

How To Get More Sales From Your Incoming Enquiries

All too often, incoming requests for product information are treated lightly. Particularly, these days, if they come in via the post. We know because we've tested it! Write in requesting a brochure or sample issue, and you're very likely to get the following treatment:

- a slow reply -- a 3-week turnaround, if not longer -- so often you can't remember sending off the original enquiry a sample issue with a Post-it note, or compliments slip, attached, along with a scrawled acknowledgement of your original enquiry. No other sales materials -- the sample issue, it seems, is supposed to say it all.
- no follow-up to confirm that you've received the original material, and find out if you have any further questions
- several other leaflets stuffed into the same envelope, for products you didn't ask about -- at the same time as leaving unanswered questions on the product you are interested in. (One very big B2B financial publisher is infamous for this approach. We once got a 15-page fax from them listing practically every product they had!)

Here's what we suggest:

1. Always be quick to respond. Someone wants to know about YOUR product, there and then. So give them instant gratification. Email them a PDF (if you have their email address) AND put something in the post the same day, or first class next morning.

2. Give them ALL the information they need to make a buying decision. A compliments slip can be helpful if you're wanting to get past a 'gate keeper', but it's not enough to make the sale. You need a way to make your sales pitch. You don't necessarily need a brochure. How about a list of features and benefits on a sheet of A4 letterhead? You don't need anything too glossy -- but you do need to give them good reasons to buy. So, in addition to this...

3. Provide some third party endorsement. Include an A4 listing of existing customers, or perhaps a page of testimonials. Let them know who is already getting your product -- chances are one of their big competitors is in that list somewhere...

4. Include a call to action. Make the prospect an offer that will give them a reason to buy NOW. ("Here's a special discount on the normal price because you saved us our marketing costs..."). Put a time limit on it to encourage immediate action. ("... but I can only hold this special rate until...")

5. Make it easy to respond. You're data-capturing their details for your mail-merged letter, aren't you? And for future mailings. So why not include a mail-merged fax-back form on A4 letterhead. That'll make it even easier for prospects to take the action you want.

6. Follow-up promptly. Don't assume that just because someone contacts you, they won't need a little extra 'loving'. So make sure you follow up by phone -- and do it promptly. Say 3-4 days after you put the material in the post to them. If they don't buy, add their names to your prospects list for FFTs, sample mailings, etc. Even if they don't buy then and there, incoming queries are still among your best prospects - - you may just need to work them a little harder, that's all.

In short, don't treat them like second-class citizens. Give them the full treatment, just as you do to prospects on your usual mailing lists.

OK, we know you've got a lot of other stuff on your plate. And sometimes the odd incoming letter can seem to be more trouble than it's worth. But don't underestimate how these sales can add up during the year. After all, it's quick to set up the necessary procedures. After all, you've got plenty of sales copy you can cannibalise from your other marketing materials. Then it should only take 15 minutes or so to process and send out a few envelopes twice a week.

If you really don't have the time or the infrastructure to do this, then pass your leads on to your telesales team -- as soon as you get them.. But first be sure that your colleagues know what they need to do with your valuable leads.

The bottom line: do it well or don't do it at all. If you botch the handling of this golden opportunity -- a prospective customer actually ASKS you to give them a sales pitch -- you're practically throwing away revenue. And if you mail out an unprofessional response, you could be undermining your product's image -- and your company's. Not to mention your sales.

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