

Five Tips on Making the Connection Before You Connect in Sales and in Social

by Cheryl Biron, President, One Horn Transportation

Nowadays we are so lucky that Social Media and the Internet give us so much information on people and companies with which we would like to do business. In the olden days, people had to order annual reports and search for articles in the library to learn about companies. Unless you personally knew someone who knew your prospect, there was really no way to find out about that person prior to meeting them. Now you can use Social Media and the Internet to research your prospect before actually reaching out to them so that you can establish a better rapport and provide better information to that person.

Here are five tips that can help you make the connection before you connect:

- 1. Google Search:** 1. It seems obvious, but not everyone does this. Prior to making the call, do a Google Search on the person's name. You'll be surprised by the amount of information you may find in the public domain. You will likely find their LinkedIn profile as one of the top results.
- 2. Read their LinkedIn profile thoroughly** 2. to identify commonalities you may have with the person. Perhaps you share a hobby, a college, a philanthropic interest. If the person is male and you have a sincere interest in sports, look up the sports teams in his town to see if he might be excited about the big game this weekend. Perhaps you share connections on LinkedIn. You can then contact your common connections to learn more about the person. Maybe this person participates in LinkedIn discussions, so you might find some of their budding concerns and bring a solution to the table. Twitter can also be helpful here if the person has a Twitter account.
- 3. Check out the LinkedIn Company Page or Company Website** 3. where they work to see if there is any relevant news that may impact the individual's position in the company. Perhaps a new plant is opening, and that individual will be responsible for supplying the new plant and a bunch of new freight lanes are ripe for bidding. Or maybe there has been a downsizing, and with no more traffic coordinators, a broker would be the perfect solution to outsource all the company's shipping needs.
- 4. Ask the Gatekeeper:** 4. Sometimes the gatekeeper can be a great source of information on

your prospect. We have a very charming and charismatic agent who will ask the receptionist or assistant something like: "Hey, is Bob a nice guy? What's he like? He's not mean or anything?" (Yes, he has actually asked that in such a disarming way, he gets the gatekeeper laughing.) Sometimes the gatekeeper will tell you your prospect is in a good mood because her daughter just graduated from college, or that today is not the day to approach her because her boss just came down on her for something. However, if that something was a failure by another transportation provider, the timing could be perfect! When approached in a respectful, friendly manner, gatekeepers can be great sources of little tidbits of information that will help you make the connection before you connect.

- 5. Pull Up Their Photo when You Call:** 5. Finally, when you get to the point of calling people on the phone, pull up their LinkedIn profile, so you can see their smiling face as you are speaking with them. This is key. It makes you feel like you are really talking to someone you know, even if you don't really know them. I always try to do this when I am speaking with someone I have not personally met, so that I feel more of a connection with the person and my genuine warmth for the conversation shines through. I truly believe they can feel it.

Quite comically, it has actually worked on me in reverse. I once got a call from a consultant with whom I was having exchanges on LinkedIn on and off, and he asked me why I wasn't working with him. From our LinkedIn discussions, I felt like I knew him, so I pulled up his photo as we talked. He offered me a couple trial sessions, proved his value, and I actually hired him. I'm typically quite frugal and do not spend money lightly, so this individual managed to connect with me by learning about me from what was out there about our company online, and it has been a fruitful relationship for both of us.

These are just simple ways in which I have connected with people before actually speaking with them. I hope they will help you as you make new connections.

The author may be contacted by email at cheryl@onehorn.com.