

## **Qualifying is a Sales Technique**

The path to a sale today is more the result of a scientific methodology than the outcome of a gut reaction from a seasoned professional. The methods of generating sales leads that dominate the market are all based on profiles, and statistical analysis and other software based calculations. Practically extinct is the human element that analyzes the needs of the client based on human factors as well as the market based considerations fed into a database.

The benefits to lead generation are not under dispute. In all, the software applications allow companies to identify possible prospects that they might not have otherwise considered. This point being acknowledged, the danger of computer based lead generation is that it has been positioned to totally replace human based lead qualification. Should this happen, a great deal of time, energy and sales resources will be lost chasing after leads that are not relevant or practical.

The benefit to a sales force is not only in the provision of lists of prospects, but more importantly in the effective qualification of that list. Before a sales pitch can even begin, the sales person must have an excellent understanding of the reason the prospect might consider the product being sold.

In most cases the complications are not merely the need of the client. Often, the need is currently being met in some form and so the prospect must also be convinced to switch providers. Also, there may be comfort zones, support systems, and other factors that need to be considered. The software that generates the lead cannot discover or analyze these qualifying factors, and yet, without them, the opportunity to complete the sale is significantly diminished.

Lead generation provides a sales person with a false sense of security, an expectation that the prospect is interested in the product. While it is true that lead generation determines prospects that are likely to be interested, the task of measuring the level of that interest and how to convert it into a sale still falls upon the sales person. Therefore, if a sales person, resting on the assurance of the lead generation software, enters into a discussion with a prospect without engaging in any qualifying tactics, most likely that sales effort will fail.

The most pressing need of a sales pitch is the connection between the sales person and the prospect and the comfort the sales person provides to the prospect with regard to an understanding of specific needs and current operations. In other words, if you offer solutions they don't need or already have, or cannot integrate, you will not only fail to make the sale, but most likely burn the chance at pitching the prospect sometime in the future.

So how does one qualify? What are the elements that need to be determined before a lead can be converted into a sale? The answer is as simple as human contact, dialogue and inquiry.

The answer is first and foremost, don't talk. Allow the beginning of your meeting to be solely dedicated to learning about your prospect and their needs. Come prepared with some basic knowledge about the company and their current operations, and then allow

the meeting to begin with having your questions answered. Some questions you might want to ask include:

1. How long have you been working with your current solution and what challenges are you experiencing?
2. What do you like most about your current solution?
3. If you could change one function or feature of your current solution, what would it be?
4. What is most important to you with regard to your solution?
5. How integrated into other systems is your solution?
6. What added benefit would encourage you to move to another solution?
7. How simple is the introduction of a new solution with regard to work flow and other applications?
8. What sort of ROI are you expecting and how do you measure it?
9. What issues are most important to you, such as timeframe, service and support, cost, and others?

While these questions are not, under any circumstances, exhaustive, they do allow the sales person an understanding of the prospect and what must be delivered in order for a sale to occur. Without this critical information, a lead is just another name and telephone number.

By asking the right questions at the right moment, a sales person can gather the information necessary to maneuver a sales meeting away from generalities and into the specifics that result in a sale. This is done only through the use of qualifying tactics that provide the sales person with the specific information needed to determine whether the computer generated lead is actually a genuine prospect.