

ENTERPRISE

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Sales Solutions

Getting your foot in the door at larger companies

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Question: I work for a document-imaging company that provides copiers, fax machines, and printers for businesses. To get the most "bang for the buck," I like to sell to higher-end accounts such as Fortune 1000 companies, but often find it difficult to get my foot in the door based on cold-calling techniques. Do you have any suggestions on how to get in with Fortune 1000 companies without having to cold call them?

Answer: Fortune 1000 companies as clients are what I like to call premium accounts because they are typically larger in terms of both the opportunity to sell more of what you sell, as well as overall revenue opportunity. The reason they are so difficult to get into is that the decision makers we would typically deal with inside Fortune 1000 companies are bombarded by salespeople on a regular basis and as a result, practice tight screening tactics to prevent you from getting through.

While cold-calling techniques can be very effective in some cases, and even in calling on Fortune 1000 companies, if you're both persistent and patient, there is a better way!

You're probably familiar with networking as a technique to try to get into high-level companies, but I would guess your networking strategy is typical of most salespeople. If so, you attend networking events and work with referral partners by simply asking "who do you know that I could talk to who might benefit from the products and services I sell?"

Instead of this approach to networking, try company-specific networking.

Here's how it works. Create a spreadsheet of your top 10 most desirable premium accounts. The headings across the top of each column should read as follows: Company name; contact name; mailing address; e-mail address; phone number and notes.

Next, complete as much of the information on the spreadsheet that you already have, company name being the most obvious, but also include information such as mailing address and phone number, if you have it. Whatever information you don't have, leave blank.

OK. Here's where it gets interesting.

Now, e-mail your best referrals partners and contacts and attach the desired premium accounts spreadsheet you've just completed. Send the e-mail to one referral partner at a time, rather than an e-mail blast, to keep it more personal. The body of the e-mail you send to your contacts should read something like this:

"Hi (referral partner name)! I'm on a quest for some new premium accounts and I'm hoping you can help me.

Attached you will find a spreadsheet of my top 10 most desired accounts. I have completed the information I already have, and am hoping you will have some additional information that I am missing, such as the appropriate contact name at each company. I prefer to speak directly with (title of your decision maker), however, would greatly appreciate having the contact information of anyone you know inside each organization so that I may get my foot in the door.

In exchange for your help with this project, I would be happy to do the same for you.

Thanks in advance for your help!"

You may also consider offering a Starbucks gift card, of a nominal amount, as a thank-you for any information that is provided by each of your referral partners.

Also, you will notice the offer at the end of the e-mail that you would be happy to do the same for each of your referral partners. By offering to do the same for your referral partner that you are asking of him or her, you increase your chances for success in getting your spreadsheet back with some of the additional information you're missing. You'll be happy to know that the people who receive your e-mail will be thrilled to help because they understand the effectiveness of a networking strategy such as this and will be able to implement the same strategy with you and their other referral partners.

Once you've compiled the remaining information on the spreadsheet you were initially lacking, you now have the information you need to get your foot in the door with each of your premium accounts. Now, instead of cold calling, you should have a contact name at each company. If the contact at each desired premium account given by your referral partners is your typical decision maker, great! All you have to do now is call the person to whom you've been referred and use the name of your referral partner as a reference.

If the person you have been referred to is not your typical decision maker, you still have the "in" you need.

Begin your search for your desired contact within each desired premium account by calling the contact you were given by your referral partner, using your referral partners name as a reference. Next, simply ask the person you've been referred to who at their company would be the appropriate person for you to speak with based on the products and services you offer.

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