

Canvassing during COVID | Expert column

By CLAY CULBRETH
INSIDE BUSINESS | AUG 28, 2020 AT 3:38 PM



Let us admit it: the world has changed for all sales folks. The big question is how one generates leads in today's stressed, divided, and closed up environment.

As a commercial real estate broker for over 37 years, I have relied on one tried and true process to generate new leads — cold calling. I mean old-fashioned get in your car, determine your market, and pound the pavement. Door knocking! Guerrilla-style marketing. Thick skinned, door slammed in your face cold-calling.

And it has worked. Year in and year out. There is no substitute for the good old-fashioned cold call. Listen up, millennials. It does not happen by sitting behind a screen for 6.5 hours a day.

So, what happens when the businesses are closed, and folks are working from home? Or the impact of a crisis totally distracts the decision-maker from even thinking about your product or service? A few clues:

Empathize: As the saying goes, we are all in this together. When talking to prospects new and old, let them know you feel their pain. It may not be the right time to make a buying decision.

Speak with past clients: I have completed 32 transactions this year and 90% are renewals or repeat customers. Take care of them. They are your bread and butter. If you forgot who they are, check your database.

Clean up the database: It will jog your memory on who needs to go and who needs to be touched. An email will suffice. I still send out old-fashioned letters when I do not have an email address.

Cold-calling: Believe it or not, there are a lot of folks working. Hampton Roads is made up of mainly small businesses that have had to stay open to survive. We are also a heavy government contractor area and those folks have stayed open as well.

The funny thing is the decision-makers are in the office or accessible by phone because they no longer have face to face meetings and thus have time to talk or meet during an old-fashioned cold call. If you are not comfortable cold-calling, email, call, or write a letter. And even if you do not feel like cold-calling in person, drive your market. You will be surprised how much comes to mind just being out of the office or home.

The bottom line is: when calling, emailing or cold-calling, be respectful. Folks want normal. Folks are scared, nervous and unfamiliar with what the future holds. This too shall pass and when we come out of this on the other side, those whom you have touched will remember you and your efforts to meet their needs. Stay safe and be well.

Clay Culbreth, a senior vice president with Cushman & Wakefield | Thalhimer, is a Virginia and North Carolina broker in his 36th year in commercial real estate. His specialty is industrial, build-to-suit, landlord, tenant, owner and buyer representation, and buildings and land on the Peninsula.