

# Is Telemarketing Still an Effective Lead Generation Tool for Professional Services?

By *Brian Swanson*

The approach to marketing has changed with the emergence of new tools, such as social media websites like Facebook, LinkedIn, and Twitter. One has to wonder whether the marketing and lead generation tools of the past are still relevant in the new electronic age. Recently, I was asked whether the “old standby,” telemarketing, was still considered to be an effective lead generation tool for accounting and law firms. Can telemarketing, if structured properly and effectively, still be an effective tool for professional service firms?

First let's define what telemarketing means in this context. When we speak of executive telemarketing we are not talking about professional business to consumer telemarketing. We are speaking of something very different. This type of telemarketing has a bad reputation, and for good reason. It is characterized by someone from an organization calling to solicit donations or subscriptions from you right in the middle of dinner, or the middle of the weekend when it's the last thing you want to discuss.

Executive telemarketing is vastly different from the description above. It refers to the process of a company calling a C-level prospect in another company to educate it on service offerings, discuss its situation and offer assistance in the future. A key difference is that the calls are being made to businesses and are done so by educated professionals familiar with the industry and service, and who are able to professionally represent their organization.

## Executive Telemarketing in the Marketing Mix

The executive telemarketing process is as effective a lead generation tool as any other components of the marketing mix. In fact, I would argue it is more effective than many traditional lead generation tools because it provides the opportunity to interact directly with the prospect. No other lead generation tool I can think of, including e-mail marketing, direct-mail marketing, social media marketing or pay per click advertising provides the opportunity to engage the prospect in a conversation about the issues and challenges it is facing. Those other tools provide a flow of information, delivering a message to the prospect, but

do not provide a forum for interactive communication. Now these methods may eventually lead to a phone call, especially if the prospect has an immediate need, but the initial flow of information is still one-sided. The interaction component is critical and sets executive telemarketing apart from any other tool to generate leads.

Despite the fact executive telemarketing allows for interaction, it cannot be a successful tool if the process guiding the effort is flawed or ineffective. All too often the process breaks down and becomes ineffective when expectations are not set or the wrong professionals are brought into the process. The following briefly describes the main roles executive telemarketing and the sales people should play in the process.

**Telemarketing.** The role of the executive telemarketing professional is to identify qualified prospects from a prospect list. This person essentially opens the opportunity by asking pointed questions to uncover issues, problems, challenges or opportunities. The goal is to document as much information as possible, so when the conversation ends, this person can share the details with others in the firm. Although this sounds quite straightforward, there are a number of areas where issues arise, which ultimately reduces the effectiveness of the process. These include:

- *Improperly Vetted List.* Having a thoroughly researched list is important to the process. It is quite embarrassing and destroys credibility when you call a company and don't have a name, or don't have the right name for the prospect you want to speak with. Often what happens is the gatekeepers identify the call as a “cold call” and put it into a general voicemail box or offer to take a message. When this happens the call is lost because it is impossible to know if the message you are communicating will get through. So it pays to research a list, and even have the company website and regulatory filings available (when applicable).
- *Skill of the Professional Calling.* The person making the call is as important to the process as the sales person or partner who delivers the proposal. If you have someone who is not comfortable on the phone, whose voice is

monotone or appears to be reading from a script, you will no doubt experience less than optimal results. No one wants a call where someone is reading to them. In many instances this is the first time a prospect is interacting with your firm, so it is imperative the impression left be a good one. You heard the adage: you never get a second chance to make a first impression. Well, it applies here: the person making the calls has to have the necessary skills. You should ensure you have a qualified professional making the calls who has both the technical knowledge and sales skills.

- *Improper Follow-Up.* Following up is the trickiest part of executive telemarketing. How many times should I call? Should I leave a voicemail? How many voicemails should I leave? These are questions that must be addressed prior to the start of the calling effort. Define the process exactly so the professional making the calls knows how to handle each situation. In our experience, we generally call once every seven to ten days, and no more than three times per month. This includes voicemails, leaving messages with secretaries, etc. Doing more than this may convey the image you are desperate for work or don't respect the executive's time.

**Business Development/Partner.** The role of these professionals is generally to follow-up with the prospect based on the information provided from the executive telemarketing professionals. Their job can vary from discussing technical issues, scheduling appointments, or simply engaging the prospect in a conversation about his or her situation to further qualify the opportunity. It is important to note, once the lead has been handed off, the telemarketing team generally does not become involved in the process again. The function of this group is to take the lead from the opening stages and nurture it to a close. This requires a skilled sales professional who understands the sales process and has experience in the area. Although this sounds quite straightforward, there are a few broad areas where trouble can arise. These include:

- *Technical Professional Selling.* If your firm distributes leads to the professional who is technically savvy on the services being sold, but has weak sales skills, there may be a problem. Often, the most technical person is not the best sales person. Despite the best intentions and vast knowledge in the area, the professional is unable to make a connection or get to the point where the firm is invited to submit a proposal. Why? The answer is simply

that sales and technical knowledge in accounting, tax and consulting require different skills sets. If the person following up on the leads does not have the correct skills it will reduce the chance of success.

- *Consistency.* Define how often the sales professional should follow-up with the prospect. I have personally been involved in situation where it took five phone calls before I got the "interested" prospect on the phone. It was not that he or she was not interested, but the person was busy with quarterly and year-end work. Remember, consistent and professional follow-up at every stage of the sales cycle indicates your interest in their business, but respect for their time.

The key thing to remember is that the program is only as good as the structure and professionals implementing it. Unlike many other lead generation tools, executive telemarketing is highly fluid and requires the appropriate set of skills across the process.

Looking at executive telemarketing in terms of the larger marketing picture, I don't believe a firm should rely solely on it as a means of generating leads. It needs to be part of a larger plan that incorporates both push and pull methods. Some prospects will

respond better to executive telemarketing than direct-mail marketing. Others will not respond to the executive telemarketing but may come to you through your social media outlets because they prefer to communicate using the Internet rather the phone. Appealing to the prospect through as many mediums as possible makes the most sense for any company seeking to generate leads.

### Is It Still Effective?

Executive telemarketing is still an effective lead generation tool. Remember the name of the game is balance. Use all the tools at your disposal to find the most effective one for your firm. Once you have identified it, continue using that method until the results tell you otherwise. [MSNA](#)

### About the Author

Brian Swanson is the director of marketing and business development for Daszkal Bolton LLP, located in South Florida. In this role, he focuses on implementing the firm's strategic marketing plan through both traditional marketing and lead generation strategies. His experience also includes website marketing, employing search engine marketing and search engine optimization. Brian can be reached at [bswanson@daszkalbolton.com](mailto:bswanson@daszkalbolton.com).