Calendly

The art of
Cold Outreach

Proven prospecting strategies to cut through,
engage prospects, and fill your pipeline

Ding. Event invite.

Ping. Referral request.

Ring. Inbound inquiry.

As a sales development rep (SDR), your cold email or phone call is just another voice in the storm.

Cutting through the noise needs innovation and care. Earning someone's attention requires personalization and relevancy. Landing a meeting demands grit and perseverance.

Cold outreach is a tough challenge.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, it grew even harder.

The unprecedented crisis forced the world into a remote work transformation. Overnight, people lost in-person meetings, drive-by syncs, and informal breakout room chats. Every last interaction migrated online. People sent more emails and arranged more meetings. Buyers' calendars grew busier and busier until they resembled an impenetrable wall of multicolored event invites.

For sales reps, the challenge was huge: How could they land a meeting when prospects literally have no time to spare?

Suddenly, reps weren't just fighting for attention in prospects' inboxes; they were battling for priceless real estate on their calendars.

But it's not all doom and gloom.

The best sales reps took the challenge in their stride. They've developed innovative strategies and honed impactful tactics. They've learned how to cut through the noise of mid-COVID life.

In this e-book, we'll reveal how they're getting replies, landing meetings, and generating revenue.

We'll break down their cold-calling frameworks and share their best practices for email outreach. We'll uncover their social selling strategies and the sequences and campaigns they're using to pull everything together.

We'll give you all the tools necessary, not just to survive the pandemic, but to thrive during it.

Cold calling

Still the best way to get hung up on. Still an impactful channel.

Two-thirds of the buying journey is done before a customer contacts sales.

Today's buyers don't want to talk to a sales rep.

Cold calling is dead.

We've heard it all before. And do you know what? It's nonsense.

Buyers want to hear from sellers. [Two-thirds said they're accepting more calls during the pandemic](). More than 80% of buyers say they've accepted meetings after a cold call. And although people complain about cold calls, [phones remain the preferred channel for C-level executives (57%) and directors (51%).]()

But cold calling is easy to get wrong.

When you call a prospect and immediately tell them about how great you are, they're going to hang up. What you need is a framework that puts your prospect and their challenges at the heart of the conversation.

We have just the thing.

A proven framework for cold calling

[Belal Batrawy]() is startup sales royalty. He's been an early hire at six startups, two of which are now unicorns. During his career, Batrawy made thousands of cold calls. He developed a sixth sense for what differentiates a great call from one that falls flat.

"A well-executed cold call is one where you have the buyer validate and embrace the problem," he explains. *"A lot of people think cold calling is for qualifying, but any experienced AE can run qualification in the first five minutes of a meeting. What an SDR can do that an AE can't is find people that embrace the problem."*

To do that, Batrawy condensed a decade of sales success into a proven framework called the *Mic Drop Method.*

- **Permission:** Acknowledge the interruption and ask for permission to continue.
- **Problem:** Demonstrate understanding of the prospect's challenges.
- **Provoke:** Relate the problem to your prospect and encourage discovery questions.
- **Promise:** Secure the follow-up meeting.

It's simple — but don't let that fool you. Batrawy has relied on his "Mic Drop Method" to generate millions of dollars in pipeline at high-growth companies like Clearbit and FullStory.

Here's how it works in practice.

Permission:

> *" Hey David, you're not expecting my call. Do you have a moment? I promise to be brief. "*

While you could disguise the purpose of your calls, that's only going to delay, rather than alter, your prospect's response. Instead, Batrawy recommends using a permission-based opener that sets the tone early. [Being open and honest about your intentions increases your success rate by 2.1X.](#)

From here, there are two routes a call can take:

- **Refusal to continue**
- **Permission to continue**

The former isn't a rejection of the sales process. When a prospect tells you that *now* isn't the right time, pivot the conversation to *alternative* times.

"Let them know that hanging up doesn't mean you'll let this go," says Batrawy. "If they suggest calling back later, promise to call back at three and then hang up."

But your prospects might also consent to the conversation. When they do, you launch straight into step two of the Mic Drop Method.

Problem:

> *" For most small businesses like yours. I know that the second largest cost after payroll is health benefits, which have been increasing nine to 15% year over year. "*

Your goal is to show your prospect that you're informed and understand their pain point. In this case, Batrawy's example prospect is a CFO who is struggling to keep control of rapidly growing health benefit costs.

"I'm showing you that I know what's going on in your world," explains Batrawy. "I'm not just some joker cold calling you, asking you to listen to a pitch. I get your business."

Provoke:

> *" I recently talked to another CFO who told me they switched brokers three times in the last four years in an attempt to slow growing costs. Does that sound familiar to you? "*

The third step ties your problem statement to the prospect in the form of a provocative question.

Again, there are two possible responses.

Your prospect might dissociate from the question. They might say, "No, we've kept costs at *six* percent, not 15." When you experience pushback, treat them as a resource. Tell them they're unusual. Ask how they managed to keep costs so low. Find out how they beat the curve.

But more often, prospects will *embrace* the provocative question. They *will* be struggling with your problem statement — whatever it is.

This is where you take control and kick into a brief qualification phase.

What have you tried previously?

What happens when you do nothing?

Why aren't you happy with your current broker?

Your prospect's answers will reveal whether or not there's an opportunity. If there is, it's time to push for the meeting.

Promise:

> **"** *Listen, David. I promised, at the beginning of the call, that I'd be brief and I know this was an interruption to your day. Would it make sense to set up 15 to 30 minutes in the next week or two to talk about this further?* **"**

When you have all the information necessary to qualify the prospect and set up a meeting, don't draw out your conversation. Reiterate that you promised to be brief and ask for a follow-up meeting.

When everything is agreed, hang up first.

> **"***There's so much power in that," Batrawy says. "They're thinking, 'Oh, this guy's a professional caller. He knows what he's doing.' Close out and hang up. You end it.***"**

And that's it.

In four steps, you've taken a prospect from an ice-cold contact to warm lead.

But there are a few more tips and tricks you can leverage to up your cold calling game, too.

Avoid pitches

A tiny fraction of any market is actively looking to change providers at any one time. That means for every 100 people you call, only a small handful want to hear your pitch.

And yet, sales reps *love* to pitch.

As soon as a prospect answers their call, they launch into a seller-centric sales pitch, listing out features, functions, awards, and accolades.

The reality: Buyers don't care about your pitch. What matters to them is *their* challenges, *their* goals, and *their* company.

Cold calling must be buyer-centric.

Prepare for objections

Objections are *not* the end of the conversation.

In fact, almost any objection is an opportunity to deepen the conversation and learn more about your prospect. But objection handling is tricky to do on the fly.

The best-performing reps will plan, prep, and rehearse for the most common roadblocks. [Buyers who learn how to successfully defend their product and overcome objections can have close rates as high as 64%.](#)

Although objections come in many different flavors, they boil down to four common archetypes:

#1 Already has a solution

If someone is already paying your competitor, that's a great sign. They have already bought into your value prop and have the budget to invest in a tool.

Your goal here is to drive a wedge between their needs and their current vendor.

Pull up your battlecard and go hard on your key differentiators.

#2 Bad timing

If a prospect tells you it's not the right time, there's an implication that there *is* a right time somewhere. Overcome bad timing objections by leaning on urgency.

Are there compounding effects you could reference? Do you know anything about the company's trajectory? Have their competitors recently raised capital or launched a new product?

Do whatever you can to make *now* the best time.
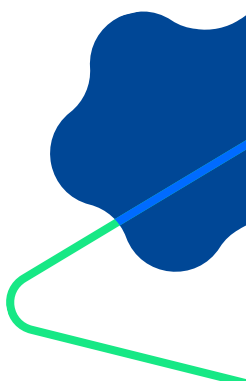
#3 Wrong person

If your prospect tells you they aren't the right person, there are a few different ways to handle the objection.

If your prospect passes you to someone more junior, elevate your pitch. Get above the line, replacing features and functionality with percentages and dollars.

If they pass you up the chain, that's great. However, try and stick with your current contact until you start a new conversation.

And finally, if they redirect you to a new department, go back and revise your messaging — it's clearly not landing for your target persona.

#4 No budget

Buyers *never* have budget — but that doesn't stop deals from getting signed. When you're hitting financial objections, there are a couple routes you can take.

The first is to ignore pricing and align on pain. Show that you understand their challenges, empathize with their struggle, and offer to take it from there. If the pain point is large enough, chances are they can find budget somewhere.

The second strategy is to have prospects anchor on a price point. Ask them how much they *would* pay. Once you have a figure, you can work them upward by demonstrating value and impact.

Daisy chain rejection

As the old sales joke goes, cold calling is the quickest way to get hung up on. And it's true. Even the best sales rep at the best company will get hung up on more often than they have successful conversations.

But what makes great sales rep great is how they use that rejection.

One impactful tactic from [Jed Mahrle](#), Sales Development Manager at PandaDoc, is to daisy chain rejections.

Say a company's director of finance, Angela, hangs up on you. When you call their VP of finance, Jane, reference your earlier conversation.

> **"***Hey Jane, I had a correspondence with Angela. Sounds like she wasn't the right person, but I wanted to reach out to you.***"**

You're not misrepresenting your relationship but you no longer sound like a cold caller. When you include more people in your deal, they're more likely to close. [Deals with three prospect-side stakeholders are 161% more likely to land than deals with just one.](#)

Email

The backbone of all great cold outreach campaigns

Automated sales platforms have driven an explosion in the number of emails sent and received. Global email traffic is up from 281 billion in 2018 to 319 billion in 2021 — and [total email traffic is forecast to keep growing.](#)

Even though our inboxes are getting busier, B2B buyers *still* prefer email over other channels for all phases of the buying journey.

Channel/Phase	Need	Search	Evaluation
SMS	13%	16%	16%
Social Media	24%	19%	15%
Phone	39%	42%	54%
Email	92%	82%	90%

[Buyer Engagement Research from VanillaSoft](#)

Regardless of buyer preferences, getting your email read is tough. The explosion in global email traffic has turned inboxes into battlegrounds.

Today's reps must make it past their prospect's spam filter, which is no easy task. Then those emails have to duke it out with hundreds of competing messages. Even when a prospect clicks into an email, there's no guarantee that they'll read or respond to it.

But despite the immense challenge, reps are cutting through.

Here's what it takes to make your message heard.

A cold-calling template that delivers

> **"** *It earns the attention of the prospect and gets the conversation started.* **"**

That's how Belal Batrawy defines a good cold email. His definition is purposefully vague, because "conversation" could cover so much.

Perhaps the prospect tells you they're not interested, but includes an explanation why. Or maybe they'll say what you're selling isn't a priority right now. If you're lucky, they'll bite and kickstart a sales-focused conversation.

Those are all positive outcomes. They can all lead to productive sales conversations. When you shift the purpose of a cold email to starting a conversation, rather than securing a meeting, you can redesign its template to be simpler, more open, and less salesy.

Fundamentally, all cold emails rely on four elements:

- **Subject Line:** Earn attention and generate enough interest for your prospect to open the email.
- **Personalization:** Pique their interest with something applicable only to your prospect.
- **Relevance:** Demonstrate subject matter expertise and empathy with your prospect's challenges.
- **Call-to-action:** Prompt your prospect to engage in the conversation.

This email framework is flexible. You can adapt it for different sales plays — referral introductions, event follow ups, even inbound.

But we're talking about *cold* outreach. You've never spoken to this prospect. You have zero connection to them. Your relationship is nonexistent.

So how do you use this template to warm them up?

Subject Line: " *David, congrats on your new role!* **"**

Busy decision-makers receive hundreds of emails a day. Your first job is to entice them to open your email.

Speak to their limbic system — the emotional part of the brain. Use an emotional hook to bypass rational thought and engage them with something personal, urgent, or important.
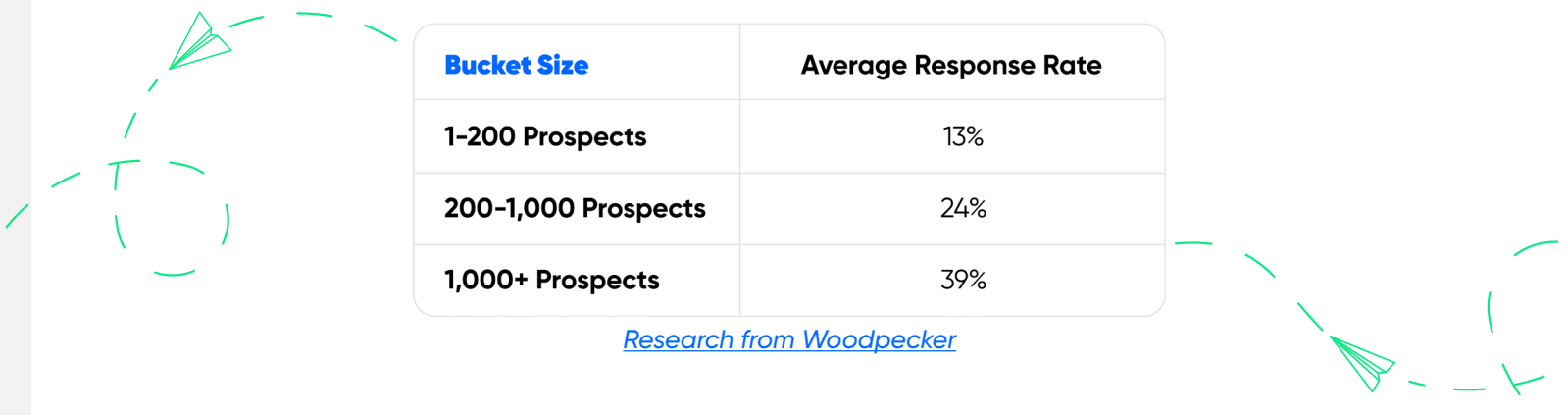
There's a lot of research on subject lines. Personalized subject lines increased response rates by 30.5% compared to generic options. Even something as small as including the recipient's name was shown to improve performance. Subject lines between 36 and 50 characters generate the most responses. Using all caps causes your response rate to plummet from 50% to 34.6%. (Hopefully, you weren't doing this.)

Personalization: " *First and foremost, congrats on the new role!* **"**

Here's the truth: Personalization isn't going to win you deals. But what it will do is earn your prospect's attention and build a relationship.

Jed Mahrle categorizes his prospects into niche buckets: new jobs, hobbies, geographies, technology stack, and more. By using standardized snippets, Mahrle can deliver a personalized feel without spending hours hunting for the perfect snippet.

If you follow his lead, be careful to keep your buckets small. The wider your targeting, the lower your average response rate.

Bucket Size	Average Response Rate
1–200 Prospects	13%
200–1,000 Prospects	24%
1,000+ Prospects	39%

Research from Woodpecker

We'll talk more about hyperpersonalization research and implementation in more detail later in the chapter.

Relevance: " *I know the second largest cost after payroll is health benefits. I know it's been rising 9 to 15% year over year in the state of California. I recently talked to another CFO who told me that they've switched brokers three times in the last four years in an attempt to slow that down.* "

Just as with cold calls, this is where you'll make your money. Your relevancy element *must* prove you know your stuff — challenges, pain points, and goals.

When your prospect reads this, they should be thinking, "This rep really *gets* me."

Call-to-action: " *Does that sound familiar to you?* "

Don't aim for a meeting in your *first* email. The chances of a prospect even *responding* to you are vanishingly small. The odds of them booking a follow-up are even smaller.

Use your call-to-action (CTA) to probe and provoke. Your goal is to get your prospect talking about the challenge you raised in the relevance section. When they open up and start talking, that's when you go for the meeting.

But eliciting any response usually takes more than one email.

So let's talk about sequences.

Multi-email sequences

The average cold email response rate is 1%.

With such low engagement, it can feel like writing emails that you know no one will ever read. It's like shouting into the void and hearing nothing back.

But so what?

No one responds to your *first* email. What about your second or third?

[When you build a three-email sequence, the average response rate jumps to 9%](#). When you expand it to seven emails, it spikes to 27%.

The message is clear: perseverance is king.

But for the most impact, you have to tweak your approach.

> **"** *If people aren't going to respond to your first email, what if you used your first email just to set up your second email?"* asks Belal Batrawy. *"What if you used your emails like a string of short stories? Instead of me giving you the entire play in the first email, I'm just going to give you the first act.***"**

Here's what Batrawy's plan looks like in action:

Email #1: *Hey David! I know the second largest cost after payroll is health benefits. I know it's been rising 9 to 15% year over year in the state of California. I recently talked to another CFO who told me that they've switched brokers three times in the last four years in an attempt to slow that down. Does that sound familiar to you?*

This first email doesn't even mention Belal, his company, or his solution. He teases the problem. He demonstrates that he understands his prospect's pain points. And he signs off with an open-ended question, knowing his prospect (almost certainly) won't respond.

And then he rolls straight into your second email.

Email #2: *David — CFOs who constantly switch brokers to deal with the rising cost of health benefits waste their time each year, while still overpaying on their healthcare costs. At some point, you just put your hands up in the air and say, "Can this stop? Can't we do better?" Would you be interested in seeing a lesser-known way on how to handle that?*

The first email teed up the problem.

The second email took a proper swing at it.

With this multi-email storytelling strategy, you just keep going. Your third email builds on your second. Your fourth builds on your third. And so on.

While your story follows a linear progression, your CTAs don't.

Calls-to-action

When you're running multi-touch sequences, prospect engagement is not equal across all emails. In reality, response rate follows a bell curve.

Your first one or two emails will rarely provoke a response. Likewise, your final touches are unlikely to succeed where earlier emails failed.

Great sales conversations live in the middle.

If you know you're most likely to generate a response in your middle touches, that's where you put your most direct calls-to-action.

"I'm going to crescendo my message in the middle," says Batrawy. "The touches in the beginning and at the end are either wrapping it up or leading into it."

Here's an example five-touch sequence climaxing on the third email:

- **Email #1 CTA:** Does that sound familiar to you?
- **Email #2 CTA:** Would you be interested in seeing a lesser-known way on how to handle that?
- **Email #3 CTA:** Would it make sense to set up 15 to 30 minutes in the next week or two to talk about this further?
- **Email #4 CTA:** Is this something you handle or is there someone else on your team more appropriate to message about this?
- **Email #5 CTA:** Is it fair to assume that this isn't the right time? Should I follow up in six months?

Notice these are soft asks. You're not asking the prospect to book a meeting. Even the third CTA only asks if it would make sense to book time. Your goal is to earn their *agreement* to book a follow-up.

Once you have their consent, make it as easy as possible for your prospect to schedule time with you.

Send across your Calendly link or ask for theirs. Busy stakeholders really do appreciate the ease of simplified booking.

The one caveat is to work up some softer language for it.

- *" Here's my calendar for your convenience. "*
- *" If you have a calendar link, please send it my way. If not, here's mine for your convenience. "*
- *" I know you're busy. To avoid email ping pong, here's my Calendly."*

Make it clear that you're sending your Calendly link for their benefit, not yours.

When your prospect has given you an idea of their availability — even something vague like "later in the week" — a great tactic from Jed Mahrle is to proactively book time. Set up the event and drop a disclaimer like "Hold" or "Provisional." So long as you tell them how to reschedule, it comes across as proactive, not presumptuous.

"You're not going back and forth trying to find a time," says Jed Mahrle. "Get it on the calendar. Half the time, it works for them. The other half, they just click the reschedule."

Hyperpersonalization

As we mentioned before, personalization isn't a substitute for relevancy. But it's still a fantastic tool for cold outreach. It can win a prospect's attention and kickstart the rapport-building process.

"Personalization is what's booked me meeting after meeting," says Emma Carr, Account Specialist at Klue. "My prospect knows that I've spent the time to write an email tying together their specific roles, potential needs, and pain points."

Indeed, [by personalizing just one-fifth of an email, open rates increase by 40% and response rates by 112%](#).

During her career, Carr built an informal process for personalization research.

She explains that there are three "tiers" of personalization: individual, company, and industry. Individual-specific personalization is the most impactful, industry-level snippets are the least, and company personalization sits somewhere in between.

There are different research strategies for each:

- **Individual Snippet:** Social media, personal relationship, CRM contact record
- **Company Snippet:** Sales intelligence, financial reports, news
- **Industry Snippet:** News, reports, competitors

With all three types of personalization, Carr recommends being unpredictable and inventive. She often references recommendations and endorsements from LinkedIn, especially if she knows the other person.

Another suggestion is to work hard to tie the personalization into relevancy so it's not a standalone section.

> **"** Reps go wrong by having a sentence on a prospect's love of tennis and not tying it back into the rest of the email," Carr explains. "If you can find a creative way to tie tennis to a pain point or create an analogy around the sport, it's a completely different story. **"**

Social media

Unparalleled access and consistent deliverability

[Sales reps with complete LinkedIn profiles are twice as likely to hit or exceed their sales targets](). What's more, a strong social presence can increase InMail acceptance rates by up to 87%. The message is clear: Social selling works.

What's more, A-players know how impactful social media can be. [Nearly 90% of top-performing say social networking platforms like LinkedIn play a key role in prospecting and closing deals.]()

AJ Trapani is one of those A-players. He's one of Gong's brightest stars, rising from inbound account development to account executive in under 18 months.
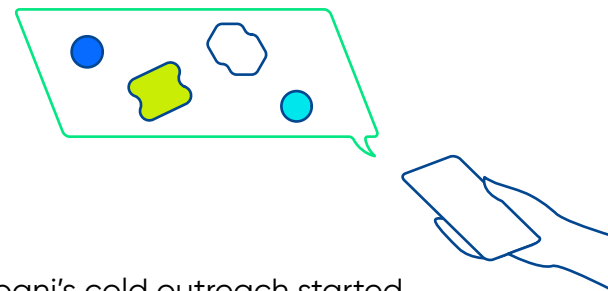
His secret?

"I heavily lean on LinkedIn," says AJ Trapani. "It's my superpower."

But LinkedIn isn't just another cold outreach channel. You can't treat it like an email or phone call.

It's a *social* network.

Relationships must come first.

Preparatory touches

When he was still an account development rep, all of Trapani's cold outreach started with a preparatory touch on LinkedIn. He worked through his prospects and sent a connection request to each one.

He personalized his connection requests wherever possible, avoiding all mentions of sales, products, and pitches. Instead, he'd look for a shared interest or common connection. His connection notes were short and simple:

- **"** *Hey, I like that you like Simon Sineck. Open to networking?* **"**
- **"** *Hey, I see we were both at Pi Kappa Alpha. Open to networking?* **"**
- **"** *Hey, you worked with my rockstar colleague Udi Ledergor. Open to networking?* **"**

Adding personalized snippets increases your average connection rate — but it's not the end of the world if you can't find them. Spend 30 seconds on someone's profile searching for the "first acceptable snippet." If you don't find anything, send a blank connection request and move on.

If a prospect accepted his request before he'd begun his outreach, Trapani paused

all his traditional outreach and switched his focus to LinkedIn. His goal was simple: chat with his prospect and get the conversation going.

He leveraged recent posts by his prospects, media appearances by their coworkers, and relevant news about their company to kickstart the conversation.

- **"** *I love this quote you shared.* **"**
- **"** *You went to California Polytechnic, right? Me too!* **"**
- **"** *I heard your CEO talking on this podcast.* **"**

Social selling relies on your ability to build personal connections with prospects, Trapani explains. Because if they like you, they'll trust you. And if they trust you, they'll buy from you.

But going from a personal conversation to a sales pitch is easier said than done.

Make the shift

One of the most common concerns with social selling is kickback. Reps worry that prospects will react badly the moment the conversation turns to sales. But Trapani says their worries are misplaced.

"I've never once had anyone get mad at me," he says. "But it's still awkward to make the adjustment."

His strategy is to be upfront and signpost the transition. Instead of trying to naturally guide the conversation to the prospect's pain point, he's upfront.

One of his recent messages read:

> **"** *Not to one-eighty you, but it's clear from your quote about coaching reps that you're passionate about rep success. You might like what we're doing over here at Gong.* **"**

From there, social selling bleeds into a more traditional cold outreach motion. You uncover pain points, develop rapport, and set up meetings.

As with cold email, use soft ask CTAs to secure a prospect's engagement. When they've agreed to a follow-up, then send across your Calendly link to streamline the meeting booking process.

Social selling best practices

Social media operates differently from channels like email and phone, so it requires its own best practices and additional tactics:

Rich media

LinkedIn doesn't suffer from the same deliverability risks as email. You can add photos, gifs, and videos without worrying about your message getting caught in a spam filter. In fact, videos included in the second and third touch have a higher response rate than in the first.

Use voice memos

The LinkedIn app supports voice memos. They don't cost any money, you're guaranteed delivery, and very few people are using them. It's a sales rep's dream. Trapani reports a 75% response rate to his voice memos.

Delay your pitch

Immediately launching into a pitch is a mistake on any channel — but especially so on LinkedIn. There's less anonymity and less privacy. It's a social network, not a pitching event. Build a relationship first. Give your sales pitch second.
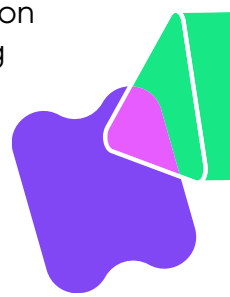
Tying everything together

American entrepreneur Jim Rohn once said: "Motivation is what gets you started. Habit is what keeps you going."

When it comes to sales, he couldn't be more right.

Writing one fantastic cold email is unlikely to land you a meeting. In fact, according to RAIN Group, it takes an average of eight touches to secure an initial meeting. Motivation will get you started but it's habit, grit, and persistence that secure meetings.

To make your prospecting work repeatable, sustainable, and scalable, you need something to tie everything together — a sequence, campaign, or blueprint.

These standardized processes detail how and when you reach out to prospects. For inspiration, check out the Agoge Sequence by Sam Nelson. The 15-step multi-channel sequence is a great starting point for fledgling sales reps.

By combining Nelson's sequence with the cold outreach fundamentals shared by Jed Mahrle, Belal Batrawy, AJ Trapani, and Emma Carr, you can deliver impact for your organization. You can cut through the noise, secure meetings, and add pipeline.