

‘They Never Call Me Back.’ No Kidding.

Get creative to set yourself apart and get prospective customers to hear you out.

His intentions were golden. Our revenue was anemic in the midst of an economic slowdown and the director of operations in the custom coating operation I ran decided to try his hand at sales. His plan was to call his peers at manufacturing companies that might require our services. In no time, he figured, our shop would be full of new work.

And so he began. He sat at his desk and made call after call to stranger after stranger, leaving voice message after voice message inviting each recipient to return his call.

About a day and a half into this endeavor he entered my office and said, “Something must be wrong.” He went on to explain that not a single person had called him back.

“They never do,” I responded.

“What do you mean?” he asked.

“They never call you back,” I repeated.

In fact, that wasn’t true. Each year for many, I had invested the first 10 working days of the New Year making telephone calls to prospects.

My goal was to make 70 calls each day, the vast majority of which

calls. How many called me back?

Two. *Two!* Out of 700 calls, two called me back, a rate so low that even now — a full decade later — I can still remember the name of one of the people who returned the call, a woman who worked in the purchasing department of a manufacturer in Schiller Park, Ill. Two out of 700. If you’re doing the math at home, that equates to exactly 0.286 percent of the prospects I reached out to who actually returned my call.

Before you chastise your fellow human beings for being so rude, so inconsiderate and so utterly self-absorbed as to not return a phone call, ask yourself this question: When was the last time you returned a call from a telemarketer? Exactly.

For the six months preceding the Fabtech show each year, I receive a half dozen voice messages each week from people trying to sell me new graphics for my trade show booth or offering to transport my booth to the show. Think I call them back? Not one. I’m not trying to be rude; I’m just busy. So are your prospects, and if your goal is to reach out to them, set appointments and secure opportunities to win new business, you must think a little further ahead than just leaving

Your prospects are busy. If your goal is to reach out to them, set appointments and secure opportunities to win new business, you must think a little further ahead than just leaving a voice message.

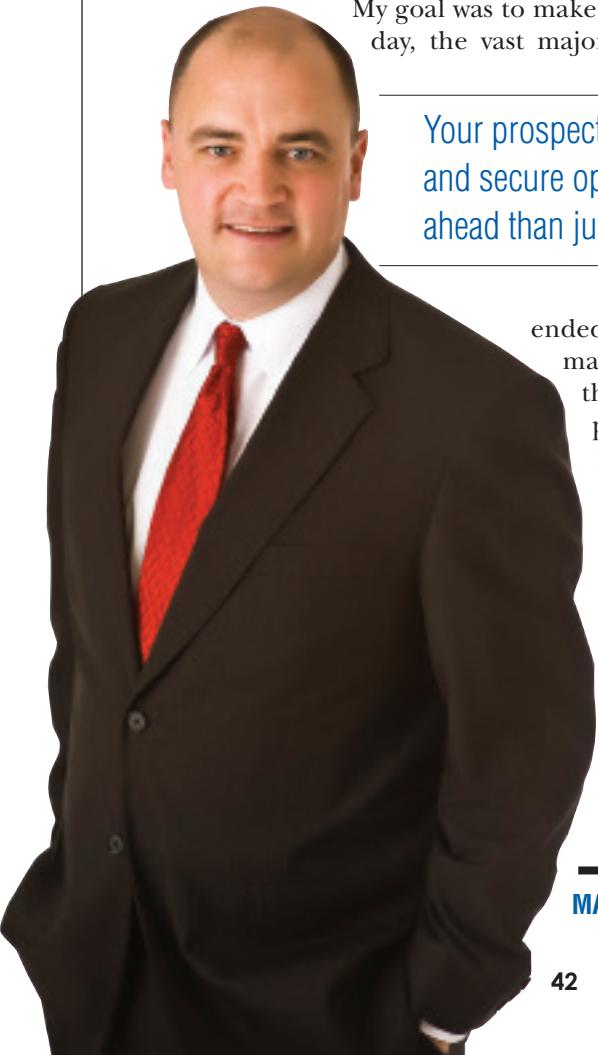
ended in a voice-mail requesting that the prospect return my call. One year, I decided to keep track of how many calls were actually returned. Seventy calls each day for 10 days make a total of 700

a voice message.

Not long ago I received in the mail from a real estate consultant a bright red hardcover book on the topic of “neuro-marketing.” I actually cracked it open and found it a pretty good read, and when the individual who sent it to me left a message on my voicemail, I returned his call and heard him out. I keep his business card on hand, and when I need someone with his skills I call him.

From time to time, another sales representative will drop off a \$10 Starbucks card along with her literature, and in a small way she has set herself apart. But I was much more impressed by the health insurance salesperson who delivered a brand-name bag of chewy chocolate caramels and included a list of 10 “Riesens” to meet with him. Brilliant.

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How about the payroll service representative who left a basket of bite-sized Payday candy bars with our receptionist along with his business card? Now that's creativity. Be careful, though—I thought the sales person who gave one of our employees a \$100 Visa debit card crossed way over the line, and I let him know he wasn't going to win our business by attempting to bribe our team members.

Checking through my mail one day, I found a flyer from a sales rep that included his photograph at the top along with a quote that said, "I'm so-and-so, and I want so badly to win your business that I am going to phone your desk next Tuesday at exactly 10:09 a.m. to request a meeting with you." The flyer went on to tout his products. The next day another flyer arrived in my mailbox. Same picture, same quote, but different information about why his company should be my supplier. This went on for five days, and then at 10:09 a.m. that next Tuesday my phone rang. I took the call and praised his originality.

How about the company that sends cranberries to prospects the week before Thanksgiving or the one that sends a tin of peanuts wishing them a happy 4th of July?

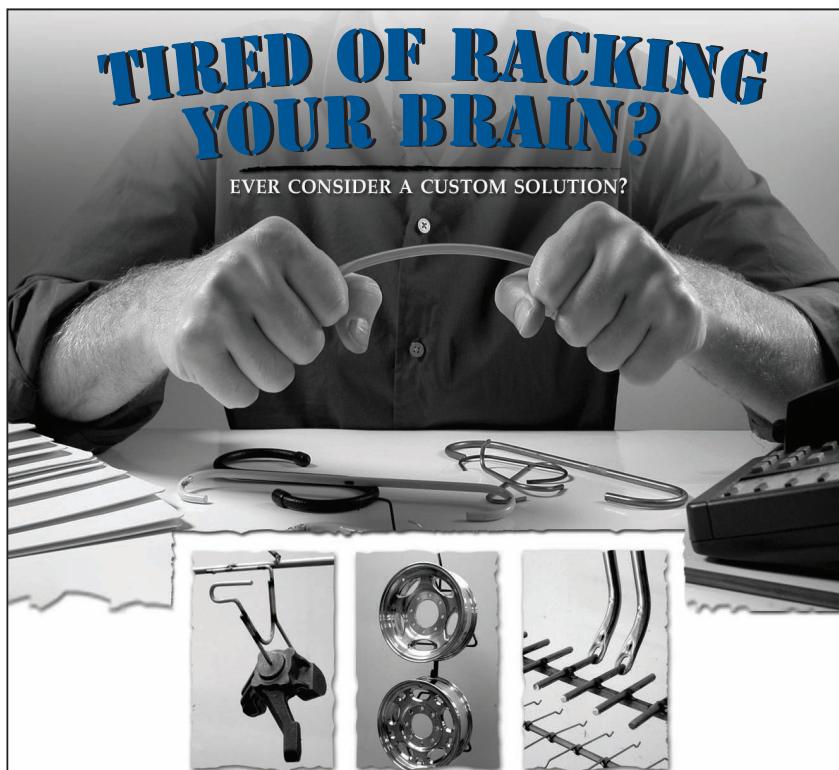
To set yourself apart, nothing beats a handwritten letter. Struggling to get a key prospect to take notice of your brochure? Spend a few extra bucks and send it via Federal Express. Who doesn't open a letter that comes FedEx? Could we perhaps be a little more inventive than sending an email to a prospect with "Meeting?" in the subject heading? Why not opt for a heading that catches attention?

When ELV and RoHS directives first had manufacturers up in arms as to whether their products complied and trying to figure out what to do about it, I know a sales person who spent a weekend studying these regulations and understanding exactly how they affected his prospects. He then went on to declare himself the expert on both,

and instead of leaving messages begging for appointments, he offered to educate his prospects on ELV and RoHS in a free 60-minute seminar that he could present right in the prospect's office. Ingenious.

Invite them to a Chemical Coaters meeting, offer a free trial, propose that you show up with sandwiches for a lunch-and-learn. I could go on for pages.

They never call you back? Actually, 0.286 percent of them do. To get the rest to do so, you'll have to get creative. ■



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