



TELEPHONE SELLING REPORT

Special Opening Statement Report

Common Resistance-Inducing Opening Statement Mistakes

Imagine someone not understanding how to open his garage door, or not knowing how to back his car out properly. Sure, once on the road he can do a reasonable job of driving, but he often does not get that far without incurring some damage. He experiences frustration, futile efforts, and as a result, avoids driving completely.

That's what it's like for lots of salespeople as it relates to opening their telephone calls.

In this cover page article you'll see the most common mistakes salespeople make in their opening statements. Mistakes that create resistance, if not a complete stoppage of the call right there. Throughout the rest of this special issue you'll get lots of word-for-word ideas you can use to ensure you're avoiding these errors and delivering the most effective openers possible.

First, put yourself in the position of prospects, and imagine how you would react if you heard these things at the beginning of calls.

❑ **"I want to talk about myself, my company, and my products."** As in, "The purpose of my call is to introduce my company to you and explain many of the great products/services we sell."

❑ **"I'm going to actually give you a long presentation of my products/services, right here in the opening, before you even have a chance to speak, even though I don't know anything about you or what you're interested in. There's a good chance I'll talk about a lot of things that have no relevance to you, and you'll be bored out of your mind."** These are the openings that begin with a presentation. "Mr. Prospect, I'm calling to tell you about ABC Industries, and our line of gobblestymers. We are the largest in the business, and have a full line of

yadda, yadda, yadda . . ."

❑ **"I'm going to use a salesy, slimy-sounding line I read in a book written by a guy who made tons of money selling swampland timeshare properties. This will paint you into a corner, cause you to roll your eyes, and grab both sides of your chair as you brace yourself for the sales pitch."** You've been on the receiving side of this sales profession-disgracing pap, I'm sure: "Mr. Prospect, if I could show you a way to get everything you've ever wanted, ensure your health and financial security, and have eternal youth, of course you'd want that wouldn't you?"

❑ **"I'm going to ask you to buy something (or otherwise make a commitment) before you're emotionally or logically ready to go there."** Quick decisions make many people nervous. Especially when they involve money, being sold, or investing time. Ask—or insinuate that you'll be asking—for a decision in the first 10 seconds of a call, and you get a similar response to approaching a stranger on the street and saying, "Hey, let's have a relationship." Here are actual call examples.

". . . calling today to discuss switching you over to our service . . ."

". . . and I'm calling to set up a time for us to get together . . ."

❑ **"Even though you get piles of unsolicited mail every day, I'm calling to see if you read the stuff that I sent you."** "I'm calling about a letter and catalog/brochure/folder I sent you. Did you have a chance to read that?"

❑ **"I'm going to ask you questions and take your time, but you don't know why, and I haven't given you**

any reason to listen to me, or answer my self-serving queries." "I'm Joe Buffoon with Scuzzbucket Supply. We're a major supplier. What kinds of supplies do you guys use there?"

❑ **"I-am-reading-from-a-poorly-written-script. You-can-tell-there-are-also-lots-of-other-people-here-doing-the-same-thing-because-it-sounds-like-I'm-calling-you-from-a-crowded-bar-at-happy-hour-where-the-drinks-are-free . . ."**

Where There's Been Some Previous Contact

Follow-up calls, and calls to regular customers have their own unique sets of blunders.

❑ Being Simply Reactive

". . . calling to see if you received the material . . ."

". . . wondering if you have any questions . . ."

". . . wondering if you've given any more thought to the program . . ."

❑ Presuming They Know (or Perceive) There's a Relationship

"I'm your new Account Manager. You might have bought something from us once a long time ago and probably have no idea of who we are, but I'm the person who is assigned to call you every two weeks."

❑ Not Bringing Any Value on Calls to Customers that You Contact Regularly

". . . just checking in with you . . ."

". . . calling to see if you needed anything . . ."

Recognize any of these? Don't worry. Turn the page, dig in, and work to develop and refine your own perfect, interest creating openings.

Special All-Opening Statement Issue

by Art Sobczak

I must have said and written it tens of thousands of times since 1983: your opening statement is the most important part of your call. A good one puts the listener in a positive receptive state of mind and moves him to the next phase of the call. (By the way, those are the two main objectives for the opening.)

Poor openers, which are much more prevalent, create resistance, tension, give no reason for the person to stay on the phone, and worse, cause them to shift into a "I've got to get rid of this person"-mode. Perhaps you've experienced that. I know I have.

Over the years, I've developed a pretty good sense of what works and what doesn't. And to what degree of success. Meaning someone can use an opening that gets them into the body of the call O.K., but perhaps the listener isn't as talkative as they could be with a reworked opening. My point being that regardless of what you use to open your calls now, even if you could enhance it so that it's 10% more effective, you're much better off.

Special 12-Page Issue

And that's why I'm providing you with something I've never done in 14 years of writing and publishing this publication: a special, one-topic only issue. And I've thrown in an extra four pages, full of word-for-word ideas, tips, and examples you can use to create and fine-tune your own openings for the various types of calls you place. From prospecting to calls to regular accounts, you'll find it covered in this issue.

What you are getting is a collection of some of the best ideas we've shared over the years on openings, some brand new material, and plenty of examples of openings actually used by fellow readers.

The Dreaded "S" Word

You'll see lots of real examples of openers this month. Which might get you thinking about that word: Script.

The word conjures up images of telephone solicitors, calling us at home with their auto dialers (complete with the two second delay at the beginning of the call before they come on), reading—often very poorly and robotically—from their

pitch sheets. No wonder many real sales pros like you do facial contortions upon hearing that word.

Get over it. Fellow professional, you should, you must, script out your opening to be most effective. If you're the type that responds negatively to the thought of having a script, consider that it's not a script itself you dread; it's the *canned delivery* we never would want to emulate.

Let's put it in a different context. Seen a movie lately? Think those actors were winging it? Of course not.

A well-written, tested script is the most effective combination of words to use to evoke the audience response you want. There's just no way you can achieve the same result by dialing the phone and "letting it flow." The worst possible time to think of what you'll say is when it's already coming out of your mouth.

The key to using a script is in the delivery. It can't be read. Your goal is the other end of the spectrum: making it sound like the first time you ever said it. You must practice it repeatedly until it sounds natural.

Naturally, the opening is the only part of the call you can totally script, since everything else depends on what they say. Not that you can't still be prepared for where you'll go, based upon how they respond—and you should be—there's no excuse for not having a smooth opener ready to roll from your lips.

And you're getting more ideas and examples of proven, common sense, conversational openers than I've ever seen in one place.

If you enjoy and profit from these ideas, I urge you to subscribe to this publication so you can get it regularly. Every other month we cover all parts of the sales call, and you're guaranteed to increase your sales. Fill out the order form on the back page, or call us at 800-326-7721

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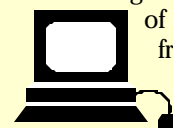
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Identify What Results You Deliver to Create the Best Openings

OK, what business are you really in? Be careful now. Many people write out what their business **does**, which is not the right answer.

For example, an organization that says they are in the business of "selling computer software and hardware" is only describing the operation of the firm. No one buys from them because they sell hardware and software. The business they are really in is "helping businesses save time and money by automating tasks that were previously handled manually." More specifically, niche marketers pinpoint their descriptions, such as, "helping bookstores save money and time by automating their inventory control, accounts payables, and purchasing functions."

When telesales reps prospect for new business, and say something like, "I'm Glen Jones with Acme Services. We sell advertising promotional items," it normally elicits a "So what?" response in the prospect's mind (along with a big yawn). The prospect immediately wants to know how what you do will help him. A better alternative to the aforementioned would be,

"I'm Glen Jones with Acme Services. We help small businesses keep their names in front of their customers every day at a fraction of the cost of regular advertising."

Do you describe what your business makes or sells, or what you do to make the lives of others better, easier, happier, more profitable, etc.? Be sure it's the latter.

Openers to Regular Customers Need to Have Value Added

Reasons for Calling

Do you like to be taken for granted? Or, do you like to be pampered? Obvious answers. But, why then, are so many customers treated with indifference. For example,

"Hi Mike, it's Keith at Able Supply. Hey, you guys got an order for us this week?"

When your call is announced to your customer, you want him/her to say, "Oh, sure I'll take it. He always has great ideas for me." Contrast that with, "Oh, him again. Probably wants to know where my order is."

Every time you call, without exception, have a Value Added Point. It's anything that allows them to feel they've gained by simply talking to you. It can be good news, useful information, notification of a sale, ideas you have . . . anything they will perceive as useful.

"Sandra, it's Linda with Dino Services. I was studying what you've been buying from us over the past two years, and I've got an idea here for a program that might just make your job a little easier . . ."

Consider beginning your opening with,

"I heard some interesting information, and you came to mind as someone who could really profit from it . . ." Or,

"When this news came out, I immediately thought about your situation there . . ." ☎

Ideas for Your Initial Benefit Statements

When you initiate a prospecting call, your prospects obviously are not expecting you. They are engaged in some activity.

People will react positively, or at least more neutral than negative, if they see a potential gain or way to avoid loss in your proposition. Within the first few seconds of the call, you need to point out how you can provide these benefits.

Here are a variety of ideas on openers from Jim Porterfield's book, **"SELLING ON THE PHONE: A SELF-TEACHING GUIDE."**

☐ **General Statement that Sparks Interest:** "Mr. Buyer, I'm calling today to make you aware of how companies like yours have saved up to 50% on their travel costs by using the techniques and insider information available in our travel newsletter."

☐ **Making Startling Statements:** "Ms. Jones, eight out of ten people are surprised to find that they don't have enough insurance coverage to replace their homes at present costs in the case of disaster. If you are one of those eight, we can give you that protection, perhaps at a lower rate than you are now paying."

☐ **Follow-Up to Literature Request:** "I'm calling to follow-up on the literature you requested, so that we can determine which of our services would best provide the results you desire."

☐ **Mentioning an Industry-Wide Problem:** "Lisa, the reason for my call is to introduce you to our Private-Eye security camera, which helps significantly reduce employee theft in convenience stores."

Use these examples in adapting your own attention-grabbing openers.

(SOURCE: Examples from "SELLING ON THE PHONE: A SELF-TEACHING GUIDE," James Porterfield, John Wiley & Sons, New York.)

A Different Idea: Don't Identify Yourself

It's normally suggested that you introduce yourself and your company at the beginning of your calls. Here's an idea that leaves out the name of the caller.

"Ms. Stevens, I have an idea that will increase the attendance at your programs, while not costing you anything. I'm with Ajax Promotions."

"Keith, if you ever use temporary help, we have a program that provides trained, reliable people, and it costs less than any other in town. I'm with Top Temps."

The examples illustrate that the intent of the opener is to evoke emotion and curiosity right away. A premise of this introduction is that prospects don't care about your name, nor will they remember it, **until** you tell them what you'll do for them. The reasoning is that as the call progresses, and as they become comfortable with you, they'll say, "By the way, what did you say your name was?" ☎

A Fill-In-The-Blanks Opening Statement Formula

Here's a popular piece that originally appeared about three years ago in *TELEPHONE SELLING REPORT*. We regularly get requests for reprints, and have even made it part of our training manuals for the Telesales Rep College.

It's a fill-in-the-blanks formula and menu of word and phrase choices that I've used with sales reps for generic prospecting opening statements, which can be customized by most anyone for their own industry and types of calls. Use this as an idea-starter for your own perfect opening.

“Hello _____, I’m _____ with _____. I’m calling today because depending on what you’re now doing/using/experiencing in the area of (fill in with your area of speciality) there’s a possibility we might be able to help you (fill in with 1. Minimization Verbs) your (fill in with appropriate 2. Undesired Noun), and (fill in with 3. Maximization Verb”) your (fill in with appropriate 4. Desired Noun). If I’ve caught you at a good time, I’d like to (fill in with 5. Action Verb) your situation to see if this is something (fill in with appropriate 6. Ending Phrase).”

<p>1. Minimization Verbs</p> <p>save free up consolidate cut down on reduce lower shrink combine get rid of</p> <p>salvage decrease minimize eliminate lessen soften slice modify</p> <p>cut slash trim</p>	<p>2. Undesired Noun</p> <p>costs difficulty problems annoyance time expense waste work effort worry</p> <p>trouble restriction obstacle inconvenience charges</p> <p>hassle drudgery paperwork anxiety</p> <p>taxes burden labor bother</p>	<p>3. Maximization Verb</p> <p>strengthen reinforce increase add maximize create enjoy help</p> <p>intensify boost expand grow enhance build ease</p>
<p>4. Desired Noun</p> <p>profits revenues savings morale attitude market share</p> <p>sales income time motivation image</p> <p>dollars cash flow productivity output victories</p>	<p>5. Action Verbs/Phrases</p> <p>discuss review go through analyze ask a few questions about</p>	<p>6. Ending Phrases</p> <p>you'd like more information on you'd like to discuss that would be of value to you that would be of interest that would be worth considering that would work for you</p>

Examples

This formula is intended to be tool for you to use when creating your own opening. Let's look at some examples using this template.

“Hello Ms. Dillon, I’m Dudley Denton with Able Services. I’m calling today because depending on how you’re now handling your receivables processing, there’s a possibility we might be able to help you cut down on the time you spend preparing invoices, while also increasing your cash flow by getting bills paid to you more quickly. If I’ve caught you at a good time, I’d like to discuss your situation to see if this is something that you’d like more information on.”

“Mr. Grillo, this is Jill Nostrel with Slumlord Services. We specialize in working with multiple-unit property managers. Depending on how you’re now tracking your accounting and owner reporting, there’s a possibility we might be able to help you cut down on the hassle and paperwork involved in those tasks, while at the same time enhancing the amount of useful information you can put in a report, along with making them easier

to read. If I’ve caught you at a good time, I’d like to ask you a few questions to see if this is something that you’d like to take a look at.”

“Hi Don, I’m Dale Fallon with Fishbreath Supply. My purpose for calling you is quite simple: depending on what items you’re carrying now, there’s a possibility we could help you lower your costs on many of the same supplies you’re stocking, while at the same time free up more cash to carry other fast moving, high margin items. If I’ve caught you at a good time, I’d like to ask a few questions about your store to see if we should talk further.”

Apply this formula . . . whip out your thesaurus and come up with other words more descriptive for what you sell, and what your customers want. Tinker with it, then test, edit, and retest your openings. I'd also like to see and hear about your results. Fax your openers to me at (402)896-3353, along with your comments so we can share them with other readers.

Don't Waste Opportunities on Initial Calls

Often sales reps will waste an opportunity on a prospecting call by saying this in their opening:

"I'm Pat Jones with ABC Company. I'd like to send you some information about our services and then follow up with you later, OK?"

This is a feeble effort, since 99% of the prospects say, "Sure, send it," which they view as an easy way to get the caller off the line. Then, come follow-up time, they are unreachable, or very cold towards the caller.

If your goal is to get information in the hands of the prospect, let them know that, but also let them know they have to do something for it, and that there is a potential gain for them.

"I'm Pat Jones with ABC Company. I'd like to send you some information about how we have helped food packagers increase their productivity, without any additional investment in labor or equipment. First, I'd like to ask a few questions to determine if this would be appropriate for your situation."

Then you can seize the opportunity to qualify, and sell the prospect on your ideas. You still likely will send material, but using this process they will WANT to receive it and read it.

Another Variation

"Mr. Prospect, I'm _____ with _____. I'd like to mail you some information that describes how we specialize in helping banks collect a greater percentage of their past due loans. (wait for response, which would almost always be positive.) Great, let me ask a few questions so I can tailor the package to your specific situation."

Again, the literature is used as a non-threatening way to get the prospect to listen. Since they are interested, they'll answer the questions, and the rep will have a much more productive call, and will be able to send information that is more meaningful.

Avoid Discussing Your Product/Service In the Opening

Let's examine a few opening statements that are sure to create resistance in the minds of prospects.

"Ms. Prospect, I'm Bob Jones with Parts Supply. We sell replacement parts for gromulmitzers, and I'd like to tell you what we can do."

"We're an environmental services consulting firm, and I'd like to introduce you to our services."

"We've just introduced some new products and I'd like to tell you about them."

Yawn.

No, make that, "How do I get rid of these people?"

Can you detect what's wrong with these? Aside from the fact these opening lines don't hint at what potential value is there for the listener, each talks about the company's products and services. Big mistake. People don't give a hoot about what you sell. Talking about products early in a call likely will gain you an early exit. People are only interested in the *result* of owning or using what you sell.

Examples

Read through the following examples submitted by Breck Johnson with International Automated.

"This is Breck Johnson with International Automated. We specialize in helping business owners/managers control and simplify their accounting for fuel and other vehicle expenses . . ."

"We help save drivers' time, especially when they purchase gas, diesel, or other related items for their vehicles . . ."

"We help business managers lower their gas and diesel expense by providing an opportunity to shop for the best local pricing instead of being tied to one specific store or franchise."

Based on these openings, can you determine what product or service Breck is calling about?

If you guessed a VISA card specifically designed for fleet vehicle operations, congratulations. But you probably didn't, because these opening don't mention the card, which likely would spur resistance.

For example,

"Mr. Prospect, I'd like to tell you about a new VISA credit card we've just introduced that . . ."

Breck's targeted prospects, fleet owners and managers, are inundated with sales offers for credit cards of all types. (Probably just like you are at home. Think of how you react when you hear the telemarketer drone on, ". . . and you've been pre-approved for a Big Bank Titanium Gold Super credit card . . .") They don't need another card. But, oh, did you say simplify my accounting and lower my fuel costs? Tell me more.

Analyze your own openings. Are you inciting resistance by talking product/service instead of results? If so, brainstorm for the loss you help people avoid, or what you help them gain. Then work those ideas into your opening, and move quickly to the questions.

An Exception To the Rule

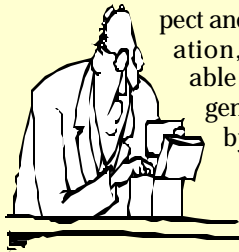
Here's an opening that appears to break the product/service no-mention rule.

"John, I'm Linda Peters with Wilco Services. We specialize in providing trained word processors on a temporary basis to companies who need them for special projects. I'd like to ask you a few questions to determine if you ever run into situations where you need to get a large amount of entry done in a hurry, but may not have the necessary staff."

OK, I'll concede that if your product service itself screams "Benefit/result!", then it'll probably evoke some interest. Be careful though. Most people have a higher opinion of their product/service than their listeners do.



A Prospecting Opening Idea



The more you know about a prospect and his/her situation, the better able you are to generate interest by appealing to their specific situations.

We've often recommended that you question operators, screeners, salespeople in the prospect's organization (we all love to talk, right?) others in the prospect's department, or anyone for that matter. After introducing yourself, say to these folks,

"I'm hoping you can help me. I'm going to be speaking with Mr. Bigg at your company, and I want to be sure I'm on target with my questions. There's probably some information you could provide that would be useful."

Then proceed with questions about the areas you specifically work in.

Then you could use whatever you collect to tailor an interest-generating opening . . . one that sets you apart from smilin' and dialin' shotgun-in-the-dark feature-spewers:

"Ms. _____, I understand you're now in the process of (whatever change you know they're working on), and I might have something here that might make that process easier as it relates to the (pick an area: installation, implementation, staffing, funding, etc.) If I've caught you at a good time I'd like to discuss a couple of ideas to determine if you'd like more information."

Follow-Up Opening Example

"Kathy, it's Dan Adams calling to continue our conversation from last week. I've got some good news on the replacement parts research I did for you, and also I'd like to go through your thoughts on the proposal I faxed you . . ."

Ideas For Follow-Up Call Openings

Your follow-up call opening should serve to smoothly bring the customer's state-of-mind back to the point where it was when you ended the previous conversation. The opening should not,

- ask for a decision: ". . . calling to see if you're ready to buy now . . ."
- be simply reactive: ". . . and I was just checking to see if you had any question . . ."
- be a quality test of the postal service or their internal mail handling: ". . . wanted to see if you received the material I sent . . ."

First, your follow-up call needs to be based upon an objective for this call. When you think about it logically, there must have been some reason why you've agreed to follow up, right? (If not, this might be a sign you're getting the brush-off from lots of folks, causing you to waste time chasing shadows. For example, "Well, just call me back in about six weeks.")

Good reasons for following up include either,

- they were to do something between the last call and the scheduled follow-up that would make this call worthwhile, or,
- a future event would take place that would make the follow-up more appropriate, such as a new budget year beginning.

The opening needs to bring them into a conversation that readdresses the hot points fueling their interest last call, and also serves to move the process closer to the ultimate action you're seeking (the sale).

Follow-Up Opening Format

Here's a simple format for the opening.

1. Identification. The less the familiarity, the more formality. If you've only spoken once, first and last names and your company should be included. If you're well acquainted, you be the judge as to what sounds appropriate.

2. Bridge. Again, you want to bring them back to a point they were emotionally when you ended. You often need

to remind them of their interest and the previous call. Use words like,

" . . . calling to continue our conversation from two weeks ago . . ."

" . . . I'd like to pick up where we left off . . ."

" . . . calling to resume our discussion of . . ."

Mention what their main interest was.

" . . . where we went through the savings you'd show with internal management of your . . ."

3. The Agenda for This Call. This part needs to be proactive:

"I'd like to go through the material I sent you to point out the specific cost-cutting features that apply specifically . . ." Other proactive words and phrases include,

"discuss"

"analyze"

"cover"

"review"

"walk through"

Remember, you're not calling to just check in, or slap them with a goofy question like, "Well, what'd you think? Are you ready now?"

You also should bring something new to the table . . . some value-added reason for this call, beyond what was covered last time. This way, if their interest has waned since the last contact, and/or they didn't follow through with what they said they'd do (which happens quite often) you still have a basis for continuing this contact. For example,

"And I also did some research and came up with a few other examples of something you showed interest in the last time we spoke: how other engineering firms have used this process."

The opening is a small, but integral part of the follow-up contact. When well prepared and executed, it takes them to the next phase of the call, which is your questioning.



He Focused on the Appointment, and Got Resistance Instead

A financial planner cold-called me the other day and after introducing himself and his company, said, *"I was referred to you by (a friend of mine), and I'd like to come by and spend about twenty minutes discussing what I do for people to help with their investments."*

I politely told him that I was well taken care of in that area. He tried to overcome the objection by telling me how listening to ideas couldn't hurt, yadda, yadda. I became even more resistant.

The main problem here is that he immediately went for an appointment in the opening statement. I'm sure he subscribes to "the phone is only for setting an appointment"-theory. I didn't see any value in taking time in talking to this guy in person. However, with an intriguing opening, I likely would have spent a little time with him by phone. Then, if he asked the right questions, got me involved, built some rapport, and gave a few ideas that made sense, I might have met with him.

An opening I might have listened to would have been,

"... I specialize in working with business owners in your size range, helping them maximize their return and minimize their tax liability. If I've caught you at a good time, I'd like to ask you a few questions to see if we would have the basis for a more in-depth conversation."

A New-Business Opener

"Hello, Mike, this is Scott Wolf with Radio Profits Corporation. (If referral, insert: "John Doe suggested I call you.") **My company works with stations to develop an inhouse telephone sales department. This generates new revenues and sales leads for your outside sales force while promoting your station's call letters throughout your market. I'm calling today to introduce myself and our program and help you determine if this has value for your stations."**

Opening Rules, Ideas and Tips

❑ **The two objectives for your opening:**

1. Put them in a positive frame of mind, and,
2. Move them to the questioning part of the call.

On Follow-Up Calls . . .

❑ **Have Value Added Points (VAP's) on Every Call.** If you are truly calling to keep your name in front of them, fine. It's necessary to build "mindshare." But this is only successful if they feel they received something as a result of the call. Be prepared with useful news, new ideas, information about how some of your other customers are taking fuller advantage of some of the things they are buying now, and so on. For example,

"I was at a trade show last week and I thought of you . . ."

Or, **"We've just introduced something here that might be able to work in your situation, and I'd like to run it by you . . ."**

❑ **Be Proactive.** Even if you did send literature, don't bring the call to a screeching halt by asking if they received it. Make it part of what you want to DO together on this call:

"I'd like to review with you the pricing options I detailed in my letter . . ."

And if they didn't receive your stuff or don't have it handy? No problem; the literature isn't holding you up like a crutch. Be prepared to proceed anyway.

On Prospecting Calls . . .

❑ **Use Weasel Words.** Appear out of the blue with cocky claims like *"I can show you how you can do thus and so, guaranteed,"* in your opening, and people furrow their brow, wince, and look at their handset thinking to themselves, who *IS* this used car salesman?" Instead, ease in with words like,

"might be able to . . .",

"there's a possibility . . ."

"depending on what you're doing now . . ."

Word-for-Word Opening Statement Examples

To Infrequent Customers Following a Catalog Mailing . . .

"Hi, this is ___ from Seismic Supply. I'm calling today because we recently sent you a copy of our new instrument catalog. I see that we had the opportunity to provide you with your (items purchased) several months ago, and if I've caught you at a good time, I'd like to talk a little about your situation and discuss a special promotion we have that can give you 20% off of your next order of ___, or anything in our catalog."

Focusing on an Industry Concern or Problem . . .

"Ms. Keely, I'm Dan Davis with Quality Services. We specialize in working with fastener distributors on easy ways to comply with the recent federal regulations regarding consistency. The purpose of my call is to find out how much of a concern this is to your company, and determine if it would be worth for you to take a look at some of our material."

A Prospecting Call . . .

First a little background: Contractors Labor Pool provides electricians, plumbers, and other tradespeople on a temporary basis to building contractors. Clay calls on the contractors to qualify them, generate interest, ideally place workers immediately, or get agreement that the contractor will use CLP when the need arises. Here is Clay's opening, and questions.

"Mr. Prospect, this is Clay Mahle with Contractors Labor Pool. We specialize in providing skilled tradesmen on demand, when your need arises. A number of physical plant managers use our service to increase their service capacity and flexibility, without the hassle and expense of hiring extra staff. My purpose in calling is to ask a few questions about your operation to see if our service would be of value to you." ☎

How to Call One-Time Buyers

Many of you are given customers after they've made an initial purchase, either by mail or phone. Your goal then is to build the business. Here's how you don't want to start the first call. It's a call I received from a sales rep.

"Hello Mr. Byer, I'm _____ with _____ Supply. I see that in the past you've bought some diskettes and printer ribbons from us, and I'd like to talk to you about the other supplies we have."

Analysis and Recommendation

"So what's the problem?", you might be saying right now. "That's exactly what the rep is trying to do . . . talk about the other supplies."

Nope.

That's where this approach falls on its face—with the misguided objective. Don't call anyone to just talk about *products*. Your objective is to learn about their business, what their needs and desires are regarding the results they want from the types of products/services you sell, and then make a recommendation as to how you can help them. And that's the most effective way to build a relationship with a buyer.

As for this opening, let's pick it apart.

First, one of my cardinal rules of opening statements is that all you want to do is place them in a positive state of mind so they'll open up, share information with you willingly, and subsequently listen to you. This opener confuses, and creates resistance.

After the introduction the rep says, *"I see you've bought diskettes and printer ribbons from us . . ."*

That's almost accusatory. (Or at least it could be construed that way by some, the possibility of which is too high for my tastes).

A positive approach would be much better.

"First, I'd like to thank you for your recent order with us, I see we had the opportunity to provide you with computer diskettes and printer ribbons."

Then the rep said he wanted to *"talk about the other supplies we have."* This, more often than not, creates the feeling that salespeople want to avoid: resistance. A salesperson calling and wanting to talk about products implies the listener will be asked to buy something. Naturally that's what we want them to do, but slapping them in the face with it this early in the call triggers instinctive buyer's resistance—like the inane "May I help you?" that most retail sales clerks use—therefore placing them into a negative frame of mind before you've even left the starting gate. Instead, we want to instill warm feelings about sharing information with us.

That's all you're trying to do in the opening.

In this company's example, the customer likely bought by mail initially because the company had lower prices on many items. Therefore the rep should use that buying motivator as part of this opening.

"The reason for my call is that depending on what else you're using in your office, and how much you're spending, it's likely we have some other items here that might be attractive to you and give a similar savings (pause, wait for their response, lead into qualifying questions) **I might be able to make some recommendations for you . . . what types of printers do you use . . . ?"**

Nonthreatening, results-oriented, and effective. It gives a nice transition to the questioning.

Grab Their Attention

Searching for that grabber for your opening statement? Put yourself in the position of the person you're calling, and ask yourself,

"What is it I want most as it relates to (your types of products/services)?"

The answer—less downtime, ease of use, quick turnaround time, etc.—will likely be the reasons people buy from you. Mention it in your opening and you're sure to get their attention.

Opening Examples From Readers

Here are openings sent to us by fellow readers.

Ben Hyman, Telemarketing Manager of ROI Systems, and Telesales Rep College grad, submitted this one:

"Hello _____ (prospect name). This is _____ (name of TM rep) from _____ (Name of Company). I'm following up with you at your request from our conversation several weeks ago. The last time we spoke, we chatted about . . ."

The reason this works for him is that it provides a link to the last call, and reminds the prospect of the pain uncovered or important issues discussed during the previous contact.

Something you hear tens, maybe hundreds of times daily and probably don't even think about, are the musical backgrounds, lead-ins, and sounds effects on radio, TV, corporate videos . . . anywhere for that matter. There's a good chance that music came from FirstCom Music in Dallas. The pros there are responsible for selling to their existing accounts, and prospecting for new biz. Here's an opener Sharon Baer is using with great success to win new radio station accounts.

"Hello this is Sharon Baer with FirstCom Music. The reason I am calling is to tell you about the two new libraries we have added to our "pick and choose" custom production library. Depending upon what you are using now for production, I might be able to help you freshen up the sound of your radio station."

"Ms. Evans, I'm Sandra Steven with Grand Supply. We work with quite a few dealers like yourself nationwide, and have a system that has helped them sell more of their products to new customers. Depending on the market you're selling to, it might be worth it for us to see if this would be of any interest to you . . ."

First Name Only, Or First and Last?

A question I often get is, "Should you use your first and last names on calls, or is a first name sufficient?" Here are some general guidelines.

- When prospecting, or calling people who won't instantly recognize you, use both first and last names. This builds your credibility and professionalism, and eases any skepticism. Decision makers have told me when they get calls from people using only a first name—and they don't know the caller—their image is of people who typically use only first names, i.e. service repair people, delivery drivers, and so on.

Another benefit of using first and last name is that it eliminates the inevitable question, "And your last name is . . . ?"

- On calls where there's an existing relationship, last names aren't necessary. You be the judge of how strong the familiarity is.

- On a similar note, also give your full company name. If a firm is casually known as AGI, that may mean nothing to someone unfamiliar with the organization, whereas American Garbage Institute is more descriptive.

For Requestors of Literature

If you receive requests for information via the mail, Internet, fax, tradeshow, and eventually plan on calling to qualify them for either a phone or face-to-face sale, call before you send out the material. You'll save time, weed out non-buyers, save money on literature you won't send, and most importantly, uncover hot leads that are ready to buy quickly.

The key to determining if these people are players or pretenders, you need to get them talking.

"Mr./Ms. Prospect, I'm _____ with _____. First, thank you for requesting information from us . . . on the Torquemaster keyless bushings. I'll be providing that to you, and if I've caught you at a good time I'd like to find out a little more about what you're looking for, since it's likely I could get you some additional information that would be a bit more specific for your application . . ."

Openers for Calls to Reassigned And Inactive Accounts

Here's another go-nowhere opening that, to me, sounds like long fingernails dragging slowly across the blackboard:

"I was recently assigned to your account as the new rep handling your territory, and I was just wondering if everything is OK, and if we could be of service in any way."

I feel sorry for the unsuspecting greenhorn sales reps who are thrown into situations like these, often with very little training, and are told, "Call these people up and see if there's anything we can do." It's as if the prospect was waiting for the call, list in hand of all the items he would like to buy from the caller. Yeah, right.

Usually, the customer isn't really a customer—maybe someone who purchased something minor at one time or another—and hasn't a clue about the calling company, and couldn't care less that there is now someone assigned to his account. Actually, he's probably thinking that now he has some sales rep who will be bothering him. If you're handed a pile of old "accounts," keep in mind these people may not know your company from one plucked randomly from the Yellow Pages, let alone care that you're now the person assigned to him.

Similarly, what you also don't want to say is *"I was going through our dead account file..."*, or *"I noticed you have an account but no activity with us."* As amusing and absurd as these examples seem, they surprisingly are quite common. Inactive accounts are always a good source of new business, and are easier to turn than cold prospects if approached properly. What you **want** to do in the opening statement is

The Process

1. Identify yourself and company,

"Ms. Smith, I'm _____ with _____, providers of _____."

2. Give the reason for calling, and mention the fact you had done business before. Include a benefit.

"The reason for the call is that we had the opportunity to provide you with widgets about a year ago, and we once again have those priced very attractively."

3. Get them involved.

"Please tell me, are you still using the X- 25 model widget?"

An Example

"Ms. Davis, I'm Dan Douglas with Whittle Cutting Tools. We sold your company several cases of diamond blades a few months ago . . . and if I caught you at a good time, I'd like to let you know about a special we have on those blades, and few others you might have some interest in . . ."

Notice this one doesn't even mention—yet—that the caller is now handling the account. Because, it's not important to the listener. There wasn't a relationship established previously. They wouldn't have known the previous rep from their last pizza delivery man.

When There Is a Stronger Relationship

Next let's look at it from the perspective of a lukewarm relationship, where they are a customer buying fairly regularly. It is appropriate to mention that you're now handling the account.

"Tom, I'm Gwen Charles with Twin Financial. There are two reasons I'm calling today. First, I wanted to let you know I've taken the place of Ken Hartley who worked with you in the past, and second, in looking at your account here I've got a couple ideas I'd like to run by you that . . ."

After this opening, the rep should say,

". . . and first, to make sure I'm making the best recommendations, I'd like to update my files here on what you use . . ."



Opening Formulas to Use or Adapt

Here are some opening statement ideas you might want to consider and adapt if appropriate.

“Hello _____, I’m _____ with _____. The reason I’m calling is that:

a. I have an idea I’d like to explain, to see if it could pay off for you.”

b. I’d like to get your opinion on one of our products/services to determine if it would be worthwhile for you to consider.” (although this breaks the rule on not talking about your products or services in the opening, it piques curiosity.)

c. I have an idea I’d like to run by you to determine if you feel it could make money for your company.”

All of these openings are designed to pique the prospect’s curiosity, and get them involved in the conversation, which is all you’re really trying to do in the opening statement. All of these openers should cause the listener to say, “What do you have?”, or “Let’s talk about it.”

At that point, you can give just a shred of a benefit to keep their interest, and then proceed with questioning to determine their main needs. For example,

Caller: “Hello _____, I’m _____ with _____. We specialize in _____. The reason I’m calling is that I have an idea I’d like to explain, to see if it could pay off for you.”

Prospect: “What do you have?”

Caller: “We’ve just introduced a new software-based training program that can shave hours off the time required to become proficient with most word processing programs.”

Prospect: “Oh really?”

Caller: “Yes, I’d like to review it with you. First, tell me about your present program for training new word processors . . .”

Here’s another idea that can be adapted for many situations:

“Mr./Ms. Prospect, I’m _____ with _____. We provide a product(s) you now use (sell), and I have an idea that might be able to (fill in your own benefit). We specialize in (add another one of your own benefits). Let’s determine if it would make sense for us to spend some time together . . .”

Then you simply begin your questioning. It’s likely that you will have piqued their curiosity, and they will see a benefit in at least finding out what you have to offer.

You’re Not a “Talking Mail Piece”

Keep in mind you are not a “talking direct mail piece.” That’s a caller who spews the same information, call after call, with little regard for questioning and the needs of the listener. For example, the caller might repeatedly say, “*The reason for the call is to let you know about our special on muffler belts this month. They come in six colors and are only \$5.95 each. Would you like some?*” A tape recording could give that same message, for gosh sakes! Ensure you’re calling with prepared questions, and only present after you’ve learned of their needs.

By the way, you *can* take a specific offer, and make that the premise of your call—you just don’t give the entire spiel at the beginning. Instead, you might start with, “**Pat, when I saw this month’s special, I thought of you, and how it would be perfect for you because of what you told me last time about how muffler-related items move well in your store.** (pause) **Tell me, what brand of muffler belts are you carrying now?**”

Then, after layering questions further—questions designed to uncover needs-related information—then the listener would be in a much more receptive frame of mind to hear about the belts, plus the rep could tailor his presentation to fit snugly with the prospect’s situation.

“We’ll Save You Time and Money.” Yeah, Right.

Everyone says they can save time and money. And it’s not very effective.

“But wait, Art,” you might be thinking, “Isn’t that what you always say? To have a benefit/results statement in an opening?”



Yes, you should. You must—if you want to start out with an open-minded prospect who willingly participates in a conversation as opposed to one who shifts into his let’s-get-rid-of-this-pest mode. But the phrase “save you time and money” has become as hackneyed as “How are you today,” and therefore doesn’t carry much weight. Problem is, it doesn’t conjure up a picture and feeling of the end result the prospect is looking for. My feeling is that the phrase actually causes the listener to think, “Uh-oh, a salesperson. Let’s see how I can get rid of him.”

Therefore, your job is to get creative. To come up with jazzy, unique, mental picture-painting, emotion-stirring words that semi-hypnotize the listener into a state of mind where he’s thinking about the potential result. You need to be descriptive, and tailor your phrase to the situations he encounters—ones you can help with.

For example, instead of,

➔ “*save you money,*” a sales rep might say, “. . . **and we might be able to help you reduce the amount you spend every month on interest and penalties.**” Or, “. . . **help you cut down on the expenses for short-run printing jobs.**”

➔ Instead of “*help you increase sales,*” consider, “**help you get new customers, and keep them buying from you.**”

➔ Instead of “*save you time,*” think about, “**reduce the number of hours your staff now spends on manually researching rules and regulations.**”

At your next sales meeting, have people describe the physical pictures and emotional feelings customers experience when they have the problems you solve, and also their feelings after you solve it. Then work on ways to creatively describe them.

Grab Their Attention With This Opener

Here's an opener you can use or adapt:

"Ms. Keely, I'm Dan Davis with Quality Services. We specialize in working with fastener distributors on easy ways to comply with the recent federal regulations regarding consistency. The purpose of my call is to basically find out how much of a concern this is to your company, and determine if it would be worth for you to take a look at some of our material."

You're not trying to sell in the opening. All you want to do is break their preoccupation with what's going on in their environment, and generate enough curiosity and interest so that they'll answer your questions from a positive frame of mind—not a resistant one.

If you don't grab their attention immediately, they'll begin thinking of ways to get off the phone.

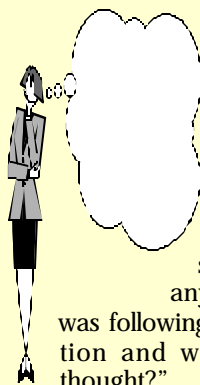
Quick Tips

- If someone answers** the phone and sounds rushed, don't let that scare you into rushing your opening or questioning. Some people naturally sound fast-paced . . . others do it with salespeople until the rep builds rapport.
- You could hardly go wrong** by using "Thank you," or "Congratulations."
- If you feel you must ask** for someone's time at the beginning of a call, ONLY do it after mentioning the value you can offer, and then say, ". . . and if I've caught you at a good time, I'd like to . . ."
- Whenever you find ways** that other customers use your product or service that could be of value to others, be sure to write that down and use it as a Value-Added Point on future calls. And, get permission to use their name.

Another Opening Example

"Ms. Davis, the reason I'm calling is that we specialize in helping wholesalers take their non-performing or written-off inventory and turning it into cash. To determine if it would make any sense for us to take a look at your situation, I'd like to find out a little about your . . ." Then you should be prepared with your questions.

"I Was Thinking About You . . ."



Follow-up calls to people we've spoken with previously are typically some of the most difficult for which to create interesting opening statements. A common question we get is, how do you avoid saying, "Do 'ya have any questions?", or "I was following up on the information and wondered what you thought?".

One idea is to use the "I was thinking about you ..." technique.

For example, on a call to a person who has your product or service literature, but they are in "prospect limbo" as so many wind up, you might say,

"Hello Jim, it's Pat at Universal Services. I was reading some new performance reports, and I started thinking about you. I realized that you might be interested in what these reports had to say."

Another example,

"Ms. Jones, Ellen Phillips with Clone Engineering. I was thinking about you, and some of the points you made about your specific hydraulic needs during our last conversation. I have a few ideas I'd like to run by you."

Most people are flattered to learn you were thinking about them—IF you are sincere. But, using this technique doesn't eliminate the need to have something solid and beneficial to say to the prospect.

Collect Information First, Then Create Your Opening

Calling someone without first knowing anything about them is like saying, "I don't believe this potential transaction is important enough for me to do any research for."

People call our offices all the time, immediately launching into a pitch on phone equipment and other telecommunications hardware and software, assuming we're a telemarketing service agency. Naturally, this blunder instantly and indelibly brands them as someone who didn't take the time to find out who we are or what we do. Which very easily could be accomplished by asking those questions of the person who answers the phone. Your credibility, and perceived ability to deliver anything of value, is viewed in direct proportion to how much you know about your prospect. Be a detective. Ask questions of the screener. Do your homework. And then use this information to prepare a more relevant opening. You'll find your calls go much more smoothly.

An Idea Some Stockbrokers Use

Here's an opening statement prospecting idea intended for use by stockbrokers that you might be able to adapt to your situation:

Caller: "Jan, I'm ___ with ____. I'm calling today about an excellent investment opportunity. Before I describe it, I need your answer to one question. Do you mind if I ask it?"

Prospect: "No, go ahead."

Caller: "Do you have any money anywhere earning less than ___%?"

This wouldn't be for everyone, but it might be feasible to say, **"I'm calling today about an idea that has saved money for other people in the ___ business. Before I run it by you, I'll need your answer to a simple question . . ."**

Work with this one to see if it has possibilities for you.

(SOURCE: ART OF SELLING INTANGIBLES, LeRoy Gross, Simon & Schuster, New York)

Write It First, Then Revise It

Anyone who writes anything will vouch for the fact that their first draft is usually garbage. (For some of us it's more than that!) Many writers trash their first draft, start over, and *then* begin the editing and fine-tuning process.

So what's this got to do with selling by phone? It underscores the importance of first writing out the most important piece of your call: the opening. When a sales rep wings an opening statement with a disjointed stream-of-consciousness collection of thoughts, it's like a writer submitting a first draft for publication. Both are destined for the scrap heap. Write out your openings, word-for-word, edit them, let them age for awhile, come back again, repeat the process a few times . . . and then you might have something very worthwhile.

How to Edit Your Openings

When editing your opening, scrutinize every word and idea. Ask yourself, "Is this adding to the effectiveness of the opening?" If not, cut it, or reword it. Sales reps often get wordy with things that just take up space and time in an opening.

Also ask, "Is there anything here someone could potentially object to?"

Reword openings so they sound good when spoken. Use contractions, informal language, build in pauses, and use sentence fragments.

Read Your Opening Into a Tape Recorder to Test It

After cobbling out an opening statement you feel is ready for field testing, put it through a few more trials. Speak it into a tape recorder—this ensures it sounds conversational. Role play it with a partner. Have them throw resistance at you. You'll be better prepared when you get on the phones.

Avoid Saying What You "Just Wanted to Do"

In openings avoid using the phrase, "I just wanted to give you a call today and . . ." Don't talk about what you "just wanted to do." Instead, TELL them why you're calling, including your reason why they should be interested.

"I'm calling because we've worked with other people in a similar situation as yours, and helped them to . . ."

How to Address Them

So what do you call them? Mr., Ms., first name, "hey, you" . . . it's a common question. Your prior relationship with them is the first determining factor as to whether using a first name is appropriate. If they don't know you, then it's subjective. Depends on how they answer the phone. "Hi, this is Jan," indicates a first name is OK. Otherwise, you need to read their tone, sense of urgency in their environment, and draw on your own instincts as to how to address them. Better to err on the more formal side.

No Need to Apologize

Don't apologize for taking someone's time at the beginning of a call. It diminishes your importance. For example, consider the caller who says, "I know you're busy, and I'm sorry for interrupting . . . I'll take just a few seconds, and here's why I'm calling."

Stop. Think about what you're really offering. You have something of value that will help make this person's life better. You need to present that feeling with conviction. If you're not sold on your importance, how could you expect them to be?

Don't Rush Your Opening Statement

When you introduce yourself and your company at the beginning of a call, be sure to do so in a confident tone of voice. Also be certain to not rush through it.

Your first impression is lasting. "HellothisisBobJoneswithWESTSUPPLY" sounds like a blur. When you rush, you sound out of control and the listener might feel that you do not possess self-esteem.

Brief Tips

On calls to inactive accounts, don't say anything similar to, "You have an account with us, but no activity," Instead, try, "We had the opportunity to work with you in the past, providing you with . . ." Then mention a benefit you can deliver.

On follow-up calls, use phrases like, "I'm calling to continue our conversation . . .," or, "I'd like to pick up where we left off . . .".

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