

# Let Your Fingers Do the Walking

Generating your own leads can result in increased sales

By Jennifer Smith

**Y**our company probably does a great job of advertising. It sends out thousands of postcards, advertises in local coupon magazines, and may even have radio and television commercials. This causes the phone to ring off the hook and bombard the sales department with leads. Unfortunately, this can become costly for owners, and they often must review their return on investment.

#### House Leads vs. Self-Created Leads

Most would define a house lead as one that was brought in through an advertisement the company provided. House leads are great for new sales professionals who are just getting their feet wet in the industry; however, those who have been in water treatment sales for any length of time know the well sometimes runs dry. These leads also are not always the most qualified. Maybe a homeowner

misread a coupon or is just shopping around, and closing the sale may be difficult.

So what should sales professionals do during these dry spells? How can they land more qualified leads? The answer is simple: Create your own leads. Creating your own business not only will allow you to increase your closing ratio and save the company advertising dollars, but it also will allow you to be in charge of your own paycheck.

#### Where to Start

One of the first exercises I like to complete with sales professionals is the Yellow Pages exercise. Phone books are not delivered as often as they used to be, but obtain a copy of the one provided by your local telephone company. Then, let your fingers do the walking.

Starting with the letter A. You are looking for other industries with which you could possibly build a

relationship and, hopefully, a referral base. Start with only the headers first, and write down any industry that may be in the home or affiliated with the need for good water, such as appliance repair and sales, beauty salons, chiropractors and so on. You can easily get a list of 25 to 30 industries with which to build relationships.

Next, choose the top three industries you feel the most comfortable approaching. (Set the rest of the list aside for a month or two, then come back to repeat these steps with three more industries.) Now search for companies in your territory that are listed under the industries you chose. For appliance repair and sales, I recommend choosing a small “mom and pop” store that has been in business for a long time. For beauty salons, I recommend that you do not go to the “\$5 Haircuts” salon, but rather the “We Fix \$5 Haircuts” salon across the street.

### Give More Than You Take

Now it is time to swing by these storefronts and start building relationships. Let’s use the appliance store as an example.

Here is a common practice of many salespeople: They walk into the building, ask to speak to the owner, introduce themselves and then ask for the owner’s referral. In most cases, the owner does not know you or your company and has no reason to put his credibility on the line to pass you a couple of leads.

Here is the most successful introduction I have used when starting a relationship with an appliance store: “Hi, my name is Jen with 123 Water Conditioning. I have come across a few homeowners who are replacing their dishwashers every few years because of hard water. They have realized the hard water is the culprit of the dishwasher failing, so they are installing water treatment; however, they are looking at repairing or replacing their dishwasher also. I was hoping to find a company I can recommend. I saw in your advertisement you have been in business for 25 years. For a company to be in business that long, I would think we have the same philosophy on customer service. Could you please tell me a little about your company and what problems you run across with bad water?” And then I listen.

I also will ask to look at some of the dishwashers. I will note, “A homeowner pointed out the lines in the detergent cup say ‘soft’ and ‘hard’ in her washer. My dishwasher does not have that, but my dishwasher owner’s manual notes the amount of soap to use according to the hardness of the water.”

Let this conversation be about their company, and get information on how you can refer their team. Be sure to



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thank them for their time and let them know you look forward to speaking with them again. I also highly recommend sending a personal letter thanking them for their time and knowledge.

Be sure to stop by a few weeks later. It is at this time you can offer a free water analysis for any of their customers who may require multiple repairs or purchases due to poor water quality. Explain that you do not do a pushy sales show, but that you simply test the water and give recommendations if the homeowner is interested.

### Maintain the Relationship

Every relationship, whether personal or professional, requires maintenance.

A few years ago I was training with a salesperson. We stopped into a small appliance store and spoke to the owner about her company. She was third generation in the business and loved that our company was too. She asked for our information (we provided folders with the history of the company, a few brochures, coupons and a business card that we had left in the car until she asked). She mentioned she had worked with another water treatment company years ago, but thought it had gone out of business. As we left, she turned to her team and told them if anybody had questions about water, they were to call us.

Do you know what happened next? Absolutely nothing. Why? Because that salesperson never returned to the appliance store again. The owner again assumed the dealership had gone out of business. This is a perfect example of why it is important to swing by and say hi. Meet the different salespeople. Drop off bottles of water every once in a while. See if your company has some sort of referral program to

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thank them for their leads. Eventually they may allow you to display your equipment. But, most importantly, make sure to refer them—give more than you take.

### Success Does Not Happen Overnight

If you continue to maintain this relationship, you will start to see your sales increase. However, these companies have to build their trust in you and your team. Sometimes it may take up to a year for the leads to start coming in—this is why I recommend going back to your list every few months. But once you have gained their trust, they will be proud to send their customers your way. **WQP**

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