

TSF Radio Network
Affiliate Prospecting

GENERAL RULE:

Through the years, I've wasted too much time dealing with people who could not make the decision. For me, I always talk to market mangers, general manager, or owners. These are the decision makers who can decide on whether or not to move forward.

I don't trust others to sell for me what I can sell myself to the decision makers. If the person that you're talking with does not have the power to make the decision today, then you're not talking to the right person. In sales, this is called qualifying the buyer.

Now, if you have an existing relationship at a station with someone other than the market manager, general manager, or owner, then you need to work through that established relationship. In that case, it would be rude to jump beyond your point of contact in the company.

If there is a situation in which you're hitting stone walls with an established relationship, then let me know. I could, like the dummy that I am, contact the station and talk to the decision makers at the station.

When the decision maker tells you to talk with someone else in the company, then you talk with that person. Yet, when you do make that contact, don't forget to say that, your GM or MM or whatever, told me to contact you about this opportunity.

EIGHT TO TEN IMPRESSIONS: It typically takes 8-10 impressions for a prospect to turn into a customer. I usually get there with letters, phone calls, e-mails, demos, and other points of contact. We must remain persistent to earn someone's business, keeping in constant contact with people until we earn their business or they tell us to leave them alone.

That's why I always leave a voicemail and send regular e-mail updates when we add new clients or I see a link that might interest the prospect.

It takes as many as 8-10 impressions to turn a prospect into a client. Even before picking up the phone, I attempt to make a least three impressions with the prospect. This is to establish a foundation for the discussion, paving the way for the rest of our conversation.

This is the process.

Impressions

1. Direct Mail
2. Introductory E-Mail
3. Demo
4. Phone Call
5. Follow Up E-Mail (success story; new affiliate)
6. Demo #2 (30-second; local sponsors)
7. Follow Up E-Mail (answer a question)
8. Phone Call

Direct Mail

This is an introductory letter with a flyer that includes a call-to-action to call for a demo. At times, the introductory letter will generate leads that turn into clients. That is not, however, the point of the letter. This is just an introduction.

Introductory E-Mail

Essentially, this is the introductory letter in the form of an e-mail.

Demo

After briefly researching the station online, we send a customized demo.

Phone Call

Only after as many as three impressions, then I will pick up the phone to call the prospect.

Follow-Up E-Mail

This is an e-mail that is sent whether or not we've reached the prospect via telephone. In this e-mail, we can pass along a success story; new affiliate news; or other information.

Demo #2

This is an opportunity to further demonstrate our core competency with a 30-second demo or one that includes local sponsors in the opening/closing billboards.

Follow-Up E-Mail

This is another e-mail that can be used to answer a question posed by the prospect or to answer an objection presented by the client.

Phone Call

People are busy, and really don't have time to deal with us, so call and call until you get an answer.

Gathering Critical Information on Cold Calls

It is never advisable to contact any radio station without first researching the station to gather information about the prospect. For me, this includes all of the following information:

Station Name;
Owner or Ownership Group;
General Manager;
Operations Manager;
Program Director;
Phone & Fax;
E-Mail;
Web Address; and,
Business Address.

All of this information needs to be gathered prior to making the first phone call. Most of this information is available online, but if not, then it is important to gather this information during a phone call to the station.

If the decision maker is not available, then it is time to gather information about the decision maker, including:

- best time to reach the decision maker;
- decision maker's e-mail address;
- their name, if needed; and,
- any other information that might help with the sales process.

Difficulty in Reaching Decision Makers

At times, it can be difficult to break through the gatekeeper to reach the decision maker for the station. My recommendation is to try calling before normal business hours or after normal business hours. I would recommend calling during the weekend or late at night. There are a number of ways to reach a decision maker via non-traditional methods.

(Opening)

I'm _____ from "The Sports Flash" Radio Network, and we provide radio stations with customized, local sports reports that focus on your teams, your scores. You give us the content and format guidelines and we take care of the rest. It's a free service. All we ask is that you play our network commercials. I'm just calling to see if you might have a need for our service at your station.

(Opening)

I'm _____ from "The Sports Flash" Radio Network powered by Yahoo! Sports Radio. We deliver customized local sports updates that focus on your teams, your scores, your branding, and your sponsors. It's a barter service. I'm calling to see if that might be of interest to your station.

CLOSING THE OPENING WITH A QUESTION

I typically close my opening with a question:

- Would that be of interest to your station?
- Would our service be of interest to your station?
- Is this something that might be a good fit with your station?

I always close my opening with a question for two reasons: (a) to gauge interest; and (b) to uncover any possible objections to our service. If there's any interest whatsoever, they'll tell you immediately.

Granted, there's a risk of an immediate "NO" from the prospect, but I can't tell you the number of people who have said "NO" to me and are now clients. "NO" presents an opportunity for you to discover the real objections to our service and remove those obstacles as reasons for not doing business with us.

Also, if it is an immediate "NO" then ask: Why? That will be the main objection to our service.

This technique also establishes a firm "NO" in the beginning of the process, so if it's a firm "NO" then you don't waste time pitching a prospect that will never use our service.

In my experience, questions are the most important part of the entire process. If you ask the right questions, there's an opportunity to build rapport and uncover objections to our service. I try to close out each question that I'm asked with a question of my own to keep the conversation moving forward and toward them using our service.

Typically, if there's an interest, they'll begin by asking questions about the service, or they'll ask to hear a demo of the reports. Usually, I'll hear many of the following questions after the prospect indicates an interest in the updates.

This is just a sampling of questions from prospects. It is true of the great interviewers and it's true when selling: LISTEN! LISTEN! LISTEN! It is important when talking with prospects to actually listen to what they're saying, so you can respond intelligently and ask good questions that uncover their needs and objections.

Here are some of the typical reasons that I receive for NOT wanting to add our "Sports Flash" updates:

PROSPECT: "We already have a whole staff that handles our updates for us. I don't need another guy to do updates."

That's one of the biggest objections that I hear from the major-market sports or news/talk stations. In my calls to the big markets, the following argument is gaining traction among the major-market stations with a "sports" staff. Here's the counter-argument:

YSR: Many of our client stations already have a staff in place that handles the sports updates, but still use our service. Why? Often, the update anchors are also producing a show, screening calls, tracking the commercial log, scheduling guests, and handing a plethora of other duties not related to writing, producing, and anchoring the updates. Unfortunately, for many of your anchors, they're not exclusively focused on delivering an engaging, informative, and entertaining update. In fact, if anything, the updates are an afterthought, a hindrance to their real goal of hosting a show or whatever else they deem to be more important than anchoring the reports. When that happens, the quality of your on-air product suffers.

In other instances, the producer is so focused on putting together a great update, that the real purpose of their job – supporting the host and producing a great show – takes a secondary role to the anchoring of the updates.

"The Sports Flash" is all that we do. That's all that our anchors do. They're exclusively focused on delivering the best update possible for your station. It's a difference that you can hear in our updates and frees up your staff to concentrate more on doing the best job they can to produce their shows.

YSR (FOLLOW UP): Is it fair to say that many of your guys have a lot on their plate? Do you think that removing a time-consuming task like researching and anchoring updates would help them focus more on their other duties, principally producing a great show?

PROSPECT: "We already have a whole staff that handles our updates for us. I don't need another guy to do updates."

YSR: Lots of our affiliate stations find themselves in a similar situation as yours, but they still use our service because it gives them more flexibility. There's no need to have a guy anchoring updates all morning, when the sports news is essentially the same until early afternoon. That's just not enough going on in the mornings to justify the expense of anchor doing updates all morning. Instead, some of our client stations use our service until early afternoon and start the local "in-house" anchor later in the day. This enables them to dedicate more resources to their signature afternoon shows.

We provide a local voice during the national programming while you can dedicate your staff to other more important tasks.

YSR (FOLLOW UP): Do you know of any situations in which you could use our service and better utilize your staff in other day parts? Do you have a need for weekend updates?

PROSPECT: "We've got a guy who has been doing sports on our morning show for years."

The following is best for smaller stations without the big staffs that are typical in the bigger markets. This is a typical hurdle with successful stations in the smaller markets.

YSR: Think of us as a way of making your station sound "bigger" than it actually is. If you're guy does mornings, then have us do afternoons or weekends. That way you'll have the legendary local sports "voice" on in the morning, and add one of our award-winning, major-market anchors in the afternoon. In our afternoon updates, we'll even remind listeners to tune in tomorrow morning for your morning sports updates.

YSR (FOLLOW UP): Do you have a need for an afternoon update to compliment your morning updates? Would you like to add another voice to your station without adding another cost?

PROSPECT: "NCNN gives us like three sports updates a day. That works for us."

Insert any of the regional news/sports networks for this objection and you're good to go, whether it's the North Carolina News Network, Kentucky News Network, Georgia News Network, etc.

First, before I begin the response, an aside: I NEVER talk bad about the competition to potential clients - NEVER EVER! That's not how I do things. I'm not telling you what to do, but I think that it is unprofessional and I'm not interested in winning clients that way. Whenever someone says that they're using another service, I ALWAYS compliment the competition and focus on how our service is better.

Now, I don't back down when someone point blank tells me specific negative information that was said about our service. For example: "The NBC guys say that you guys suck." My response: "Well, truth is, they suck worse, so . . ."

Seriously, I push aside such things as quickly and efficiently as possible and move on to selling the value that we deliver. Granted, flat-out lies cannot be ignored, but they can be addressed professionally without the conversation crumbling into a grade-school discussion on the competition's shortcomings. We don't win when we spend more time bad mouthing the competition than we do selling our value.

As a reminder, once again, the objection:

PROSPECT: "NCNN gives us like three sports updates a day. That works for us."

YSR: NCNN is a wonderful service; they've been doing it for years; and they've got great anchors. We deliver the same quality as NCNN, but we've taken network sports reports to the next level with our customization. We focus our updates on your team and your scores, right down to the high school level; we cross-promote your play-by-play broadcasts; we use your branding; and we'll even include your sponsors in the updates.

NCNN sounds like the big-time radio network that they are. We sound as if we're part of your station. With our service, you're essentially hiring a sports anchor without the cost.

A few years back, when we launched our updates on one station Fayetteville, NC, the local media writer from the newspaper called the station to talk with the new station's new "sports guy" that was on the station. That's how much we seamlessly our updates fit in with the station.

YSR (FOLLOW UP): If you could get the same quality as your current service, would your objectives be better served with an update that included your teams, your scores, your branding, and your sponsors?

PROSPECT: "We air the NBC Sports Update at the bottom of each hour."

YSR: That's a national update, which you can get from any of a thousand sources. In three seconds, I can have all of national sports news that I could possibly want right on my phone.

Many of our client stations have made the switch to our service, including Tulsa's Sports Animal and 640 Sports in Miami. Why?

First, our updates include local content that the listeners cannot get anywhere else. There's nothing wrong with a national-focused update, but listeners can find that information anywhere. Our updates focus on the sports news and information that matter most to your listeners. We can cross-promote any of your play-by-play broadcasts, and our anchors will even include your local sponsors in the updates. That's content that the listener wants to hear.

At the end of the day, local content wins.

YSR (FOLLOW UP): Also, did you know that NBC is just awful? :-)
From your experience, do listeners want more local or more national content?

PROSPECT: "What's the benefit to me? Why should I do this?"

YSR: That is a pretty general question, but there are plenty of benefits to using our updates. Major-market anchors delivering local sports. That will stand out in your market.

If you're looking to add quality programming while cutting costs, then we're a perfect fit.

No investment on your part, and the opportunity to generate additional revenue by securing a local sponsor for the updates.

YSR (FOLLOW UP): What do you want from us? How can we help to improve your station? In your mind, what can we do to be of benefit to your station?

PROSPECT: "The sports guy from the television station does our sports reports."

YSR: At one time, many of our client stations had the local TV sports guy doing their sports updates. For those stations, they found that kind of arrangement is more beneficial to the television station. First, obviously, it is usually free promotion for the television station, while also an investment for you to hire the local TV guy to do the updates.

More importantly, from a branding perspective, using the local television sports guy cedes credibility to the local television news operation. This elevates the local TV station in the mind of the listener as the local sports authority, so whenever there is a story of local importance, the listener will turn to the TV station, not the radio station. For a sports radio station, that's a strategic mistake, one that diminishes your relevance in the marketplace.

YSR (FOLLOW UP): Is there a real benefit to partnering with the television station? Are you paying for that service? Do you think that the television station benefits more from the partnership?

BUYING SIGNALS: *When a prospect asks a question that directly relates to the prospect actually using the product, then the question is actually a buying signal. This is the prospect's communicating a desire to buy, provided you can remove their final objection or hurdle to purchasing the product. For example, in car sales, there's no bigger buying signal than: "Does it come in red?"*

Some buying signals are obvious: "How soon can we start?" Some are not so obvious: "Well, I'm not so sure that our guy is capable of downloading the update."

Identifying and capitalizing on buying signals are critical to your success. It does take time, experience, and, most importantly, sharpened listening skills to hear the signals and pounce on them.

PROSPECT: What exactly do you mean by local sports? Do we send you the sports?
(BUYING SIGNAL)

YSR: That really depends upon you. We focus on your teams and your scores. Tell us the teams you want covered and we'll take care of the rest. From the top down, we cover the big league teams, the college teams, and the high school teams that are most important to your listeners.

Our coverage of high school teams peaks during the high school football season. Usually, we preview the games on Friday night and report the scores on the following Monday. If your station airs play-by-play of high school football, then all you have to do send us your play-by-play schedule and we'll cross-promote those broadcasts on our reports.

If they're asking about the "local" sports, then they're interested in our customization of the updates for the station. It is important now to establish how they define "local" sports.

YSR QUESTION (FOLLOW UP):

Do you broadcast any high school or college games?
How about college? NASCAR?

The purpose of this question is to determine the depth of coverage that they expect from our service. Make notes of what the station is telling you is most important to their listeners. When it comes time to produce the demo, we'll try to parrot back to the prospect what they've already told us to be important to them. In fact, if possible, we'll go ahead to cross-promote their play-by-play broadcasts in our demo report.

PROSPECT: How do you get the information for your reports? (BUYING SIGNAL)

YSR: We gather the news just like any other news organization, making phone calls and making contacts. Our anchors and producers are experienced sports journalists who can get the stories that you need for your stations. Many college and pro teams constantly send us more information that we can use in our reports.

We work with you to establish the content guidelines for the updates. That means determining the teams that matter most to your listeners. That's all you need to do. We take care of the rest. All we ask is that if we're not covering something that you want covered that you give us a call, and we'll get right on it.

NOTE: *Often this question directly relates to the prospect's concern that they're responsible for providing us the information and we just voice the reports. It is important to convey that we're full-service.*

YSR (FOLLOW UP): Do you have an idea of what teams that you would like us to cover? Would you like us to put together a coverage analysis of the teams in your area? We'll do all the leg work and all you have to do is tell us what teams that you want covered.

PROSPECT: Is this an e-mailed thing or what? How do we get them? (BUYING SIGNAL)

YSR: We set up a web address on our server where you can do to download the updates each day. Once we get that set up, we'll send you all of the information on how to access the files, including FTP access to our server. The files are either MP3 or WAV files. You can either manually download the reports each day or set up your automation to download the reports. Many of our station's automation systems reach out to grab the files from our server and they automatically appear in the system.

YSR (FOLLOW UP): Do you think that you would manually download or set up an automatic download of your reports? How do you think you would download the reports?

PROSPECT: How long are the reports? (BUYING SIGNAL)

YSR: Generally, our reports are 2:00 in length, with 60-seconds of content followed by our 60-second commercial. Yet, since our reports are customized station-by-station, tell us what works best for you. We produce reports each day as short as 30-seconds and as long as 5:00. Just let us know what you need, and we'll get it done.

YSR (FOLLOW UP): How long of an update do you think that you need? If you added our service, when would you actually air the update?

PROSPECT: When are the reports available for download? (BUYING SIGNAL)

YSR: The reports will be available each weekday by 4 a.m. EST for you to download, if not earlier. The producing and uploading is usually an 11 p.m. – 3 a.m. EST process.

YSR (FOLLOW UP): When would you need to download it?

PROSPECT: Is there a monthly fee for this service? (BUYING SIGNAL)

YSR: No. We do not charge a monthly fee for our reports. This is a barter service. All we ask is that you air our network commercials.

YSR (FOLLOW UP): Does a barter deal work for your station? Is that ok? Would you like for me to draft a barter contract?

PROSPECT: How much barter do you need to make this work? (BUYING SIGNAL)

YSR: Typically, we need no more than three, 60-second commercials per day. Now, we usually deliver the updates with our network commercial attached as a self-contained feature or we can traffic the commercial separately, ROS, Monday-Friday, 6A-7P. All that you need to do is send us an affidavit of performance for our network spots.

YSR (FOLLOW UP): What would work best for you? Self-contained with commercial attached or should we traffic our commercial?

PROSPECT: What kind of sponsors do you have? (BUYING SIGNAL)

YSR: Our radio network works with New York City advertising agencies to secure national advertisers for our updates, including: Motel 6; Progressive Insurance; Sears; Advance Auto Parts; and others. On occasion, we'll have a regional buy come through, but we do not sell to local advertisers. In fact, we strongly encourage you to sell our updates to your local sponsors. All you have to do is send us the copy and we'll include your local sponsors in our updates. We'll even produce demos for your sales folks to take out to prospective advertisers. This has worked well for our client stations in Denver, Miami, and Riverside.

YSR (FOLLOW UP): Do you have a local sponsor in mind for the updates?

PROSPECT: My guy is technology-challenged. I'm not sure he'd capable of actually getting the files. (BUYING SIGNAL)

YSR: Delivery is simple and easy. If he can open a web page or e-mail, then he's certainly capable of downloading the reports. There's even a possibility of your automation downloading the reports and putting them automatically into your system.

YSR (FOLLOW UP): What would be the easiest method of delivery for you?

There are many other possible buying signals out there. The key is to listen to the prospect's thought process and jump on anything that sounds as if they're thinking of how they could use our product.