

NETWORKING

How Top Salespeople Land Hard-to-Get Meetings

by [Stu Heinecke](#)

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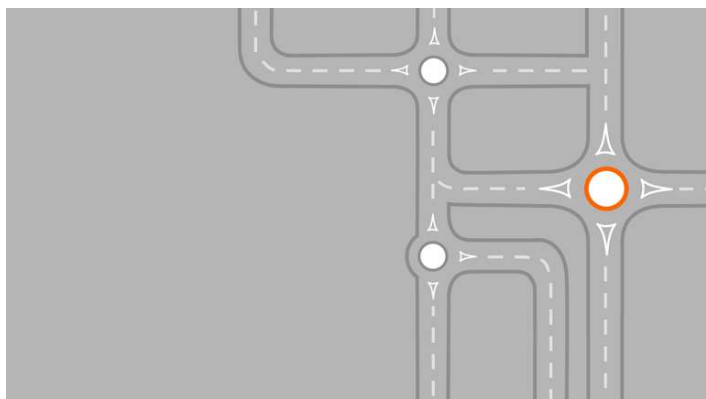
Richard Branson famously said, “Succeeding in business is all about making connections.” Mr. Branson surely has little trouble getting anyone he wants on the phone, but the rest of us could use a little help.

While I was researching my new book, *How to Get a Meeting with Anyone*, I asked the top 100 sales thought leaders in the world, “When you absolutely must reach someone who is very important but nearly impossible to reach, how do you do it?” What I discovered was a shadow practice that has

been extremely effective at breaking through to critical contacts, but no one actually had a name for it.

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Meetings



The Seven Imperatives to Keeping Meetings on Track

by Amy Gallo

How to Design an Agenda for an Effective Meeting

by Roger Schwarz

Do You Really Need to Hold That Meeting?

by Elizabeth Grace Saunders

I dubbed it “contact marketing,” and found it to be a surprisingly effective marketing technique.

Based on my interviews, reported response rates averaged from 60% to 80%, with some campaigns actually hitting 100%. What exactly is contact marketing? It’s a fusion of marketing and selling, employing specific campaigns to connect with specific C-level executives and top decision makers. The idea is that you only need a few dozen of the right high-level relationships to change the scale of your business. Contact marketing can take many forms, but there are five takeaways you can use to make your own high-level connections:

Deliver something of value. Here’s your chance to stand out, to be audacious, and to create a meaningful connection. The objective is not to

attempt to bribe someone to meet with you, but to deliver something that makes a difference to the recipient. It should express your brand personality but contain absolutely no pitch. Your first mission is simply to create a connection, to establish yourself as someone they’ll want to listen to. While you might use search results and social media postings to try to determine an executive’s specific challenges and desires, there are also some simple assumptions you can use to open doors, based on universal desires shared by most business leaders. We all want more success, recognition, and income, but we also want to do the best job we can and leave a mark. For example, I’m a cartoonist, and I’ve found that my cartoons can touch upon all of these markers in a very personal way. Sending a personalized cartoon, like the one below, has become a can’t-miss way for me to connect with virtually anyone, but anything that recognizes the recipients’ desires, helps them do their job more effectively, or enhances their business in some way can be highly effective.



*"Are you sure this is how Richard Branson
got his start?"*

Offer something of further value. As your request for contact is received, it's a good idea to include something additional as a reward for taking the proposed meeting or phone call. Some campaigns split a gift in two – a remote-control model sent with a note explaining that the withheld control unit will be delivered during the meeting, for instance. Although this has reportedly worked, it can come off as being too pushy. A far better approach would be to offer relevant research, a white paper, or a free audit of some aspect of the target executive's business when the meeting takes place, as a way to provide the incentive you

may need to actually get the meeting. The point is to continually add value to the connection building between you in a way that helps the executive do their job more effectively.

Include the executive assistant. Many sales reps do their best to avoid, circumvent, or trick the executive assistants they encounter, but that is a fatal mistake. Don't think of assistants as gatekeepers; think of them as talent scouts, always on watch for extraordinary opportunities their executives would otherwise miss. Once they've rendered assistance, be sure to thank them with a modest but meaningful gift. If an assistant has been helpful to me, I often send a card with one of my cartoons personalized in their name and a handwritten note of thanks. Whatever you send, don't make it look like a bribe; a dozen roses is way too much, but a gift card for a few lattes is perfect. Just make sure it expresses your appreciation for their help.

Secure the meeting. Arranging a call or meeting can be painfully tedious as all parties attempt to coordinate openings in their schedules. You can either suffer the details or use one of many productivity tools on the market to get your meeting on calendars, such as Calendly, Assistant.to, ScheduleOnce, and TimeTrade. I recommend x.ai, an artificial intelligence agent that makes the necessary arrangements via email, from the initial request right on through to confirming meeting times on everyone's calendars.

Connect, don't pitch. Once you've gone through the trouble of arranging the meeting, it would be a waste to ruin it with a misguided pitch of your company's product or service. So don't do it. Instead, be ready to have an exploratory but informed conversation about an issue by researching news stories or mentions in their social media feeds. Share other cases in which you've helped companies in their industry gain new competitive advantages, but never start the meeting assuming your offer is right for them. Be human, explore, and have a conversation.

Here are two stories of how others have used contact marketing to inspire a few ideas for your own campaign.

Dan Waldschmidt's swords. Dan Waldschmidt is an extreme athlete, an author, and one of the top sales bloggers in the world. But his core business is turnaround consulting. To connect with prospects, he scours the business news for stories of missed earnings estimates. When he finds one, he has a beautiful sword made with an engraved inscription in the target contact's name. It's sent in a fine wooden box with a handwritten letter telling the CEO he's got his back in the next battle – but says nothing about his turnaround service. This offer has generated a near 100% response rate and numerous multimillion-dollar engagements while beautifully expressing the value Dan delivers and the personality of his brand.

NoWait app launch. The founders of the NoWait app, which allows you to put yourself on the waitlist of your favorite restaurant from anywhere, used Contact Campaign as the basis of their entire launch strategy. They targeted the CEOs of 30 top restaurant chains with a brilliant campaign that used personalized videos delivered on iPads in custom NoWait packaging. Their highly targeted approach allowed the company to focus on the people who could do them the most good, using a minuscule \$30,000 marketing budget to achieve their objectives. As a result the NoWait App is already used by more than half of the targeted chains.

I've always used my own cartoons to connect with great effect, but you don't have to be a cartoonist or send expensive gifts to break through to important contacts. Just produce a contact marketing campaign that makes you stand out as someone the recipient really needs to get to know. Do your research and figure out the sweet spot between what your future client needs most and why you're the best person to help them reach their goals.

Stu Heinecke is author of the new best-selling book, *How to Get a Meeting with Anyone*. He is also a *Wall Street Journal* cartoonist, a hall of fame-nominated marketer, host of Contact Marketing Radio and founder of *contact*, a Contact Marketing agency based on Whidbey Island in Washington State.
