

How to Beat the Summer Sales Doldrums

By: Shawn Greene

Summer is here! It's time to break out the sandals, slather on the sunscreen, and... worry, because sales have slowed down. Here are tips for dealing with the summer sales doldrums.

Expect Things to be Slow:

Appropriate expectations help prevent frustration. The fact is sales often slow down in the summer months. People not only take vacation, many take mini-vacations in the form of shorter hours and long weekends. That probably makes sense to you—you may be taking time off yourself—and yet we often get thrown when things slow down and prospects stop returning our calls.

We tend to think prospects would tell us they plan to take vacation, but most often they don't and the sudden lack of communication can feel like a stalled sales process. Remember that you, your products, and even the issues your prospects said they want to address, are not the center of the universe. Lack of communication may have very little to do with you.

- Ask the receptionist or others in the department if your prospect is on vacation. Don't assume their voicemail will tell you that. However, don't let a "no" get to you. Continue your follow-through.
- Other people take vacations, too. Summer-mode affects organizations from top to bottom; from bosses involved in the decision process, to people in vendor management. This, too, can slow your sales process down.
- Make a note for next May and June: Proactively contact all prospects in sales process and ask about planned vacation.

Expect to get a higher percentage of voicemail:

- Whenever someone's outgoing message says they're away for more than a couple days, do not leave voicemail. They'll have so many to deal with when they return yours will probably get lost.
- Note when they'll be back, and call a couple days after that; even later if they were gone for one or more weeks.
- When you call them: Unless their voicemail specifically said they'd be on vacation, be careful about asking about vacation. Their absence may not have been for such a happy thing.

Deal with Your Own Summer-mode:

Whether you've got vacation planned or not, you may find your brain wants to take one. You may procrastinate more, have decreased sense of urgency about selling, and feel more easily frustrated. That's normal for this time of year, too, especially when it comes to cold calling.

- Block time for telemarketing. Those blocks of time should include time to prepare (research, scripting, etc.); time to call (make calls in a row); and time for following through (sending stuff, updating records, etc.). Don't usurp those times for other things unless truly necessary, including sales appointments. This is a best practice any time of year and all the more useful whenever you're procrastinating.
- Use smaller dial goals. Always use dial goals you can reasonably hit, even if the goal is lower than usual. If you're having trouble focusing, overly-high goals will be counter-productive.
- Take more frequent breaks, too. Be sure to get physically away from the phone and your desk.

Use the Slow Time Well:

Less sales activity gives you more time for other things. Catch up on filing; re-work your website; write a bunch of articles to hold for the newsletter; or heck, write a book!

- Catch up with "old" networking contacts and nurture new ones. Take them to lunch, meet for iced coffee or a root beer float, play some twilight golf.
- Do the same with prospects, whose own summer-mode may mean they're more open to doing that kind of thing, including spontaneously. Be sure to align your agenda and stated reasons. Don't invite prospects to "enjoy lunch and get to know each other better" if your real objective is to have a sales dialogue. The two don't have to be mutually-exclusive, just don't keep your agenda hidden:
- "Slow" times are excellent times to call clients and show your appreciation. Again, make sure that's all you intend to do; don't make this a disguise for asking for referrals or prospecting to them.

Be prepared to encounter slightly confused clients—they'll be waiting for that prospecting shoe to drop. The best way to prepare is to draft and use a script. "This is Shawn from Savage and Greene. I want you to know how much I appreciate the work we've done together over the years. How is your summer going?"

Prep for voicemail, too. "This is Shawn from Savage and Greene. I want you to know how much I appreciate you. You're an absolute pleasure to work with. Sorry I missed you. Hope you're having a terrific summer!"

Have More Fun:

One of the ways to add punch to your voicemail (and increase response rate) is to include a tidbit at the end. Including trivia on your outgoing message adds snap to that marketing opportunity, too. Some professionals may find that idea...well, somewhat unprofessional. If that's you, then summer—the time when it's okay to reveal you own several pair of shorts—is the perfect time to try it anyway.

Head onto the web and find out where flip-flops came from. Research the origin of the expression the “dog days” of summer. Remind us when and where the ice cream cone was invented. For example:

“This is Shawn. 510-237-8323. I do sales training. I’d like to see if these services might be a good fit for your company at some point. Please call me back. In the meantime, here’s a little summertime trivia: Water has been used to amuse people in parks since about 1550. The Italians were masters with this type of fun. But the first modern waterslide park was opened in Orlando in 1977.”



Shawn Greene is a sales performance expert and author of “I’d Rather Have a Root Canal Than do Cold Calling!” (Yes, written in summer).

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