

How to get introduced

Judy Jenner reveals how to make connections the Latin American way: no cold calling required



Judy A. Jenner MBA is a German and Spanish translator in Las Vegas. She runs Twin Translations with her sister, Dagmar, who works from Vienna. She is the Vice President of the Nevada Translators and Interpreters Association and is a frequent speaker on marketing topics.

What's worse than someone trying to sell you something you don't want? How about someone trying to sell you something you've already explicitly said you don't want? These are both bad scenarios, and they happen all the time. As linguists selling our services, we can learn from this when acquiring direct clients.

The main thing I have learned working exclusively with direct clients is that you need to think of yourself as a customer. That entails putting yourself in your customers' shoes and seeing things from their point of view.

Now, let's apply that to sales. That term – sales – has certainly become quite negative, and it conjures up memories of pushy used-car salesmen and software providers who won't stop calling even after you tell them that as a small business you do not need an enterprise-wide, million-pound accounting software solution. To avoid these negative associations, let's think of this process as new client acquisition.

The continuous client acquisition process

As small business owners, we need to constantly grow and expand our client base. Many linguists are fortunately so busy at the moment that they don't have the time or are not interested in expanding their business. However, my recommendation is to never completely stop your client acquisition process. Why? Because life changes: your best customer might retire, sell his/her company, get laid off, take another job, move

to the Bahamas or be ousted by new management that gives the pink slip to all the previous management's vendors. As a contractor, there's no such thing as a secure payslip. Don't put all your eggs in one basket (or even two or three). Diversifying and continuously growing your client base is key.

Why cold calling is bad

Think of yourself as a customer: how many emails from strangers trying to sell you something do you actually answer? Most likely, those messages don't make it past your spam filter, and if they do, you delete them quicker than you can take your first morning sip of coffee (or tea for my British friends). For our purposes, let's define cold calling as:

- Approaching someone you don't know, either via email, in person, or via the phone
- Approaching someone you don't have a connection to (common friend, business partner)
- Approaching someone of whom you don't know whether they have an interest or need for your service or not

Cold calling is:

- Mainly a waste of your time
- A waste of money, because time is the only resource you have, and there's that opportunity cost: you could be spending this time earning actual money (or walking the dog or having a glass of Bordeaux)
- A waste of your potential client's time and money
- A way to potentially make yourself unpopular in the long run
- Mainly unprofessional

- Illegal in some countries, including Austria. This includes both cold calling and cold emailing potential customers.

The Latin American approach

While growing up in Mexico, where social etiquette is more important than in many other parts of the world, I was used to very specific rules of acceptable behaviour, including the one that we'll try to emulate for our customer acquisition approach. After moving to the US, I realised that the following scenario was quite unique to Latin American countries. Say that you are a young man, Lalo, trying to meet a young woman, Isabel, at a club. She's caught your eye and you'd like to buy her a drink. The Mexican etiquette I grew up with would prevent you from simply approaching the young woman 'cold', that is, without knowing her; which is something extremely common in other parts of the world. It's simple, right? Hoping that she might be interested in meeting you, too, you approach her, introduce yourself and ask if you can buy her a drink. Simple enough, and people do this all the time. However, generally speaking this approach has a low success rate. Mexican etiquette calls for Lalo to roam the club to find someone who knows both him and his prospect, Isabel. Hopefully, that person, let's call him Francisco, will be found, who will then proceed to vouch for Lalo when making the introduction. 'Hi, Isabel, great to see you! I am here (wink, wink) with my friend Lalo; we went to the British School together. Have you had the chance to meet? I think you

'When meeting in person, don't jump into your "sales pitch" right away. Look at it as a first date: make a good impression but don't rattle off all your achievements'

are both huge Manchester United fans, aren't you?' While this system might, socially, seem a bit archaic, it works. Take this lesson and apply it to your business.

Pre-qualified leads

When you find someone you'd like to tell about your services or simply someone you'd like to meet, you need to find someone who knows both of you. Check your databases, your LinkedIn or Xing profile, and ask your friends. You'd be surprised how many people know each other. Once you've identified the referrer, ask if he or she would be interested in making an introduction. Don't assume anything, and be conscious of the fact that some people might not feel comfortable vouching for you if they don't know you well. If your referrer accepts, you will have achieved your first goal of finding the connection between your potential contact and you. This is analogous to Lalo in the club finding Francisco to make the introduction to Isabel.

10 golden rules of referral

It's up to you whether you would like to make the initial contact to your referral via email, in person, or via telephone. I usually opt for email as it is quicker, easier, and less expensive.

- 1** Email: during your first contact with the person you have been introduced to, copy in the person who made the referral. Consider putting the referrer's name in the subject line to make sure your new contact person opens the message. Example: 'Multilingual Strategies for XYZ – Referred by XYZ'.
- 2** When meeting in person, pick a mutually convenient time for all three of you, unless your referrer declines. You need to make the effort to include the referrer and let him or her decide if they want to be involved in this meeting. Consider suggesting a quick lunch, happy hour, coffee or an informal breakfast. Whatever you do, you need to pick up the tab for this, unless you are meeting someone whose internal company regulations prohibit him or her from accepting meals from potential vendors (this can apply to government officials, media executives, etc). Use your credit card and don't pay cash: no one wants to see you count money at the table.

3 When meeting in person, don't jump into your 'sales pitch' right away. This is the time for you to figure out what you have in common and whether you click. Look at it as a first date: make a good impression but don't rattle off all your achievements. If it feels natural to talk about work, do it. If not, follow your referrer's lead and wait for him or her to say 'So, the reason I made the connection between the two of you is...'

4 Be prepared. Thoroughly research the company before your initial meeting. Read their press releases, their recent news articles, and have something relevant to say about the business. The more details you know, the better.

5 Have a solution, not a sales pitch. Saying 'I just want to let you know that I'm available if you need

'Be patient. While your business is the centre of your universe – as it should be – it's not the centre of your potential client's universe'

translation services' is not good enough. It shouldn't be up to the client to figure out whether they need you. That's your job. Offer solutions such as: 'I see that you are aggressively expanding your Macau gaming business. I propose having your website in three languages to effectively communicate with all your international visitors, who I understand make up XYZ percent of total visitors.'

6 Follow up. Check in days after the initial meeting and email any information that might have been requested from you. Thank both your referrer and your new contact for their time.

7 Know when to step away. Many folks are not good at saying that they are not interested in your services, so you simply won't hear back from them. Others will be too busy to respond and will be happy to hear from you when you do follow up. As challenging as it can be, try to read between the lines. Don't be too hard on yourself: it's a learning process, and people respond differently to

FIVE THINGS TO KEEP IN MIND:

1 These are long-term investments in your professional future. You can't expect to go from having coffee to being the go-to vendor for a company's international communications strategy in a week.

2 Be patient. While your business is the centre of your universe – as it should be – it's not the centre of your potential client's universe. Remember that they are most likely meeting many people who'd like to do business with them.

3 Are you selling something that your potential client wants? If not, don't insist. Show that you respect your contact's time and simply say that you'd be very interested in talking to him or her if there's any change in the business needs.

4 Be real. A software vendor (to remain unnamed) called me roughly twice a month for a year or so, trying to sell me something I was actually quite interested in. However, this particular person stuck to the sales script so much that regardless of what I said, he would answer with a scripted answer that didn't apply to my business. I never bought from him because I thought that if he couldn't address my concerns during the sales process, he probably wouldn't be able to give good customer service once I'd bought the product. Don't be that person: be prepared, listen to your customer, and don't stick to the talking points.

5 Keep good records. If someone has told you that they are not interested, but has suggested you check back in six months, do so. If someone has explicitly told you that they are not interested, you should make a note of this in your database, spreadsheet, or on a simple piece of paper and do as instructed.

the same degree of insistence on the vendor's part.

8 Ask for more referrals. If this experience has been positive for all parties – and you will hear about it – consider asking your referrer for more referrals. Don't abuse the privilege, but keep in mind that most business people are quite happy to introduce competent people to each other.

9 Repay the favour or pay it forward. Many times we get stuck in 'me' mode: what can others do for me and how can I get ahead? Don't forget that it works the other way as well. Think about how you can have a positive impact on other business people's careers. Volunteer to make introductions.

10 The business of referrals. A large part of your success in our business, and any business, will depend on the quality of relationships you can form with clients, vendors, and colleagues. Be sure you behave in a way that makes others want to refer you.