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## Telephoning the Client

*“My formula for success is rise early, work late and strike oil.”*

*Paul Getty*

### **Getting Past the Secretary or How I Learned to Stop Worrying and Love Cold Calling!**

A young illustrator came to one of my seminars and, during one of the breaks, hesitatingly approached me with a small portfolio which he asked if I could look over. Folks, this guy’s work was Amazing! I was green with envy! I expected to see his wonderful imagery staring down at me from every poster hoarding in the land in a matter of months and yet, several years later, I’ve never seen a thing by him in print. Why? Because he refused to accept that if you want to work you’ve got to cold call.

So what’s cold calling and why is it so vital? Simply put, Cold Calling is the name given to unsolicited telephone calls made by someone unknown to the recipient, usually to sell something, and, the first thing you’ll discover about working in illustration is that, despite phrases like “pounding the pavements”, you’ll spend a lot of time with a phone connected to your left ear or, as they say in the adverts, “letting your fingers do the walking”. We can, and should, send out mailers and samples, but if we are really serious about securing commissions there is nothing to beat face-to-face meetings with clients and the way to procure these is by cold-calling. Or, in layman’s terms, the best and easiest way to get work is to ring up clients and say, “Hello! Any work going?”.

OK, you’re going to have to be a little more sophisticated than this, but, if

you always remember that the purpose of all your work-seeking calls is to simply ask the above question you'll have many happy hours of Cold Calling ahead of you and you'll avoid many of the pitfalls and heartaches associated with this art.

So, how do you cold-call then? Quite simply, think of all the people you want to work for, write down their names on a bit of paper, look up their numbers, ring them up and ask them for work. Easy-peasey Lemony-squeezy!

Alright, alright. I'm being facetious. It's a little more involved than that but, really, that's all there is to it once you've found your feet. Always keep this to the forefront of your mind and don't let Cold Calling become the scary monster that many people [self included!] have let it develop into. The success rate for an experienced cold-caller is about one "yes" for every seven "noes" but real experts can bring that down to about one in every five. It seems scary to start with but once you've done a couple of hundred it's tinker toys. Honestly!

So let's start by looking at Cold Calling from your client's point of view. It's Friday night. You've had one helluva week and just sat down to relax after the last hard day. You've put the kids to bed, walked the dog, poured the tea and put your feet up. You're just about to watch Frasier when the phone rings. You break off from what you're quite happy doing to answer and it's some dickhead that you don't know trying to sell you double glazing that you don't want. How would you feel? No need to answer, you'd just put the phone down, and that's exactly how your potential client could feel about you when you cold call. So let's start our work generating system on the right footing and learn how to do it properly.

### **Max's Golden Rules for Cold Calling**

(1) **Do Your Homework.** Make sure that the person you're calling actually needs what you have to sell, or, in layman's terms, if you're selling illustration don't waste time (theirs and yours) ringing up clip-art merchants. They're not interested! As someone who's spent many, many hours Cold Calling, both for myself and for employers, I can assure you that a client

who has no need for your service is a total waste of time and effort. Or, to put it another way, even the world's best illustrator will have his work cut out with a publication like Hansard which uses no images.

(2) **Get Your Timing Right** Please don't get paranoid about this. You can't know if it's a good time to call your client but if you set up a few ground rules you'll avoid the situation of being brushed off because the client can't be bothered talking to you. I once had a temp job selling ad space for a local newspaper where we were Cold Calling from nine to five, so I always prefixed my calls with, "Is this a good time to talk?" (and if the client said no, followed up with, "When can I call you back then?") but to get the best out of your freelance Cold Calling it might be a good idea to set up an ad hoc time table. I would suggest that you don't phone a client first thing in the morning when she hasn't had her coffee or organised her post, lunch time for obvious reasons (ie, she isn't there!) or last thing when she's trying to clear her desk and get out in time for the five-fifteen from Victoria.

Obviously, everyone has their own preferences. I prefer to confine my Cold Calling to between 11 am and 12:30 pm, for example. I find that the art directors and editors who use me don't tend to be at their desks much before ten-thirty in the morning and by afternoon have either wandered off somewhere or have got involved in that day's project and don't want to be disturbed. The key to good timing, therefore, is to know your sector of the industry. When will your target art directors be at their desks and free to listen to your pitch?

(3) **Always Know Who You Are Phoning** Any book on sales will tell you all about speaking to the MAN, not a sexist preference but a snappy mnemonic for the person who has the MONEY, the AUTHORITY and the NEED. Throwing your pitch at anyone else is a waste of time. So, when you ring up a client the first thing you must establish is who you're speaking to. For example, if you want to get into adverting, there's no point in ringing up an ad agency and just asking if anyone there would like to look through your portfolio. For all you know you could be speaking to the janitor or, even worse, the office junior. To paraphrase an American book on the subject I once flicked through in Waterstone's [I can't remember the name of the book or who wrote it so I can't acknowledge this with a plug - sorry, whoever

you are!] don't pitch to anyone other than the Head Honcho. Many, many illustrators attend interviews with clients and never receive any work while lesser talents prosper. Why? Because the person you pitched doesn't have the authority to commission you and your business card is gathering dust in a barren filing cabinet.

Happy Cold Calling will result when you have the name of the Big Enchilada in your possession and can ask for her directly when you ring. Lots of the Art & Design industry is actually well documented and you can get all the contact names and numbers you need from directories like The Creative Handbook, usually found in your local library. If, however, your needs are more specialised, or your library's directory is ten years out of date, you might have to resort to a little subterfuge to get the information you require. There are many ways to do this and here are my three favourite methods:

(a) The Naive This is the simplest and most effective method. Simply ring up your client's reception desk and ask who you should contact regarding freelance work in your field. Write down the name, ask if there's a department or extension number you should have, say thank you and ring off. Don't ask to speak to the person now because the receptionist knows what you want and will forewarn your prospect and give him time to think up an excuse not to see you. Instead, ring off and call back a week later and just say "Fred Bloggs please" like he was your old mate and you ring him every day. You'll get through!

(b) The Information Gatherer. If you answer phones for a living you'll know that people ring up to collate information all the time. Receptionists are used to these kinds of calls, so if you ring up with a line like "Hi! I'm updating the Bodger & Snodgrass Database, can I just verify we've got this right?" you'll find out all the information you need, like the names and extension numbers of all the various Head Honchos. If you have moral problems about using this one, pacify your conscience by using your own name for the database you say you're calling about. This way you're not telling a porkie when you say that you're updating your own database because that's exactly what you are doing! You can even use this method to gather supplementary information like the names of sidekicks or Assistant

Honchos.

(c) The Devious. If you meet a real closed-mouth company who give nothing away you can always give this one a try. Ring up, and, in your best stropy Tory MP voice snap, “Joe Bloggs Please”. The receptionist will, of course, try to find Joe Bloggs and draw a blank. “I’m sorry, we don’t have anyone here by that name, what department does he work in?” “He’s head art director, of course, I need to speak to him straight away!” The receptionist thinks she’s on her home ground now and delivers her punch line to put you neatly in your place. “Oh no, our head art director is Fred Smith. You must be mistaken!” And you’ve got what you need. Write the name down quickly, apologise grudgingly and ring back a week later in your normal voice and nail your MAN.

(4) Know What You’re Selling and Sell Only That. This is the point where many novices come unstuck. They get the background, they make the calls, they get the MAN and then they blow it. Why? Because they try to sell themselves, or their work, or their cheapness, or their experience rather than just trying to make an appointment. Appointment making is now considered such a valuable skill that some large companies actually appoint specialist appointment-makers to do their telephone canvassing. You’ll have to do it yourself, however. Remember, as an illustrator, when you’re cold calling all you want, at this stage, is to get in the door. That’s when you’ll do your selling. For now, keep it simple and keep it brief. My own pitch goes a bit like this. I ring up, get the MAN and say, “Hi Fred. You don’t know me. My name’s Max and I’m a freelance illustrator. I’ll be in your area tomorrow and I was wondering if you could spare me five minutes to look through my portfolio?”

Note the key points. One, I’ve made it clear who I am and what I do. Two, I’ve underlined that I have a simple request that won’t take long. Three, I haven’t asked the client to commit to anything stronger than just looking at this stage. The client will now reply in one of these three ways:

### **The Positive Client**

Client: “Yes, I think I can arrange that. Can you come in at ten thirty

tomorrow?”

You: [with diary open in front of you] “No problem at all. See you tomorrow at ten thirty.”

### **The Negative Client**

Client: “No, there’s no point. We’re not using any illustrators at the moment”

You: “Really, why not?”

Client: “Oh, things are really quite just now, the designers are producing anything we need in-house”

You: “I’m sorry to hear that. Tell you what. I’ll give you a call in three months’ time when things will have picked up, but I’ll post you my business card just now just in case you get an unexpected rush and end up shorthanded.” Or, in other words, you believe in the client. Things are definitely going to improve for him, you’ve told him so. This client will repay your faith in him by pinning your card by the phone. Don’t forget to post it!

### **The Swithering Client**

Client: “Well, I’m a bit busy just now.....”

You: [with diary] “That’s no problem. What’s a good time for you and I’ll ring you back”

or

Client: “Well, we don’t really use a lot of illustrators.....”

You: “No problem there. If I could just show you a little of my work so that you’ve got an idea of my style then you’ll know if it’s worth taking any further.” Useful tag: “It’ll only take five minutes!”

or

Client: “I’m not sure when I’ll be free.....” He’s really saying “I don’t know what to do”

You: [telling him] “No problem. How does ten o’clock tomorrow sound.” And that good old tag line: “It’ll only take five minutes!”

(5) And, lastly, Never Sound Like A Salesman. Or, to put it another way, never, ever, use scripts. From first call to last you should sound fresh and

spontaneous, a professional making a professional call. We've all had a call from Mr Dreary, the human tape recorder who robotically recites some exceptionally cheesy script like, "You will be shocked and surprised by this wonderful offer". Yeah. And we all know what we think of him - so don't do it! Keep it brief, keep it simple, and most importantly, sound like you.

## **How to Talk to the Secretary**

When you're Cold Calling, or, as I sometimes call it, 'prospecting', you may spend hours on end being brushed off by secretaries (face it, it's their job!) and many illustrators come to regard them as The Enemy. This is not a good idea. Why? Because they hold the key to what you want and if they're going to hand it over they'll hand it to their mates and not to their enemies. Makes sense, doesn't it! Anyway, rather than giving you long lists of secretarial dos & don'ts, let me tell you about an expert in the art and you can learn by experience, like I did.

I mentioned temping on a local newspaper. While there I spent a day "on the road" with their motor dealers' rep, a lovely lady named Linda who was a true professional in every sense of the word. Motor trading is a man's world and all the clients were male, but Linda knew just how to pull their strings, just that bit flirty, just that bit coy, and then nailing her sale before the client knew what had hit him. But where, for my money, Linda excelled, was how she dealt with the secretaries. Linda spent ages with them all. She knew them all by name. She knew about their families, she knew where and when they were going on holiday. She even knew the names of their husbands and children. She was their confidant and their guru. They loved her. Their boss might have been their boss but Linda was their buddy. Other people might have been repelled at the gate when the boss decided that he was "in a meeting", but not Linda, she waltzed right through to the kill every time.

So be like Linda. When you're on the phone or calling at client's offices always take some time to talk to the person at the door. I always force myself to say, "Thank you so much for your time" when I'm being brushed-off by a secretary [even when my brain is yelling, "Up yours, bitch!" at the top of its voice!] because I know that she'll be there the next time I call and I want her to remember me and like me and, maybe, just maybe, next time I'll get

through.

So, that, in a nutshell, is Cold Calling. Practice will make it less scary and the key word to survival here is PERSISTENCE with just a soupçon of ORGANISATION thrown in to season the dish. Go out and buy yourself two great big desk diaries - buy them in January rather than December when they've marked down the best ones - and keep one for appointments and one for phone calls. In the Phone Call Diary write out your list of proposed calls for that day (names and numbers) and mark your results by each entry as you make your calls (eg, appointments, call-me-backs, sod-offs, etc). Before you knock off for the day take a couple of minutes to collate up the information you've gathered. Any appointments will already be in your Appointments Diary. Call-backs should be entered up under the next day's call list, or for the day/time the client said they'd be free. And don't discard sod-offs. Clients change their minds more often than you change your knickers. Enter their details in your Call List for three months from today (don't forget to make a little note about who they are and what they said when you last called - you won't remember!) and ring them up again, and again, and again. At time of writing there's an art director I've been chasing for an interview for over fifteen years but I know that he'll crack before I will! That's the beauty of having a system.

A simple clean-as-you-go setup like this will keep you organised, cut down on stress, and generate assignments for you. Work out a system like this one that suits your own way of working - some illustrators prefer to use year-planners or charts rather than diaries, for example - and get it up and running as soon as you start Cold Calling. It's not going to make Cold Calling absolutely headache proof but it will help!



