

Cold Calling

Cold calling involves picking up the telephone and calling strangers. It is something many people fear doing. But it can be an **effective** way of generating business for those who are confident and not too afraid of hearing the word “no”.

Because the reality is that some people **will** say “no”. Some will not even give you the opportunity to say why you are calling. However, it is also a reality that **there are people who need event planning services who don't know where to turn – and would welcome a call from someone who can help them.**

With that in mind, look at each call as simply an introduction of your services – services that could possibly help this person and organization. Here's a short course in cold calling that you can use no matter what corporate market you choose.

Finding Contact Information

The first step in making cold calls is to have a list of companies to call. The obvious way to get phone numbers is to pick up the Yellow Pages and choose companies in industries you'd like to work with. However, the Yellow Pages won't give you a contact name.

For more detailed information about companies in your community, you can call your local **Chamber of Commerce** to see if you can get a list of their members. Some chambers will only give the list to other members. In which case you may either decide to join the Chamber of Commerce (if you haven't done so already), or buy the list.

Another alternative is to find the membership list at your local public library. The central library in your city will very likely have numerous business directories, including one or more directories with contact information for local businesses. This information may be broken down by industry and company size.

Once you've decided on the companies you'd like to solicit, you'll need to identify the best person to speak with, the decision-maker. Depending on your specialization and the size of the company, there may actually be several people in the organization that could use your services. For example, any of the following people or departments might use the services of an event planner:

- CEO or President
- Marketing
- Public Relations
- Corporate Communications
- Human Resources

- Sales

You could call to introduce your services to decision-makers in each of these departments. In many large organizations, the key decision-maker in each department has the title of Vice-President, Director, or Department Head. On the other hand, if the company is small, there may be a single individual you should talk to, such as an owner or office manager.

If you don't have the name of a decision-maker when you call a company, simply ask the receptionist. You might ask: **“Can you tell me the name of the person who plans meetings and social events for your company?”** Or you might ask: **“What is the name of the Vice-President in charge of Marketing?”**

When you get a name from a receptionist, make sure you ask for the correct spelling and the correct extension or direct line. If the name could belong either to a male or female (like Tracy, Chris, or Pat), also ask if the person is a man or a woman.

If you have asked who plans meetings and social events, and the receptionist doesn't know, ask for the **assistant to the CEO**, or the **marketing department**. They are likely to know who that person is (one of them may actually be in charge of it). If the receptionist puts you through to an assistant in the decision-maker's department, you can go through the same procedure of asking for the decision-maker's name and direct phone number.

Be prepared, however, that the assistant may be a **“gatekeeper.”** In other words, it may be the assistant's job to screen out calls from anyone the decision-maker doesn't know. While this certainly won't happen every time, it is something to prepare for. Remember that this person has a great deal of power over whether you ever get an appointment with the decision-maker. So do not try to bully the assistant. If he or she says, “Just send us your information,” politely explain that while you will be happy to do that, you want to make sure the information addresses the company's needs and would like just a couple of minutes to check those out with the decision-maker. Then ask the assistant to advise you about the **best time** to call the decision-maker.

The sections that follow this one offer some suggested alternatives in the event that you are not able to get through to the decision-maker on the telephone. However, let's assume that you will be put through to the decision-maker. Now you need to know what to say.