

# Don't Cold Call

It takes more than that to win and retain our business

By Kevin Stakelum



**A**s a talent acquisition leader, I receive several unsolicited calls a day from vendors who want to do business with us. They often are quick to emphasize all the value that they add to the process. I find that interesting because I cannot imagine a scenario where that would work for me. I understand that it must work for some leaders or else the salespeople would not continue with this method of business development. For me, the decision to form a partnership is deliberate and specific. I would never decide on a vendor partner because of a cold call.

I also wonder whether the vendor realizes a subtlety of the transaction. When I answer a cold call, the vendor really has no competition — because there's nothing to compete over. I am generally not going to spend money unless I have a need; and if I have a need, I know the agencies that have taken the time to learn about my business and who have performed well enough to earn my repeat business.

Once I do decide that I have a need and that I am going to partner with an agency, that is when the competition starts. Now that I have agreed to pay a fee, the money can literally go to anyone. Surprisingly, some vendors don't always seem to understand that. I am actively "courted" until the contract is signed, but then I don't hear from them again. Meanwhile, their competition now knows that I can spend and they actively offer incentives such as reductions in fees or extended services. At the point that I agree to use a partner, the emphasis then shifts from getting my business to keeping it. It also should shift from keeping it to drive their sales up, which I often feel is their goal, to providing better service to fill my needs, which would result in higher total sales for them over time.

I would imagine that the staffing leaders who read this would totally understand this concept, but my question is: "How do you know what your teams know and understand that difference?" Do you check on them? Do you

regularly perform quality checks or customer surveys to ensure that the corporate values and directions are being followed? Do you measure those results? How do you ensure that your sales teams are being held accountable to provide the proper levels of service and deliver the correct message? If your primary measurement of the capability of your salespeople is measured solely in sales volume, then I think you may be missing the point.

In the corporate staffing world, we are constantly questioning our practices and processes in an effort to measure the effectiveness of our efforts. It is not just about cost — or in this case, sales — it is also about results and the quality of the services we provide to our customers.

When we partner with an external vendor, we expect the vendor to operate in a similar manner. If your organization is not consistently doing that, then you are vulnerable to losing out to an organization that not only does it well, but can pass the results of the higher-quality work on to me, their customer. That organization then becomes a resource that adds value to the work that I do and makes the relationship less about cost and more about results. It also ensures that the relationship lasts through the busy and the slow times.

Only measuring effectiveness by sales increases seems to ignore the concept that the business will come in cycles and my best partners are there to help me in low volumes as well as in high volumes. Using increased sales as the sole criteria to measure effectiveness also seems to measure the benefit that I provide to you: I value partnerships that measure the benefit that they provide to me. How does your company do that? ■