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**Dialing for Dollars: How to Get Appointments with Your Best Prospects**

**By Jill Konrath**

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Six months ago I temporarily shut my business down to refocus, rename and rebrand my company. I also needed to create a web site. Finally, after several months of gut-wrenching work, I was ready for prime time – eager to get back to work.

My value proposition was strong; my target market clearly defined.

After identifying companies that met my parameters, I went on-line to research them. I requested annual reports and read them carefully. I wanted to ensure that when I talked to the executives, my services were aligned with their business objectives. Then, I developed my Top Ten List.

But my preparation still wasn't complete. I needed a phone script to make sure I didn't sound like a blathering idiot when I reached their voicemail. So, I went to work on that.

I wrote a script and then rewrote it. To hear how it sounded, I called my own phone number and left a message on my own voicemail. At first I sounded awkward, stilted. How you talk is really different from how you write. So, I'd make changes and try again – and again.

Finally, I got it down pat and was able to leave a personable message that conveyed exactly what I wanted to say in about 30 seconds. By the time I was done, it wasn't a script anymore; it was just me talking.

It was time to pick up the phone! I'll start tomorrow, I promised myself.

Well, after about a week of doing just about anything to not make calls, I decided I couldn't avoid it any longer. I stared at the phone. My stomach was churning. Thoughts of saying something stupid and stumbling over my own words raced through my mind.

I looked again at my list of targeted companies, thinking it was nicer to have them on my prospect list than to have them say 'no' to me. At least there was still the possibility that we could do business in the

future.

"This is absolutely ridiculous," I thought to myself. "Here I am, a seasoned sales professional and I'm suffering a severe case of call reluctance." There was only one way to put a stop to this. I had to call someone - right away.

Taking a final look at my Top Ten list, my eyes zeroed in on my top prospect. I picked up the phone and started dialing. 6...1...2... I paused, wanting to hang up, but I didn't. I took one last look at the highlighted bullet points I wanted to cover in the voicemail and forced myself to continue dialing.

The phone rang. I stood up – erect, with good posture to ensure the best possible voice quality. It rang again. I smiled, to make sure I sounded approachable... personable. It rang again.

"This is Peter," the voice said in a brisk British accent. I waited for the voicemail to continue, ready to deliver my message at the sound of the beep. There was a pause – a long, silent pause.

Suddenly I realized I was talking to a human, not a machine. I was dumbstruck. The last thing in the world I expected was to get the Vice President of Sales in person. No one ever answers phones anymore.

My mind went blank; everything I planned to say totally disappeared. Words came pouring out of my mouth. I bumbled. I stumbled. I sounded like a blathering idiot. I would have hung up on me!

Sure enough, the VP was quick to cut in, "We don't need any of that. We handle it all internally."

Under just about any other circumstances, I would have taken the comment in stride and addressed it easily. Instead, I sputtered, "Oh ... Well, thank you for your time," and got off the phone as quickly as I could.

Shaking my head at my own incredibly stupid behavior, I started to laugh ... and laugh and laugh. It couldn't get any worse. Now, I was ready to make calls.

### LESSONS LEARNED

1. NEVER, EVER call your best prospects first.

When you're selling something new, there are always glitches to work out and new obstacles to overcome. I tell this to every sales group with whom I work. If I've said it once, I've said it a million times. "Practice on your B or C prospects – ones you can afford to lose."

2. Have a voicemail plan AND a real person plan

Even though 95% of the time you'll probably get voicemail, you must have a contingency plan in case a human answers.

3. Be prepared for common obstacles too.

When you're selling you can almost count on hearing things like, "We don't need any" or "We're happy

with our current vendors." Don't be stupid like I was and say, "Oh." There are much better responses. Plan for them.

4. Make the process a learning opportunity.

If you don't get the reaction you hoped for or you run into some obstacles that are difficult to overcome, simply consider that feedback. Look at what you're saying and how you're saying it. Make changes and try again. Don't let yourself be defeated by a few rejections. Figure out what needs to be different and experiment. It truly isn't the end of the world unless you let it be.

5. Laugh at yourself – we all make mistakes.

Sometimes I can't believe I actually called my best prospect first. I knew better. I also can't believe I didn't prepare for talking to a real person. Again, I knew better. Don't ask me where my head was that week. I guess I just wanted to get out there and make things happen. And I really did want to do work with that company.

Fortunately, the conversation was so short I didn't make any lasting impression. I think I'll call Peter again soon and do it right this time!

Jill Konrath, President of Selling to Big Companies, helps small businesses win big contracts. She has FREE monthly e-newsletter, "Quantum Leaps Selling: Ideas & Insights to Increase Sales." To sign up, send a blank email to [mailto:jill@sellingtobigcompanies.com](mailto:mailto:jill@sellingtobigcompanies.com) with SUBSCRIBE in the subject line. For info on speaking, training or consulting services, please call 651-429-1922 or check out our web site ( <http://www.SellingtoBigCompanies.com> )

## **OEOComplete - A Personal Information Manager**

**By CellarStone INC.**

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OEOComplete - A Personal Information Manager

OEOComplete is a utility for managing the personal information of the user. It is designed to be flexible and affordable even for the home user. OEOComplete allows setting up appointments and tasks, and creates notes for easy reference. Recurrence, reminders and attachment enhance the competence in addition to import and export facility. For example, a weekly status meeting can be set to recur every Friday evening and remind you of the same any time before it, just by a single setting.

Users of Outlook Express particularly benefit from it, having an appointment scheduler and task manager along with their emails. OEOComplete starts automatically when you start Outlook Express while Outlook Express can be opened from OEOComplete also.

The Calendar option in OEOComplete helps you set appointments for any day, and plan your task ahead of time. OEOComplete allows scheduling of recurring appointments, such as a weekly status meeting that occurs on a regular basis

Experience the feature:

- Task Recurrence
- Set up Appointments, Tasks
- Create Notes
- Set Alerts/ Reminders
- Set up recurrence of appointments
- Import and Export of Data

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