

Cold Calling - Effective telephone marketing for job seekers

When you are unemployed the biggest assets are your time and energy. The telephone can be a great tool for maximizing time and energy, during these difficult days of transit strikes, provided you know how to use it.

Let me begin by emphasizing the fact that "cold-calling", or calling employers directly, is a difficult task for most people. "Cold-calling" is still one of the most effective ways of finding work you want. Picking up the telephone and asking about job opening or talking yourself into an interview is a very important skill.

Cold calls help you gather valuable information, while positioning and promoting your availability on the job market. Cold calling can help you find out exactly what employers are seeking. Think of it like a radio ad; short, to the point, focused at meeting the needs of an employer, and imparting the right information about the skills you have to offer in relation to what employers require.

There are several parts of the cold-calling process. Each part is similar to what telemarketers do when preparing to market a product. Cold-calling includes:

1. Preparing a list of prospective employers

Researching a list of employers is the first step. Find a list of suitable companies that match your career goals. You can use resources like the "Business-to-Business" directory, local chamber of commerce, www.mybc.com, yellow pages, business listings from newspapers and magazines, etc.

2. Preparing a script

Develop a short script to introduce yourself. Countless people stumble on the phone because they don't have a clear guide outlining what they want to talk about. Make sure you emphasize qualifications and showcase your special talents and experience. A script allows you to relax and focus on what you are saying and how you say it prior to calling an employer. Be sure to relate your previous success with what this new company needs. The script should have some basic elements, and a story approach, here is part of an example script:

"Hi, my name is Jake Sheridan <smile while talking>. Do you have a few minutes to talk? [Yes/No] I've heard your company is one of the most progressive in the industry <breath/let him respond>. The reason I'm calling is because I'm a high energy person looking to join a leading edge company that could use one more "top producer on the team" <breathe and smile>. Do you by any chance have any openings in the tech support department? [Yes/No] Well, that's great, I have over 10 years experience working with computers, 3 of those successfully managing 4 medium sized computer networks as system administrator, and 2 years working in a customer service/tech support role. What's your exact process for hiring new tech support staff?..."

3. Practicing your script

Cultivating a good phone voice is crucial. You should sound calm and confident, remembering not to rush through your script. Familiarity and practice with your script gives you confidence when introducing yourself on the phone. It also gives you the freedom to ad-lib (or be spontaneous) when calling. One method is to visualize a successful conversation before you call. Take a few minutes to loosen your jaw and relax your posture. Even though the employer can't see you they are definitely forming an impression of who you are. Here are a few ways to practice your script: (a) practice your script with a friend or other job seeker, making him pretend to be the secretary, or employer (b) record your voice on a computer or on a tape recorder

4. Preparing a toolkit

There are several things you need when making calls to employers. The most important are: (a) the script, (b) any notes about the company you are calling, (c) your resume, (d) a calendar or your scheduler, (e) a mirror to remind you to smile and act as if the employer were face-to-face, (f) a pen and paper, (g) and a "contact tracking" sheet formatted for notes on the date, time, person, company, address, telephone, reason for calling, followup date, interview date/time, and comments.

5. Practicing getting past operators/secretaries

One of the hardest parts of the process is reaching the person who does the hiring. It may take several calls before you compile enough information to find the right person. Knowledge of telephone systems is important to reaching your goal of speaking with decision makers in a company. In medium sized companies there is usually a central operator/secretary who screens and forwards calls or takes messages. This is to protect the valuable time of those who are busy. Gaining access to employers sometimes means finding ways to by-pass gatekeepers. One useful way is to use the "dial-by-name" feature of phone systems. Using your keypad you can attempt to connect to a random office person. Then you can ask for the correct extension for the person you need to talk with. Always remain courteous to whoever you talk with, you never know how much power a secretary has in the office. Don't leave long messages on people's voicemail. Before hanging up try to review your message using the extra options available on the voicemail system. Sometimes you may forget to mention your phone number or simply speak too quickly to be understood. Another way to get through to employers is call just after closing hours. It is not uncommon for secretaries and gatekeepers to leave before decision makers go home.

6. How to break the ice

Be genuine, and try to avoid reading a script like most telemarketing people. When breaking the ice you need to find out as much as you can about the company. Knowledge of what projects are underway and intended areas of expansion/development is crucial to breaking the ice with an employer. For example:

"I just read the other day that you were bringing a new product to the market. I must say, after reading the specifications on the MamboX MP3 player I am truly amazed at its potential. You see, I've worked in sales all my life and I know that this product will do well. I want to be a part of you team and I know that I can contribute a great deal of expertise towards your new marketing campaign. Is your company thinking of hiring salespeople for this upcoming promotion?..."

7. Anticipating responses to difficult questions

"Why should we hire you?", this is one of the toughest questions you can face. Presenting what's special about your skills and experiences is important. Nobody will know what you have to offer unless you tell them. A resume won't do that for you. Now is the time to mention skills or experience that would fill a gap in their workforce.

8. Anticipating objections and rudeness

Don't let "No" be the end of your conversation if you believe that you have a future with this company. Don't argue, but practice sidestepping the objection or presenting alternatives. By anticipating common objections to your call you can prepare the right answers that further enhance your candidacy. You can become depressed and demoralized from a string of rejections, unless you learn how to side step/deal with objections.

9. Phrases and words to avoid

Any type of slang like: Yep, yeah, hmmm, nope, I dunno, well..., gosh, god, dang, sooooooo, you know..., etc.

10. Voice tones and vocabulary

Don't reflect impatience because it sounds the same as irritation on the phone. Speak at a slow pace with a distinct, natural tone. Match your speed with that of the employer. Give the caller your full attention, because people can tell when you are not focused on the conversation. Smile, because your voice tone changes with the shape of your mouth. Smiling makes your tones higher and broader creating a sense of optimism in your voice.

11. Knowing when to disconnect

Your goal should be an appointment for an interview. Keep your call long enough to either get an interview or get details on how to apply for work at the company. Don't hang up until you have exhausted all

possibilities. For instance, ask if the employer knows of other companies who are hiring or other people who you could talk with about finding work. Ask if you can use their name when calling those contacts.

12. Followup

If an action was promised, what is it? Is there a deadline? For instance, do you have to fax your resume and cover letter, or pick up an application form? Or maybe you have to apply online or e-mail the boss with more information.

13. Tracking those contacted

Keep detailed records of who you contacted and when and for what reason [refer to 4 (g)]. Get the correct spelling of the employers name and write special notes about the conversation that may help in a job interview.

Contributions:

Thank you to all who requested the interview questions. They have been modified during the past week to 7 pages and will be e-mailed to you. I would like to interview active job seekers for my upcoming articles on job searching (by phone, e-mail or fax). If there are any job seekers who would like to contribute a few minutes of their time please feel free to call me at 977-5477, or e-mail me at jakes@pepjob.com.