

## 3.2: Standards for Contact

### Learning Objectives

- Understand how to make contact with your prospect.

What is the worst pick-up line you've ever heard? How did the person on the receiving end react? Chances are he or she was not very impressed. During a sales approach there are also certain opening lines to avoid—and others that will be more successful. The following section offers some pointers (and reminders) that will give you the power to start the selling relationship off on the right foot.

### During Every Sales Approach

While sales approaches can vary widely depending on the selling situation, there are a few standards that *always* apply.

#### Always Get the Customer's Name Right

There's nothing more off-putting in a sales approach than a salesperson misspelling or mispronouncing your name. If the salesperson can't be bothered to learn something as basic as your name, it sends the message that he doesn't care about you as a person, and it certainly gets the relationship off to a bad start. In e-mails, double check that the customer's name isn't misspelled or mistyped. For telephone or in-person approaches make sure you've figured out how to pronounce the prospect's name during your pre-approach research. Ask contacts who might know (a receptionist, for instance, or your referral source) if you are unsure. And if the prospect has a difficult name, and you can't get a confirmation on pronunciation, avoid using his name in your opening lines.

#### Always Listen

"Don't be interesting; be interested." In other words, don't try to impress your customer by spending a lot of time talking about your qualifications or how wonderful your company or product is; instead, show your prospect that you are genuinely interested in getting to know him and in understanding his needs. The only way you can do this is to listen. Ask questions and then let your customer do the talking. During in-person sales calls you should engage in **active listening**. Show the customer that you are really listening by adopting a listening posture: look the customer in the eye and lean forward or incline your head while she's talking. In any sales approach you should restate the essential points your customer brings up, both to check for accuracy of understanding and to show that you are paying attention.

Listening is one of those skills that is easier said than done. While people naturally want to talk, they feel most appreciated when someone else is listening. That's when people open up and share their goals, wants, and needs. Salespeople are often known for their ability to talk, but it is listening that makes the best salespeople.

#### Be Ready with Your Elevator Pitch

Have you ever heard the term "**elevator pitch**"? It's a concise description of a product or service that should take no longer than an average elevator ride. Laura Katan, "Perfect Pitch: How to Nail Your Elevator Speech", *The Muse*, July 19, 2020, <https://www.themuse.com/advice/perfect-pitch-how-to-nail-your-elevator-speech>, (accessed May 22, 2024). Every salesperson has an elevator pitch for the product or service he is selling. That way, he can tell people about his product in under sixty seconds, and it's a perfect way to start a conversation or phone call and helps to make a good first impression. In fact, everyone from a CEO to an entrepreneur has an elevator pitch about her company to tell potential investors, shareholders, and other stakeholders. Most listeners don't have the time to hear all the details about a product or service in the first minutes of a conversation so the elevator pitch provides just enough information so the audience knows what he is talking about and wants to know more. In other words, an elevator pitch is an overview of an idea, product, service, project, person, or other solution and is designed to just get a conversation started.

Your elevator pitch comes in handy when you are making an approach on the phone or in person. It's the perfect opportunity to tell someone about your company and product or service in less than sixty seconds so that you can engage her in conversation. Remember, an elevator pitch isn't a sales presentation; it's simply a way to begin an interactive conversation and get to your ultimate goal—a meeting with the decision maker.

## Approaching by Telephone

Establishing rapport can be a challenging task when you make your approach by phone because you can't read your customer's body language or other visual cues, and she can't read yours. There is also the possibility that you will catch your prospect during a busy or inconvenient time. For telephone approaches, it's best to be brief and direct and to save small talk for your in-person meeting or for a later, scheduled phone call.

Your prospect will probably decide whether or not he is interested in what you have to say within the first twenty seconds of the call, so it's best to be direct and get this essential information across early on. You might say something like "This is Shamika Lorenz from Selling Solutions, a firm that specializes in helping businesses reduce their selling costs, and I'm calling to let you know about an upcoming seminar for small business owners in your area." Such directness also conveys honesty and lets your prospect know that you won't waste his time.

## Do Prepare a Script for Your Opening Statement

Because you want to get your prospect's attention in the first twenty seconds, it's important not to stumble over your words or sound like you are rambling. After you have given your name and the purpose of your call, offer a reference point based on your pre-approach research. For example, "I read that your start-up has recently opened a new downtown location." This will personalize your approach and help establish your credibility. Next, lead into a general benefit statement that will address your prospect's "what's in it for me?" question.

## Do Ask "Is This a Good Time?"

Keep in mind that asking for permission helps build trust and allows the customer to feel like she is in control of the call. However, it's important to think about the way you phrase your question. It is always easier for people to say yes to a question than to say no, so when you open with something like "Did I catch you at a bad time?" all your customer has to do is agree with you ("Yes, this is a bad time."), and the call is effectively over. On the other hand, if you ask whether this is a *good* time, a yes response will work in your favor. Your customer is only likely to say no if this really is a bad time, and if that happens, you are well positioned to say "I understand. Would Monday at 10:30 be a better time to talk?"

## Don't Start Off by Asking, "How Are You Today?"

This common greeting is one you probably use without thinking twice about it. But opening a sales call this way over the phone (when you are contacting a busy stranger who doesn't know why you have called) can be off-putting and will probably come across as insincere.

## Don't Launch into Prolonged Explanations

Your prospect is obviously not sitting by the phone waiting for a call from you. You want to be personable when you call, but you also want to keep in mind that for busy decision makers, phone calls are interruptions, so the more business oriented the interruption, the better.

## Leaving a Voice Mail Message

Sometimes it is difficult to reach the person by phone. Although it's a good idea to call back at different times of the day to see if you can catch the person, it is also a good idea to leave a short voice mail to introduce yourself, your company, a brief reason for your call, and when you will call back.

## Approaching by E-mail

While an e-mail approach is less personal than an in-person or telephone approach, it might be your best method. According to Mailbutler, every \$1 spent on email marketing generates \$44 in revenue. 92% of adults who are online have email, and 99% of users check their inbox daily (58% first thing in the morning). "How to write a winning first email to a potential client", Mailbutler, <https://www.mailbutler.io/blog/email/write-winning-email-to-client/>, (accessed May 27, 2024). Here are a few things to keep in mind.

## Do Write a Number of E-mails in Different Styles and Tones

Online marketing expert Daegan Smith suggests crafting about fifteen different e-mail templates so you can choose between them when you want to get in touch with a prospect. You can think of it a little like building up your wardrobe so that you have different

things you can wear on different occasions: you wouldn't wear the same clothes to a baseball game that you would wear to a business meeting. You also wouldn't send the exact same communication to all your prospects. The bottom line is that you want the e-mail to be as personal as possible.

### Do Send a Well-Written E-mail

Keep in mind that an e-mailed sales approach is still a first impression, even though the communication doesn't involve any immediate contact. While the e-mail should be personal, it should be more formal than the personal e-mails you send to friends. You want to sound knowledgeable and credible, which means paying close attention to your word choice and style. Give the e-mail the same attention you would give to a business letter. This also means reading the e-mail several times before sending it to check for spelling and grammar mistakes, just as you would with any other business correspondence.

### Do Follow Up Persistently

Don't get discouraged if you don't get a response to the first or second e-mail you send. In B2B sales, it often takes about twelve e-mails before contacts reply, so be persistent. If your prospect doesn't respond right away, it doesn't mean that he isn't interested in what you have to offer—just assume that he is a busy person with plenty of other distractions that come across his desk every day. If you continue to send your e-mails regularly, eventually the message will register on your prospect's "radar screen." Of course, you don't want your e-mails to be an annoyance either, and including an "unsubscribe" option somewhere in the body of the message for the prospects who truly aren't interested so that they can request to be removed from your e-mail list is important.

### Don't Send E-mails That Look Like Templates

Again, the goal is to make your e-mails as personal as you can. If you have a number of e-mails drafted, select the one that seems most appropriate to the specific prospect(s) you want to target, and include your prospect's name in the heading and body of the e-mail. This will set your message apart from the average, impersonal "junk" e-mail that people get regularly.

### Approaching through Online Social Networks

In some cases you will be able to leverage your online social network to approach a prospect. For instance, if you are a website designer and you attend a Webinar on increasing Internet traffic to business's homepages, the other Webinar participants are potential prospects, and you might decide to contact them and ask to be added to their LinkedIn network. When requesting to connect, mention something you have in common, or specific why you're interested in connecting with that person. Companies are also increasingly using social networks as a budget-friendly way to allow prospects to approach *them*.

### Do Make a Comment When You Add a Prospect as a New Friend

According to marketing specialist Leslie Hamp, even something as simple as "I noticed we were on the Webinar together, and I'd like to add you as my friend," will work. Leslie Hamp, "5 Steps to Effective Business Social Networking," Social Networking News, July 9, 2009, [socialnetworkingnewstoday.com/](http://socialnetworkingnewstoday.com/) (accessed August 2, 2009). The point is that you want to give your approach a personal touch. If you just go out and friend all your prospects without making the effort to engage with them, they might not accept your friend request in the first place, and even if they do accept, they may wonder who you are and how you found them. Or worse, they may soon forget about you altogether. You can think of the networking tool as a facilitator, something that gives you the opportunity to connect, but it is still up to you to do the work of socially interacting and leveraging your connections.

### Do Aim for Quality over Quantity

There are so many new and interesting social media programs available that it can be tempting to join multiple sites; but if you are a member of more than two or three social networks at one time, you will probably find your efforts spread too thin. You can get the most out of your social networking by focusing on regular contributions to the few networks of which you are a member, rather than by trying to maintain your profile and connections on a number of sites.

### Do Contribute to the Community

In social networking situations, just as in face-to-face interactions, you want to build a good rapport by earning the trust and respect of your customers and colleagues. This means considering ways you can participate in and contribute to the online community, rather than simply using the social networking sites to promote yourself or your product.

## Don't Let Your Language Get Sloppy

As with e-mail approaches, pay attention to your language. Use a higher level of formality when you contact business prospects than you would use when you send social networking messages to your friends; avoid slang (like “u” for “you” or “btw” for “by the way”). Spelling, grammar and punctuation matter!

## Don't Make a Sales Pitch

Even though a social-network approach looks different from an in-person or over-the-phone approach, the purpose is the same—establishing rapport, building trust, and helping your customer discover needs and opportunities—so avoid making your sales pitch during your initial contact. For instance, returning to the example of the website design specialist, assume you added ten of your fellow Webinar participants to your social network. Maybe your company has made a short YouTube video that offers advice on incorporating blogging capabilities into business websites, so you send a message and link to your ten new contacts: “I thought you might be interested in this video.” In the video’s description on YouTube, you can post a link to your company Web site or blog where you make a direct sales pitch. This way you are offering your prospects valuable information without coming across as pushy. If a prospect is interested in pursuing your services, he has the resources to follow up on his own.

Approaching Your Prospect through Social Networking: *Dos and Don'ts*

### ✓ Use the Following Tips to Make Social Networking More Effective For Your Sales Approach

- **Do** use social networks, especially those that focus on the professional community, as a way to connect with prospects and customers.
- **Do** make a comment when you add a prospect or customer as a friend or connection.
- **Do** focus on quality of connections rather than quantity.
- **Do** contribute to the community.
- **Do** use professional social networking features such as Questions and Answers on LinkedIn.

### Avoid the Following When Using Social Networking as a Tool to Make a Sales Approach

- **Don't** let your language get sloppy; always use proper spelling and grammar.
- **Don't** make a sales pitch. Use social networks to get in touch and make connections; you can follow up to set up a meeting or phone call to explore your prospect’s needs.
- **Don't** post personal photos, videos, articles, or comments to a professional social networking site such as LinkedIn.
- **Don't** post any inappropriate language, photos, or videos on your personal social networking pages such as Facebook. It’s a good idea to remove any inappropriate information as employers, prospects, and customers can see your personal brand 24/7.

## Approaching Your B2B Contact in Person

Some managers and buyers are extremely busy, and when you try to reach them by phone, you will interact with an administrative assistant, so your first contact with your actual customer might be at a trade show or industry event.

In other situations, if you are selling to smaller businesses at the local level, you might make your approach in person at the customer’s place of business. Why make an in-person approach rather than placing a phone call? While visiting in person takes more time and effort, it’s more personal: it is often easier to build rapport with your customer during a face-to-face interaction. There are just a few things to keep in mind when making an in-person or telephone approach in B2B sales.

## Do Use a Strong, Attention-Grabbing Opener

You want to get your prospect to like you in the first minute of your sales approach, and you want to give him a reason to keep listening to what you have to say. Be up front: introduce yourself and explain the purpose of your call (including the general benefit statement you have prepared) early on. Then, as in any sales call, ask permission to continue. Your opening might sound something like this:

<b>You:</b>	Hello, Aaron. My name is Janeka Jones from iFX, a provider of e-commerce solutions.
<b>Aaron:</b>	Hello.

<b>You:</b>	We met at the South by Southwest conference in Austin last week. You mentioned that an area of growth for your business is personalized apparel. The personalized jerseys you offer on your Web site are really unique. In fact, I ordered one this weekend, which gave me an idea about how we can help you reduce your order processing time. Is this a good time to talk about your business?
<b>Aaron:</b>	I'm running off to a meeting in a few minutes, but I always like talking about my business.
<b>Aaron:</b>	I'm always looking for ways to get the product to my customers faster, but I really can't afford any additional order processing costs.
<b>You:</b>	I can understand that. My idea can actually help you reduce your overall operating costs and improve your processing time. Since you are on your way to a meeting, would it work for you if I stop by on Tuesday morning so we can talk more?
<b>Aaron:</b>	Let's see. Tuesday morning at 10:30 looks like it works for me.

## Do Take Your Lead from the Prospect or Customer

Of course you want to be personable and establish a good relationship with your customer, but buyers often say that it irritates them when salespeople try to engage in too much small talk, especially when it comes across as forced or artificial. When deciding how to balance small talk with business, it's important to take your lead from your customer. In the example where Janeka Jones from iFx approaches a prospect, for instance, it wouldn't be a good idea to make a lot of small talk during your approach because the customer let her know that he was short on time.

Some customers are more people oriented, so getting to know you as a person will be an important part of the sales process for them. Other customers are very task oriented and will prefer to get down to business right away. They may opt for a more formal, businesslike approach and will only be interested in socializing after a transaction or meeting is completed. Start your call with a direct approach, and then pause and give your customer a chance to respond. You can read his reaction to gauge the most appropriate communication style to use. Does he seem anxious to get down to business, or is he open to conversing for a bit first? The bottom line is that you don't want him to feel like you are wasting his time. Consider this story of a meeting at the major retail trade show between a salesperson and a buyer for a retail chain. The buyer started the meeting off by saying that she didn't have much time and just wanted a quick overview of the company, but the seller, who was naturally chatty and personable, missed these cues. He talked at some length and gave the buyer a thorough tour of all the displays at his product booth. Meanwhile, the buyer looked at her watch (another cue the seller missed) before the seller concluded by saying "We really want your business." The response from the buyer was sarcastic and a little cold: "You *do*? Instances like this are why it is critical to listen to your customer: both his verbal and nonverbal communications. Your attempts to establish rapport can backfire if you don't pay attention to his signals.

## Don't Use Opening Lines That Send the Wrong Message

Avoid insincere openers or openers that convey a lack of confidence in yourself or your product. Here are a few examples of opening lines to avoid:

- "Would you be interested in saving money?"

An opening line like this immediately puts people on guard. (*Oh no, another phony salesperson trying to get my attention with an obvious ploy.*)

- "You're probably a busy person, so I promise I'm not about to waste your time."

Of course, buyers don't want you to waste their time, but if you mention time wasting up front, you are suggesting that you are someone who *could* waste your customer's time. This opening conveys a lack of confidence, and it sets a negative tone for the sales call.

- “I just happened to be in the area visiting another customer, so I thought I’d drop by.”

This tells your customer that he isn’t a priority—just someone you were able to fit in between other, more important sales visits.

- “I heard that you’ve been having trouble in your customer service department [or in some other area] lately.”

This opening will also put your customer on guard. (*Who’s been talking about our problems? How did she find out?*) Tom Reilly, *Value-Added Selling: How to Sell More Profitably, Confidently, and Professionally by Competing on Value, Not Price*, 2nd ed. (New York: McGraw-Hill, 2002), 138.

### ✓ Approaching Your B2B Prospect in Person

Use the Following Tips to Make Your In-Person Sales Approach More Effective

- **Do** use a strong, attention-grabbing opener.
- **Do** take your lead from the prospect or customer.
- **Do** use a personal, sincere approach.

Avoid the Following When Approaching a Prospect in Person

- **Don’t** use opening lines that send the wrong message; keep in mind the six Cs of the sales approach.
- **Don’t** be insincere.

## Approaching a B2C Contact in Person

In B2C sales situations, there is sometimes a greater temptation to focus immediately on selling and to forget about rapport building. In most B2C situations the salesperson hasn’t invested time in researching the prospect, and he might figure that this is a one-time sale. However, relationship selling is as valuable in the retail environment as it is in the B2B sales environment. Salespeople who treat their customers as *people* before they treat them as sales prospects are the ones who get good customer referrals and repeat buyers. If you have a restaurant or a coffee shop where you’re a regular customer, you might already know how this principle works. Aren’t you more inclined to order coffee at a place where people greet you, know your name, and get your drink order right—even if another coffee shop opens up closer to your home or your office? Here are a few dos and don’ts when it comes to earning your customer’s trust and building rapport.

### Do Talk to Your Customer

Everyone wants to be recognized. Have you ever walked into a retail store, looked around, and left, without an employee ever talking to you? How does an experience like that affect your buying decision? Feeling ignored can make customers not want to stop in again. Engaging your customer might mean the difference between making or losing a sale. Even if you don’t know the person, you can make small talk: compliment the customer (sincerely of course) or discuss the weather, local news or events, or sports.

### Do Treat Your Customer Like a Guest

Make your customer feel welcomed and comfortable when she comes into your business. As a service provider, an “attitude of gratitude” for the opportunity to serve a customer goes a long way. Earl Taylor, longtime employee at Dale Carnegie & Associates, says, “The specific words you say are different, of course, but the motivation and attitude should be that you are truly grateful for the opportunity to interact with this individual and have the opportunity to be of service. Making the customer feel at home means not only interacting with him but also going out of your way to help him. Maybe the customer comes into your computer store looking for printer ink. Rather than leaving him to fend for himself, walk him to the aisle where you keep your printers (don’t just point him in the right direction). Once you take him to the aisle, ask if you can help him find the right ink type for his printer.

### Don’t Ask “Can I Help You?”

“No, thanks. I’m just looking” is the customer’s automatic response to this question, so the question itself actually comes across as a polite way of giving your customer the brush off. Instead, ask a question that will get your customer talking. An open-ended question like “What brings you in today?” will be a more effective way of engaging someone.

### ✓ B2C Approach: What's Important to the Customer?

When a customer enters a high-end car dealership, all the elements of the approach should be used to engage the customer, as in the example below:

<b>You:</b>	It is a great car, and it gets over thirty miles per gallon in the city.
<b>Customer:</b>	It is really nice, but I'm not sure a hybrid is what I need. I just came in to learn a little more about it.
<b>You:</b>	That's a good idea. I'll be happy to give you a lesson in hybrids to determine if one is right for you. You should also consider a test drive so you can see exactly how it handles on the road.

### Don't Put Any Pressure on Your Customer

What is the number one fear customers have about talking to salespeople? You might have guessed it: pressure. In fact, some customers will go out of their way to *avoid* salespeople for this reason. Let your customers know that they don't have to worry about pressure when they buy from you. As in *all* selling situations, take your cue from the customer by listening and asking questions to uncover her needs first. *Don't* start the conversation off with a question like "What'll it take to get you into a Lexus today?" That's essentially putting your sales presentation before your approach. Finally, keep in mind that asking your customer's permission will also help take the pressure off: "We have a number of new sports utility vehicles. Can I ask you some questions about the specific characteristics you're looking for?"

### Don't Prejudge a Customer

You've probably seen the scene in *Pretty Woman* where Julia Robert's character walks into a high-end clothing boutique on Rodeo Drive and the saleswomen turn up their noses at her because she doesn't fit the right customer image. You probably felt a little triumphant, especially if you've ever been slighted by a salesperson, when her character returns the following day to spend a few thousand dollars at several stores, embarrassing the salespeople who treated her so poorly. The moral of the story for a salesperson? Never make assumptions about a customer based on the way he looks, speaks, or dresses. Treat all your customers with respect and care.

### ✓ Approaching Your B2C Prospect in Person

Use the Following Tips to Make Your In-Person Sales Approach More Effective

- **Do** talk to your customer.
- **Do** treat your customer like a guest.

Avoid the Following When Approaching a B2C Prospect in Person

- **Don't** ask, "Can I help you?"
- **Don't** put pressure on your customer.
- **Don't** prejudge any customers.

### Key Takeaways

- In **all** sales calls, make sure to listen to your customer and ask for her permission before continuing with your approach.
- Use your **elevator pitch** to engage your prospect and secure the opportunity to make the complete sales presentation.
- When making a sales approach over the phone
  - *Do* give your name and the purpose of your call in the first twenty seconds;
  - *Do* remember to ask, "Is this a good time?";
  - *Don't* launch into long explanations. Keep it brief and businesslike.
- When making a sales approach by e-mail
  - *Do* draft a number of e-mail templates from which to choose,

- Do make sure the e-mail is well written and businesslike,
- Do make the e-mail as personal as you can.
- When approaching through online social networks
  - Do make sure to comment when you add a prospect to your network,
  - Do contribute to the social network of which you are a member,
  - Do avoid slang in your communications.
- When approaching a B2B contact in person
  - Do use a strong opening line that gets the customer's attention,
  - Do follow the customer's lead when it comes to small talk,
  - Do be careful that your opening line doesn't send the wrong message.
- When approaching a B2C contact in person
  - Do make conversation with your customer;
  - Don't just ask, "Can I help you?";
  - Do avoid putting any pressure on your customer.

### ? Exercise 3.2.1

1. Take the listening quiz by clicking on the following link: [http://www.proprofs.com/quiz-school/story.php?title=test-your-current-listening-skills\\_1](http://www.proprofs.com/quiz-school/story.php?title=test-your-current-listening-skills_1). How did you score? What areas do you feel you need improvement? How will this help you in selling?
2. Listen to some business elevator pitches with this video: [www.blinkx.com/video/elevator-pitch-piece-of-cake/SmKk9ZSYrHee-91t7dDalA](http://www.blinkx.com/video/elevator-pitch-piece-of-cake/SmKk9ZSYrHee-91t7dDalA). What are the elements you thought were important in the elevator pitch? What elements did you think were not important in the pitch? Why do businesses have elevator pitches? To whom do they deliver the pitches?
3. Review the following video and identify at least three things the salesperson is doing incorrectly on this sales call. What do you recommend he do to change the outcome of the call?

(click to see video)



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