

Making Cold Calls to Employers in Your Job Search

Cold calling is among the top, proven job search techniques, especially for accessing the hidden job market. Were you aware that over 80% of executive placements are made through networking, personal introductions and referrals? If you don't use cold calling, then you may be missing out on unadvertised jobs. Cold calling is more effective than just sending or emailing a resume because it allows you to create a personal relationship and have a specific contact person for follow up. You also obtain real time feedback on your candidate status and expand your network to include representatives at companies on your target employer list. Even when there is not a good fit immediately, it's a way for you to get your name short-listed for the next suitable opening.

1. *Target the right company.* Choose a company that your research shows can benefit from your skills and knowledge. The closer you fit the profile of an ideal candidate, the easier it will be to sell yourself. Match your background to the industry, your interests to their apparent strategy, and your talents where you identify a challenge you can address without any learning curve.
2. *Target the right contact.* Initiate contact with an appropriate company representative. This means finding someone in a functional or operational role that will quickly assess your capabilities and recognize your value to their organization.
3. *Target the right relationship.* HR is more likely to screen you out than to increase their pool of potential candidates. While you may cold call HR to boost your status in response to an advertised position by establishing a personal connection, HR is not the right place to learn about unadvertised jobs in the hidden job market. To get the early leads and be an insider, you want to get in touch and begin to cultivate a lasting relationship with a hiring manager who will help you and propose your name.
4. *Target the right circumstances.* Timing is critical. If you sense that the person answering the phone is distracted or not cooperating, it's okay to graciously end the call and politely

arrange to call back at another more convenient time or make a note to yourself that you need to try again after you figure out how not to interrupt this person again (i.e., ask their assistant for an appointment.)

5. *Target a direct contact.* Everyone is busy and it is often a challenge to reach someone and have a conversation. If you don't get through on the first couple of attempts, call early or late in the day, send an email requesting a callback or telephone appointment, get an assistant to help or find another insider to arrange the call. Get to the contact's direct extension.
6. *Target the right goals.* Be prepared to say something relevant or provide some information of value based on your company research. Have some business small talk ready to share as a warm-up rather than charging ahead with your request to solicit job-hunting help. Try to make this a two-way, mutually gratifying exchange.
7. *Target the right network.* Cold calling is a very effective way of expanding your business contacts database with an additional benefit of connecting you to people who might have a job lead to share with you now or in the future. This is not all about instant results, scheduling an immediate job interview or getting your resume read; it's about making connections that eventually may help you find a new opportunity.
8. *Target the right career management strategy.* Remember that you are the one asking for help and should be polite and respectful of the other person. At the same time, approaching cold calling activities as an exchange among equals, not as a subordinate, is important. You are not asking for a job; you are proposing to make a measurable contribution for your mutual success.
9. *Target the right mindset.* Don't be discouraged if the cold call doesn't get results the first time. Think of cold calling activities as an investment to establish new relationships with individuals affiliated with your target employers. It takes patience to find the right person with whom you have something in common both professionally and personally.

Phone Call Etiquette

- Be courteous to everyone with whom you speak. Never treat support personnel in a disrespectful manner; the person you are trying to impress will hear about it, and no one wants to hire people who behave rudely to anyone.
- Identify yourself, stating your first and last name clearly. Be clear about the purpose of your call. Make reference to any previous contact, conversation, meeting, etc., to remind the person why you are calling. Don't assume the person remembers you right away. Even if he or she does remember you, a brief reintroduction of yourself is a business and social courtesy.
- Ask if this is a convenient time to talk. If you want to talk to someone at length — e.g. to conduct an informational interview, etc. — you should ask to schedule a mutually convenient time for a phone appointment. Then you make the call at the agreed-upon time and stay within the limits of the time set.

Making an Effective Call

- In asking for information, wherever possible, use open ended questions rather than questions which are likely to be answered with "yes" or "no." For example, instead of, "Will you have any openings in June?" say, "I'm interested in learning about your hiring plans for management trainees this summer." Your goal in asking open-ended questions is to start a conversation in which you gain information which will help in your job search.
- Don't ask questions that you could easily find answered on the employer's web site. You'll risk looking lazy (or that you don't know how to use Internet resources).
- Remember that tone of voice carries a lot of weight in a telephone conversation.
- Ask friends (who will tell you the truth) how you sound on the phone. They know you, but an employer doesn't. Do you sound cordial or aloof, articulate or fumbling, interested or gloomy?
- Practice how you speak on the phone.
- Seek advising through Career Services if you want coaching or assistance or have questions on this topic.