

HOW TO

QUALIFY PROSPECTS TO ROCK YOUR SALES GOALS

Advice from sales experts:
Jeffrey Gitomer, Lori Richardson and Scott Channell



› Intro

Why Qualifying Leads is Still Crucial

Qualifying Starts Before You Meet the Customer

The Business of Interacting with Buyers

Signs You're Chasing a Bad Lead

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Introduction:

DON'T BE THE STAR OF A SCENE IN A BAD MOVIE

A bare light bulb dangles from a wire over a desk in a dingy room. There are visible scuffmarks on the worn, linoleum floor. A quiet man sits behind the desk. Towering over him is a guy in a cheap suit with sweat marks around his collar. He leans forward and berates his prospect with a litany of questions.

If this seems like a scene out of a bad movie, it's because it is, explains [Jeffrey Gitomer](#), author of The New York Times best sellers [The Sales Bible](#), [The Little Red Book of Selling](#), and [The Little Black Book of Connections](#).

"That old way of qualifying is over," says Gitomer, "because the customer is now smarter than the salesperson, and the salesperson can't afford to chase the customer away by focusing on 'qualifying' them."

The experts all seem to agree. In today's Internet age — where information is readily available to both sellers and buyers — when it comes to qualifying the prospect, the seller must handle prospects differently.



With a wealth of competition in the market, if a customer feels berated by a salesperson, they are going to take their business elsewhere.



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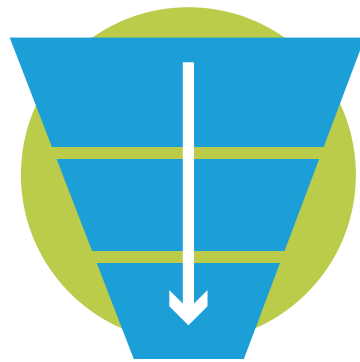
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Yet, "it's still very important to qualify, and people still do it all the time, because they have to," says Lori Richardson, President of [Score More Sales](#), "Even though they are more subtle about it, the salesperson still needs to figure out how to manage their time."

"If a salesperson spends a lot of time talking to the wrong people, they won't ever get that time back," she explains. "The fact is they are better off talking to buyers that are more probable."

So, how do you go about qualifying in 2013, without conjuring up images of a used car salesman? It's an art, say experts. In this ebook, three sales experts share their sales best practices.



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Chapter One:

WHY QUALIFYING LEADS IS STILL CRUCIAL

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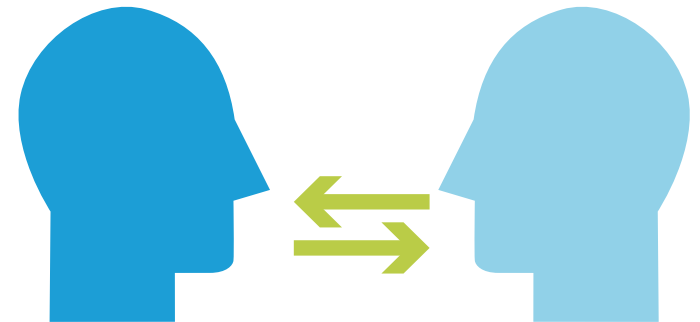
"Qualifying is like peeling back an onion; you don't know what you have until you've gotten through several layers," says Lori Richardson.

Although some salespeople believe every prospect is worth their time today, Richardson says, "often times buyers don't know what they are looking for, until they've had a conversation with you about it."

"You may think you want to buy a red house," she says, "but when I talk to you to find out more about it, I may find out that you have other needs and a red house isn't exactly going to fit."

THAT'S WHY QUALIFYING IS IMPORTANT

"I'm not going to know that until we discuss it back and forth," she says, "which is more of a two-way conversation than the old school, one-way of qualifying."



A smart salesperson must figure out who is likely to turn into a sale and focus there. This skill is both an art and a science.

Scott Channell, author of Amazon bestseller, [Setting Sales Appointments, How to Gain Access to Decision Makers](#), puts it this way: "The qualification issue really goes to your ability to properly allocate time and resources. Time spent on low probability prospects cannot be invested in finding or closing higher probability opportunities."

"In order to be good at qualifying, you have to have the confidence to determine if someone isn't likely to turn into a sale anytime soon," says Channell. "It doesn't mean that person isn't a prospect, but you may have to slot them into another bucket, one saved for an opportunity six months down the road."

If you don't know how to make that judgment call, your sales efforts will get diluted, because you'll spend all your time and your company's resources on individuals who are not likely to make a purchase from you.



Chapter Two:

QUALIFYING STARTS BEFORE YOU MEET THE CUSTOMER

QUALIFY YOURSELF FIRST

“The customer is googling the salesperson at the same time that the salesperson is googling the customer,” explains Gitomer, “so the days of qualifying the customer first are over.” You have to qualify yourself first.

How do you do that? “By establishing an online reputation,” says Gitomer. “Most salespeople are embarrassingly under-googlized. Meaning, if I google the average salesperson, I’m going to find nothing relevant. So what kind of credibility does that salesperson have? None.”

What should the buyer find? “Write a white paper on how your product or service can increase profits for customers. Create a YouTube channel with testimonials from your best customers,” suggests Gitomer. “Don’t be invisible.”

TARGET THE RIGHT CUSTOMERS



Attracting the best prospects is the first step in qualifying, explains Richardson. “I need to write my website content in a way that attracts the right buyers,” says Richardson, “because if I put the wrong messaging on my website, I’m going to have more work to do.”

“Oftentimes I will get people who contact me based on what is written on my website, but after talking to them, I’ll figure out that they don’t really need my services,” says Richardson. Once you fully understand who you’re trying to attract, you can define your target customer and revise your marketing materials so that they’re targeted to your best customers.

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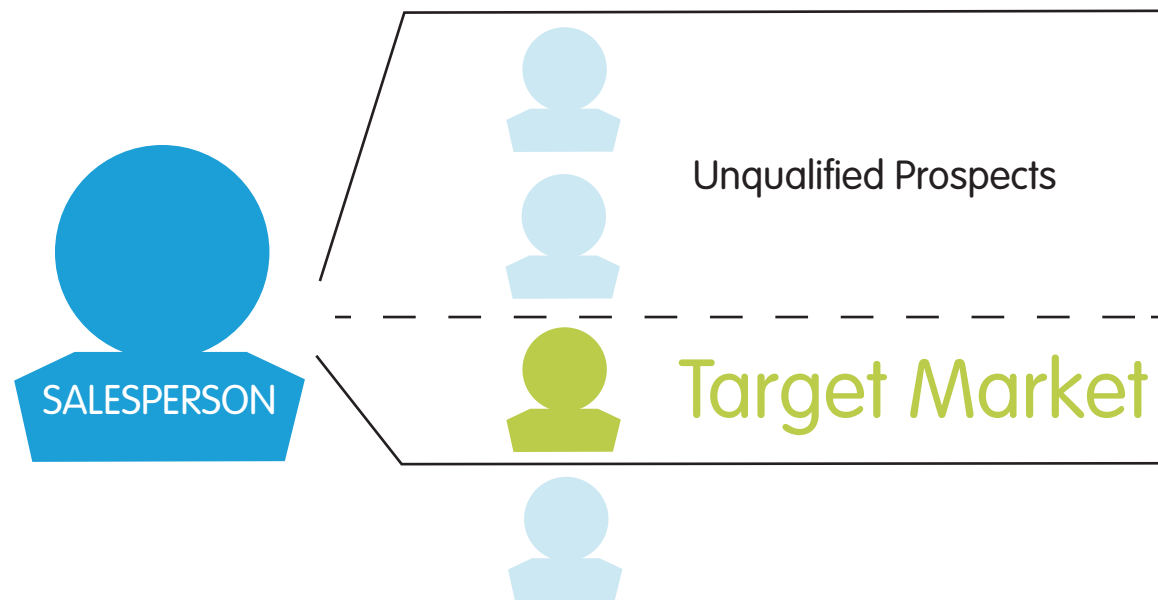
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DON'T CAST YOUR NET TOO WIDE

Companies that cast a very wide net, by marketing to potential buyers outside their ideal demographic, will feel more pressured to qualify their buyers, explains Channell.

“Let’s say you’ve determined that your best customers are those who fall into the \$1-10 million dollar annual sales range, then you will want to narrow your target to just those companies. Because once you start casting around for the under \$1 million range, you will wind up with many more of the lower range demographic responding to your materials. Now instead of dealing with the target customers, you will have to spend the bulk of your time responding to inquiries from unqualified prospects,” says Channell.

“All of a sudden, two-thirds of your resources are going to be spent on low probability, lower worth targets,” Channell shares, “So whether your company is marketing on the web, with email, direct mail or even on the radio, focus your message to target the right audience, and you will have more success with qualifying.”



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WHAT'S CHANGED?

Qualifying prospects is more of a give and take today, says Richardson. "Nobody wants to sit and answer fifty questions from you." You want to engage the prospect and be curious and naturally interested, rather than acting like an interrogator, or you are going to scare them away.

No longer should anyone ask a buyer, "Do you have a budget for this?" or "How much can you afford?" Richardson explains, "If a seller can show a smart company that there is enough ROI, the buyer will be able to find the budget."

EVERYONE QUALIFIES

For Gitomer, qualifying a person means engaging with the person and making both an intellectual and emotional connection. "The object of qualifying is to never qualify anybody," says Gitomer, "If they like you and you like them, they will qualify themselves."

Channell agrees: "It's no longer a qualified or not qualified world, but today it's more about finding the appropriate bucket to slot them into."

There are five different buckets that every salesperson should be able to put a potential prospect into:



High probability buyers
likely to make a sale



Future buyers
may become prospects in the future



Small opportunity buyers
likely to amount to a small sale



Possible opportunities
not key decision makers



No probability
not a fit for what you're selling

If you know what category a lead falls into, you can make a quick decision about how much time to dedicate to that lead.

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For Gitomer, every prospect qualifies, because even lower-level executives without decision-making power can provide insights into an organization.

He recommends establishing an intellectual and emotional rapport with any person, because sitting down and having a cup of coffee with an entry-level person can enlighten you about how the company works, and the problems they need to solve. You're always doing research for a future potential sale.

STRIKE A BALANCE

Of course, you may not have time to drink coffee with every prospect. But the sooner you can genuinely engage with a buyer by being interested in their needs – and not just think about your own agenda – the sooner you can determine if they are indeed a viable opportunity.

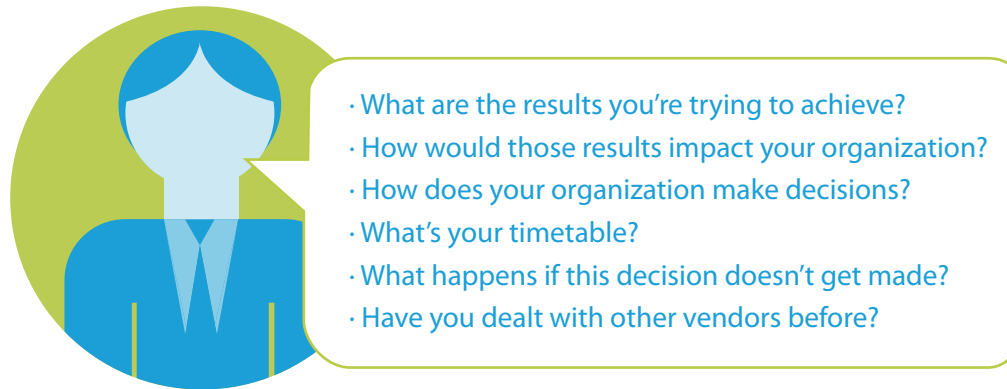
“The challenge for you or anybody in this process is to make certain that you've made a connection and you haven't pushed the buyer back. The more you try to qualify them, the more defensive the buyer becomes. And the more defensive the buyer becomes, the less attention they are going to give you.” advises Gitomer,

BEST QUESTIONS TO ASK

Back to the bad movie scenario, “It's important to learn how to ask questions that aren't interrogating,” offers Channell. “You want to get it down to a few questions, not a litany of two pages.”

For example, if you're speaking to a high-level person about a complex sale for the first time, it's insulting to ask if they are the decision maker. Get a few basic questions answered first, and save the fine-tuning questions for later.

Channell recommends asking questions that orient the buyer to the vision they hope to achieve:



If you really want to see if they're in a buying position, ask them: let's assume that I meet your satisfaction and I send you a confirmation of terms, what will you do?

"And then shut up and listen," says Channell, "This is the hardest thing for a salesperson to do. But if you pay attention to their needs closely, you can more easily determine whether you're dealing with a viable opportunity."

EVERYONE DESERVES RESPECT

Don't assume you won't get a sale if you aren't talking to the decision maker. Every company has a different process, says Channell. "And you need to respect it."

"You don't want to push a lower-level person around," offers Gitomer, "If you do, they may report back to their organization that there's a bad salesperson at that company."

"It all comes down to our ability to connect with people," Gitomer adds.



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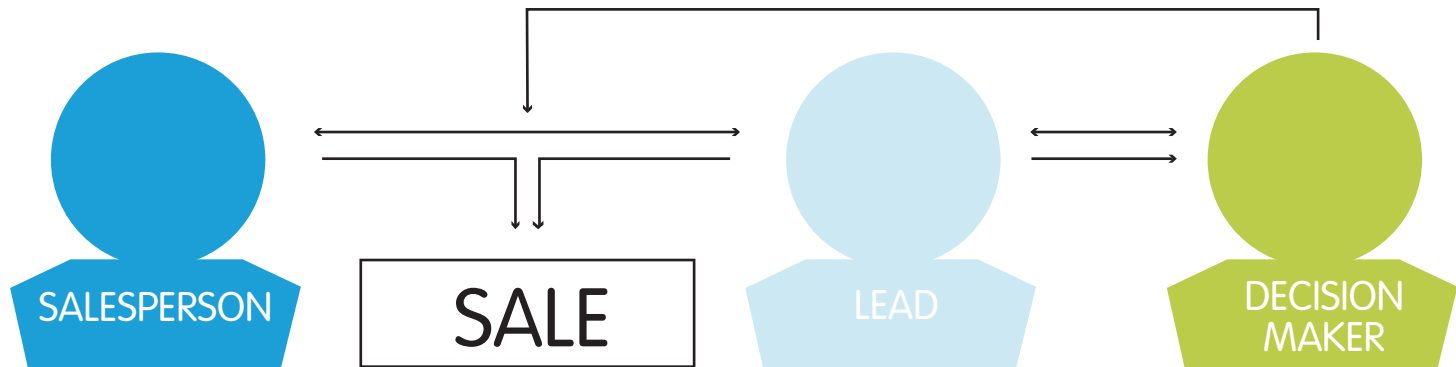
The goal is to become aware of when you're wasting time barking up the wrong tree.



When a prospect isn't likely to amount to an opportunity in the near future, you can let them know you will be in touch down the road, and choose to spend your time pursuing more probable opportunities.

"I can usually tell that I'm chasing a bad lead when I'm talking to someone and that person seems to have no idea what they're asking about," Richardson shares. "For example, they are saying, 'Make me an offer,' but they can't tell me about the vision of what they're trying to accomplish or what the longer term plan is."

"That's an indication that I'm speaking to an individual who is just gathering information for someone else," says Richardson, "I may need to find out how to bring someone else into the conversation that is more directly involved in the decision making process."



Conclusion:

PUTTING IT ALL TOGETHER

"In the end, I think the time element is so important to value in sales," says Richardson. "Salespeople need to go over their past history to figure out if they're spending time on the right activities that are leading to revenues."

It's not that complicated, says Channell. "If you stick to these basic principles of qualifying, you will get the results you seek:"

Follow the insights from these sales experts and you'll be on your way to qualifying prospects that rock your sales goals.



Target your lead generation to a very specific audience

Ask good questions that reveal the prospect's goals, processes and timetable

Determine whether or not someone is worth your time

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