area well. Once you get the base built, add one idea a month. Keep building your networks of contacts, and by the time you are proficient at all 20, you will no longer be scrambling for leads. You'll be sharing them with others you work with.

Happy mining.

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