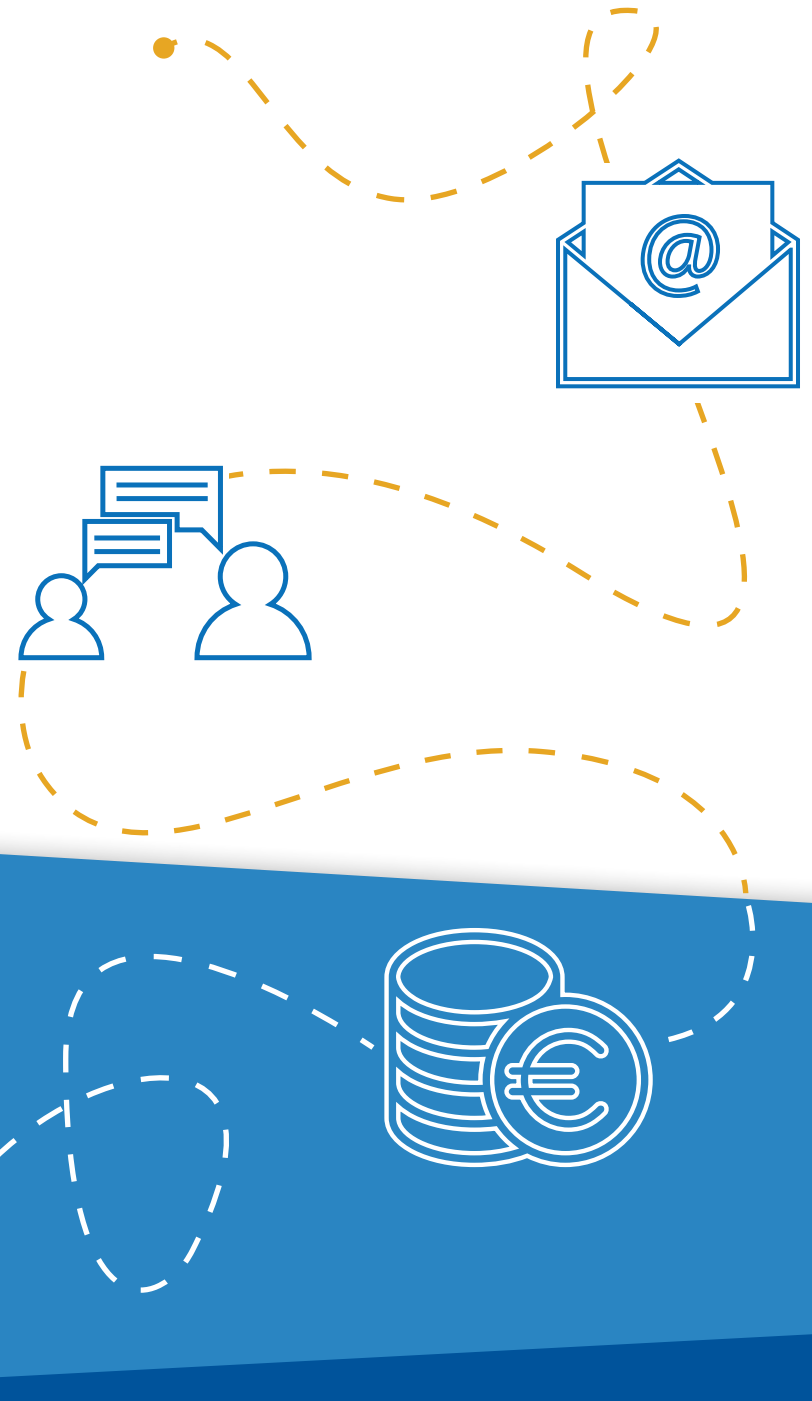


# Four Best Practices FOR SALESPEOPLE THAT TURN EMAILS INTO Phone Discussions



These days, our first contact with a potential buyer may not be in a face to face setting or on a phone call, but via email. It's not always obvious what we should do once we receive such an email message; often, the only thing we know about our prospect is the email address!

So how do we respond in a way that moves the sales process forward? **Here are four best practices to consider.**

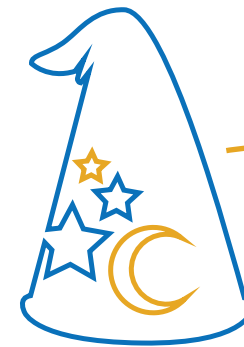
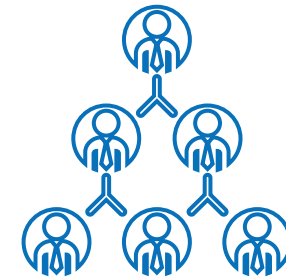


# 1. Unveil the Wizard

Prospects will often use email to put the salesperson in a subservient position, and at a distance... making it difficult to move them through the sales pipeline. How do we change this dynamic? The answer comes from a classic Hollywood film.

Do you remember the fellow in the movie *The Wizard of Oz* who hid behind the curtain? That's right: The Wizard! The curtain protected him and made him seem pretty scary as he pulled levers, making lights flash and thunder roar. People were scared and intimidated. When he finally got out from behind the curtain, though, he became easier to deal with... and more human.

If we're not careful, email exchanges can create a kind of "Wizard Syndrome". As long as prospects hide behind a curtain of emails, they seem distant, mysterious, and all-powerful. Once the curtain comes down, though, the conversation becomes a lot more substantive.



Don't try to sell via email messages alone. You're not going to close the Wizard! When your objective is to get people out from behind the curtain, look for ways to transition the conversation to a phone call or in person meeting, starting with Best Practices 2, 3, and 4. Once you do that, you can have a meaningful adult-to-adult conversation.

**Change your mindset when it comes to selling through email. Use email as steps in your sales process with a clear goal: moving the prospect forward towards a qualifying event such as a conversation, either in person or by phone.**

Once you decide to use email as a tool to help qualify initial interest and promote a phone or in person conversation... rather than as a means of trying to close a sale... you'll spend more time in control of the discussion, and see significantly better results.



## 2. Email Back... Strategically

When we receive inquiry emails, we often find they are loaded with questions.

For instance:

- “How much does it cost?”
- “What kinds of services do you offer?”
- “Yes, I did request that white paper; now, how do I take the next step?”
- “What can you tell me regarding how you might be able to help my company?”
- “Could you send me a list of the different products that you have and their pricing?”

These questions are a good thing. The prospect, interested in learning more, reached out and started a conversation. But, as you’ve probably discovered, trying to answer all the questions through email just results in an ineffective volley of hollow emails that bounce back and forth indefinitely, and make it nearly impossible to close an initial sale. In many cases, these back-and-forth emails are not even an effective way of selling after the person has become a customer!

So, let’s say you receive an email with questions similar to the ones listed above. It might have the person’s name and contact information listed in the email signature. When the email comes in, you have a few options on how to deal with it. **You can wait to address it. You can send an email reply. Or you can call the person directly.**



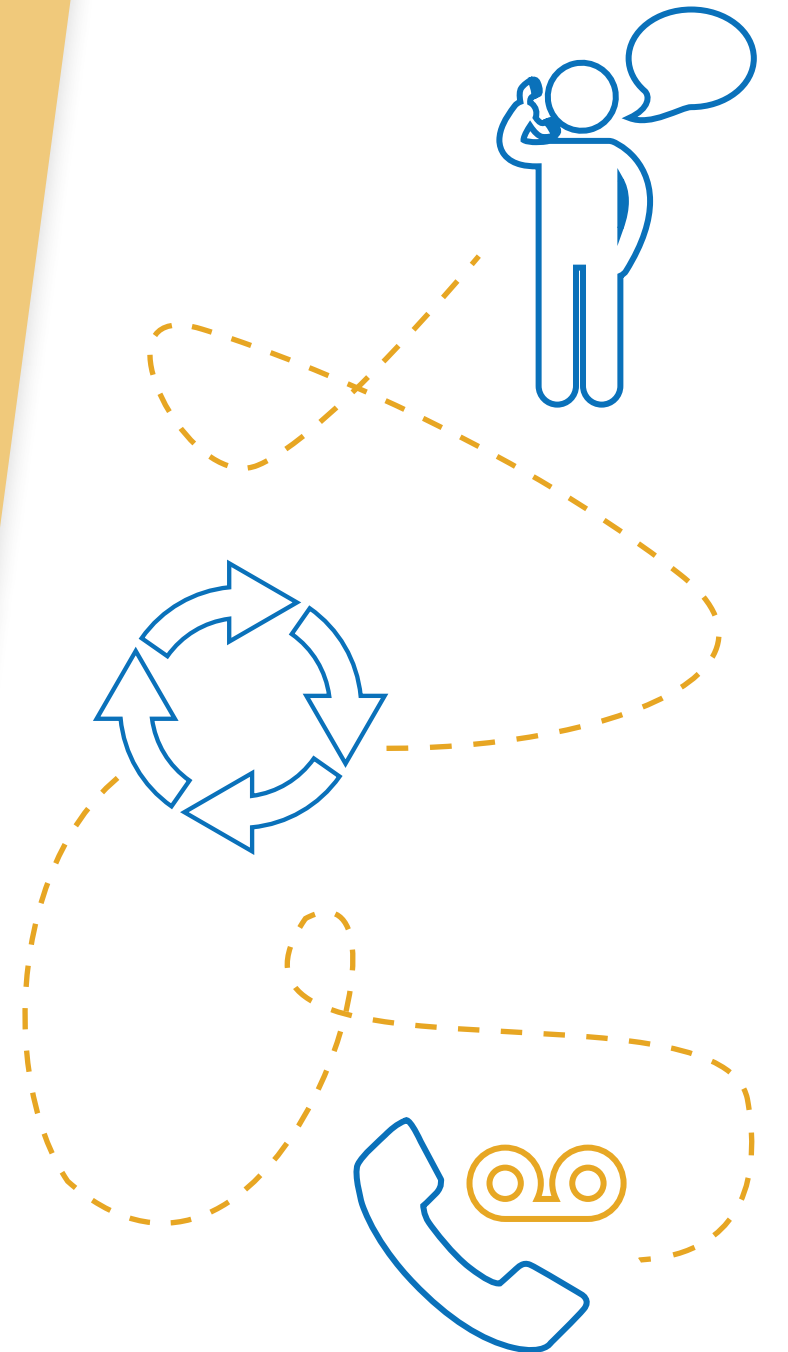
**As a go-getter, your first instinct might be to pick up the phone and dial the number immediately. Resist that urge.**

When prospects make this type of inquiry, we suggest you respond by email first *without answering ALL of the questions*. It's okay to volley the conversation back and forth a few times over email... so long as you don't send too much or inaccurate information.

**Remember, your goal should be taking the conversation offline, not on closing a sale through email.** (See Best Practice #1.) The point bears repeating: If you try to close via email, you'll likely get stuck in a confusing and frustrating back-and-forth cycle with a prospect's who's probably getting frustrated, too. Another problem, of course, is that if you give a great deal of information via email, you fall into the traditional (ineffective) selling approach of *premature presentation*. Prescribing a solution to your prospect's problem before you properly diagnose it is *sales malpractice*.

Maybe you're one of the many salespeople who think it's crazy to advise against calling the prospect straight away. You might have been trained to develop that "Go get 'em" attitude in the past. That attitude is a positive thing. You need to understand, though, that huge problems can arise if you call prospects directly after receiving that initial email.

Frequently, your call will go right into the prospect's voice mail and get lost in the clutter. If that happens, your odds of having a meaningful conversation with the prospect decrease drastically. If the prospect wanted a phone conversation right away, she would have called you instead of emailing!



## What if you had simply responded through email with something like this?

*“Hi Mary, thank you very much for thinking of us. Would you mind if we took this conversation to the phone?”*

A message like that will substantially increase your odds of closing the sale with Mary. She knows you’ve seen her phone number at the bottom of her email. But even if the contact phone number isn’t there, you’ll find that prospects frequently respond positively when you ask for permission to speak on the phone. Prospects will say, *“Yes, that’s fine. You can reach me this afternoon at 123-456-7890.”*

One reason this works is that even though you could have called Mary, you didn’t. Therefore, you don’t appear to be needy or unsuccessful. Rather, you’re portraying an attitude of experience and success. You demonstrated respect for the boundary the prospect created by using email, and you didn’t come off as desperate. People love to do business with successful people, and this approach helps create that impression.

Of course, what you write in your initial email response depends to some extent on what the prospect said or asked you. Let’s imagine Mary sent you an initial email loaded with questions, and she expects some answers in your response. You can try using what we call a “reverse” – a response that answers a question with a question – in your email.



## For example:

*“Hi, Mary. It’s very nice to hear from you! Thank you very much for thinking of us. I appreciate the questions. There are a couple of possible answers to your questions. I want to be sure I’m giving you accurate information. Would you mind if we spent just 10 minutes over the phone?”*

Our clients get great results with this approach. It works because you’ve acknowledged the fact that Mary has questions – without starting a presentation you are unprepared to deliver. In Sandler® terms, you’re not “spilling the candy in the lobby” – presenting prematurely.

### **Note the strokes and softening statements before the question.**

That’s what effectively reversing a question in an e-mail looks like. Instead of listing features and benefits, you answered her question with a question of your own. Why? Because getting her on the phone will help you more effectively understand her situation and discover her pain, which is the true reason for her email. Additionally, verbal communication gives you a much better opportunity to build rapport, an essential prerequisite to effective communication. . . . and to closing the sale.

In some cases, you may decide to answer some of her questions when you are sure that there is no risk in answering those queries. In this situation, you’re not giving away information that will help Mary to “shop you” against competitors. Instead, your answers will help you establish enough rapport to get a phone conversation.





**For example,** let's say you are in the computer network support business and you feel it's safe to answer a question like this: *"We have local area networks and use some cloud-based applications. Can you support a network like that?"*

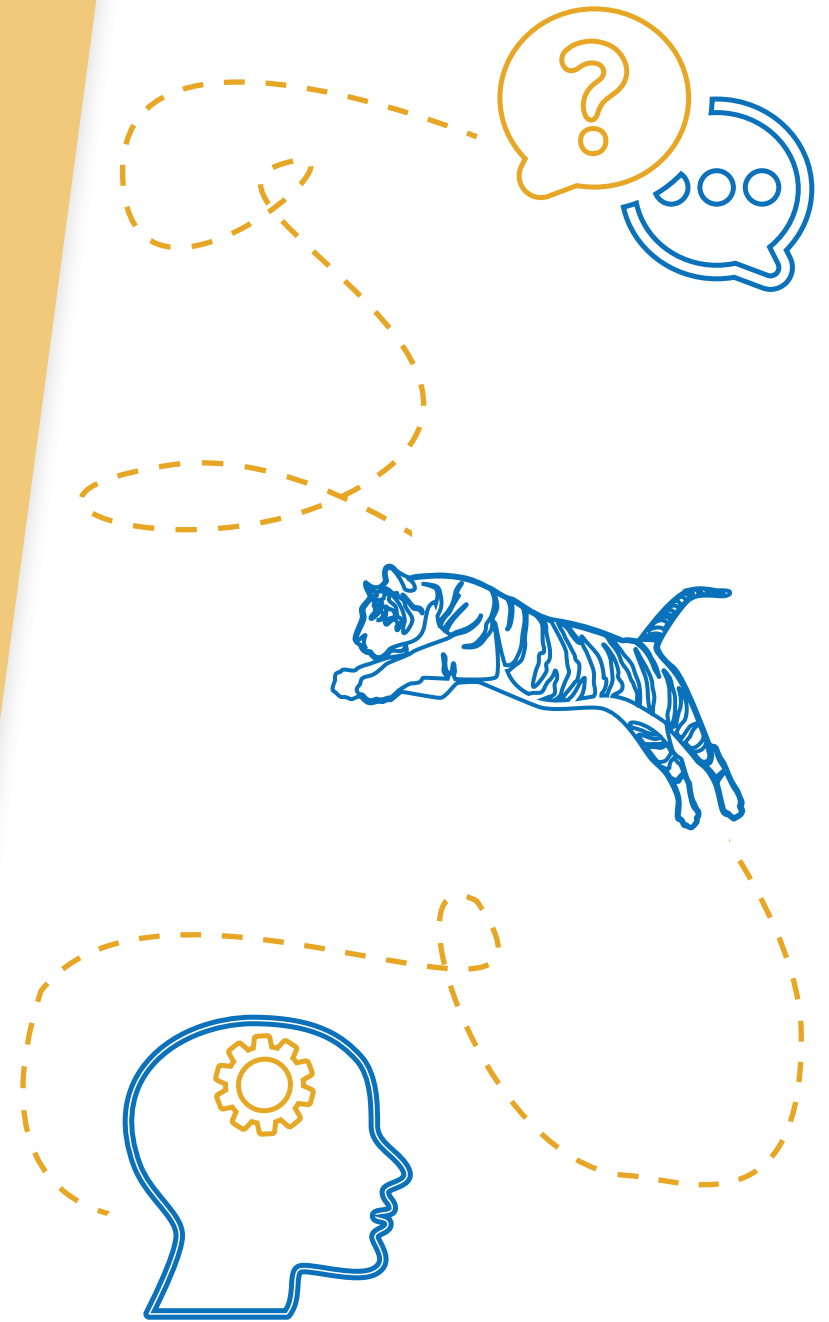
**Your email might both respond *and* reverse:**

*"Hi, Mary. Thank you so much for thinking of us. Yes, in fact, we do support local area networks as well as the cloud. Could you be kind enough to tell me a little bit more about your project?"*

With her initial questions answered, Mary will likely respond with some more information and probably a few more questions of her own. At this point you've established some rapport, so you would answer with:

*"Thanks again for reaching out. I want to answer all your questions, and I also want to be sure I'm giving you accurate answers. So, I have a few questions I'd like to ask you. Would you mind if we took this conversation to the phone?"*

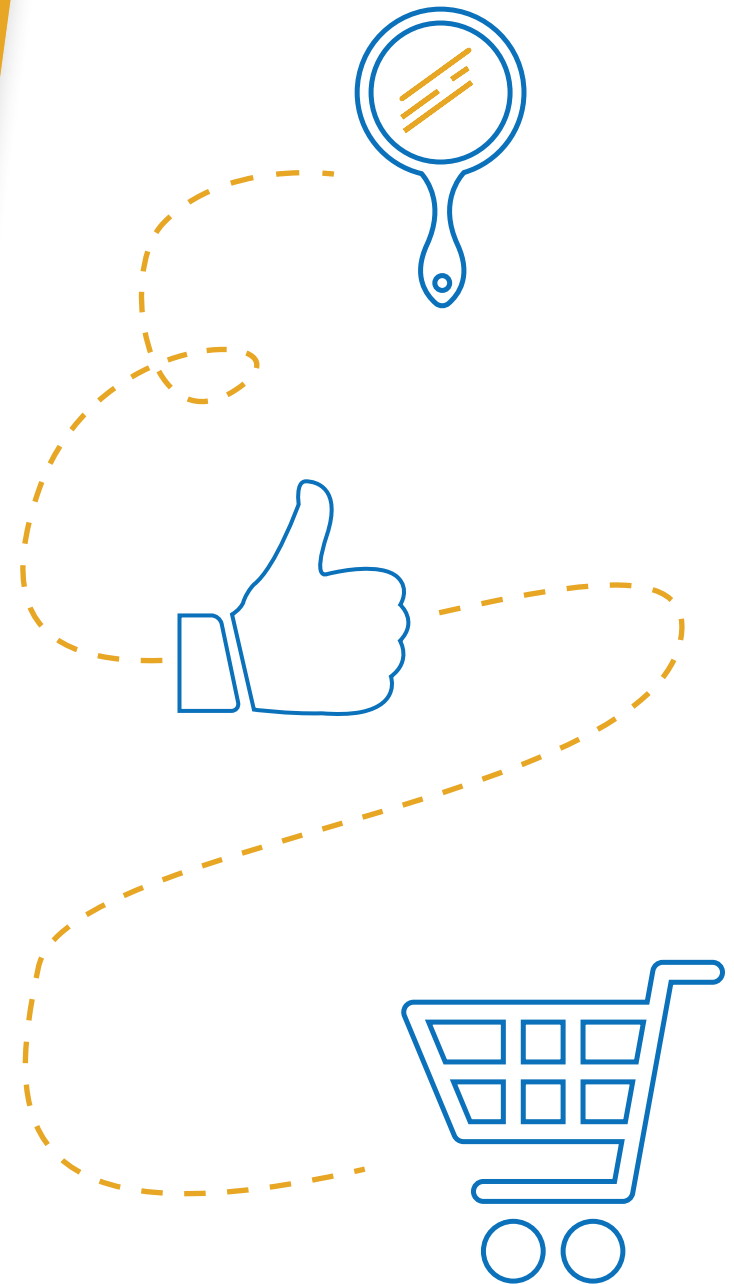
In all likelihood, when you send this, you won't look as a tiger prowling in the grass for prey, but as a conscientious person struggling a bit, and trying to do a good job. Often, the prospect will agree to the phone call.



### 3. Craft Email Messages That Build Better Rapport.

There are a couple of things you can do to support good rapport as you try to convert the email exchange to a phone conversation.

When an email comes in, and you're ready to respond, mirror and match the way your prospect wrote the email. In other words, if the prospect sent an email in green font, match the color. If the message is written with large letters, reply in large letters; if it's in small letters, reply in small letters—match the font size. If the email is personalized, be sure to personalize your reply in the same way. If the email is more cryptic — for example, if they don't even say "Hi Greg" or "Dear Greg" — then eliminate your greeting as well. Additionally, match the way the prospect closed the email. Perhaps she wrote, "Thanks," "Sincerely," or "All the best." Use your email to do the same.



**Mirroring and matching is a great technique for establishing bonding and rapport.** People buy from people they like... and people like people like themselves. If you can establish some rapport before you even get on the phone with the prospect, you'll be that much closer to figuring out whether there's a problem you can solve... and that much closer to closing the sale.

Here's another concept that works well to create rapport: **Respond quickly!** Remember this Sandler principle: "Time kills deals." Because email is a time-sensitive medium, responding quickly will always be seen as a good thing by the prospect. It helps inspire the person to converse with you on the phone as they perceive you as a no-nonsense person who is "on the ball."

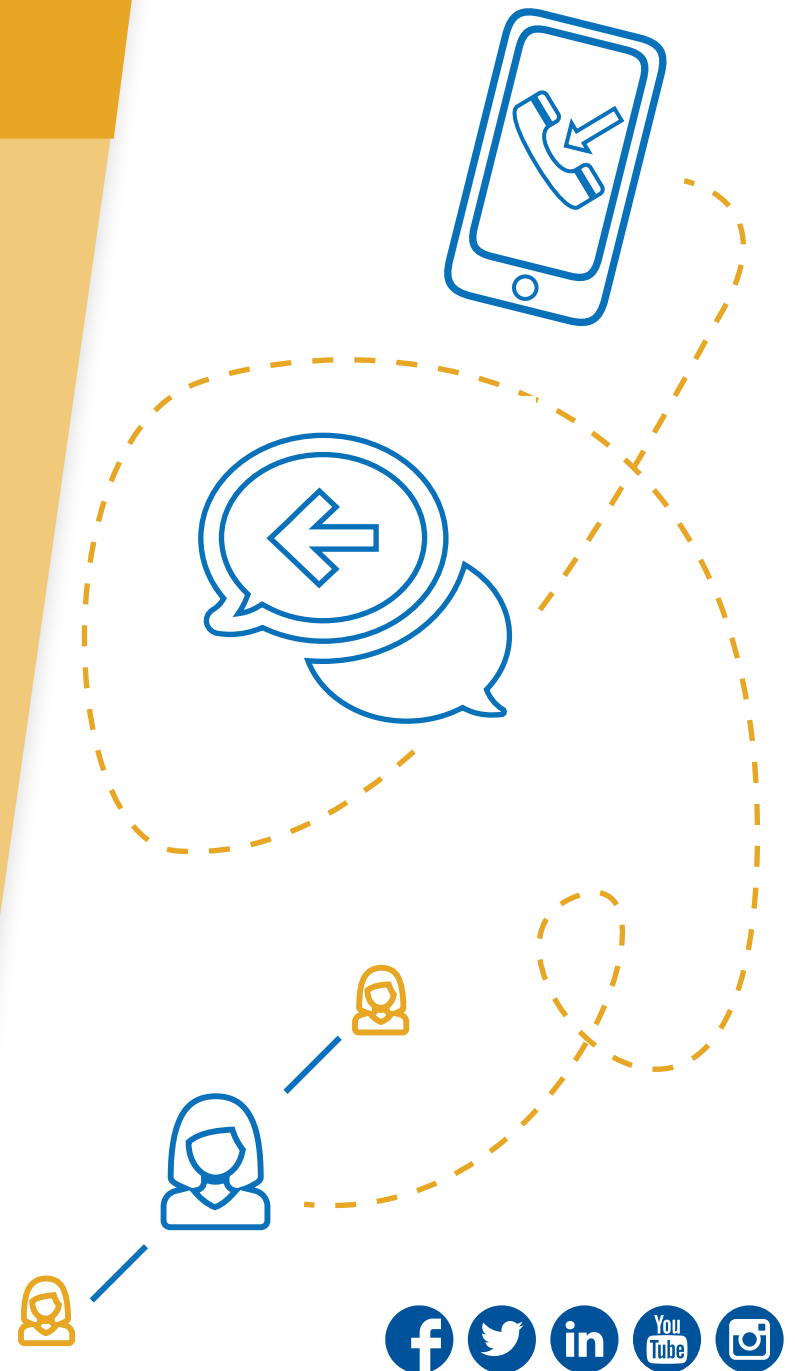


## 4. Connect More Effectively with People Who Downloaded Information from Your Website

The rules change just a bit when you are following up with prospects who have just downloaded information (for example, white papers like this one) from your website. These exchanges are in a different category from people who sent a direct email requesting information and specific answers. Of course, some of the principles and techniques previously discussed still apply. Here are the best guidelines to follow.

**1. Respond as quickly as possible.** This point is worth emphasizing. The chances are high that the prospect has made inquiries to competitors. Studies show that in many cases responding more than thirty minutes after the prospect's inquiry can be too late! You are in a horse race to decide who gets ahold of the prospect first. Whoever does is likeliest to win the deal.

**2. In this case, you DO want to call first whenever possible... instead of emailing first.** This is because response time is key. If you call and don't reach the prospect, you can leave a message like this: *"Hi Jack, this is Greg from Sandler Training. Thank you so much for reaching out and downloading our eBook, 'Why Salespeople Fail and What to Do about It.' I have a question for you. It's kind of important, but not urgent, so please give me a call when you get a chance at 123-456-7890. Thanks."* If you get the prospect on the phone or when he calls back, establish appropriate rapport and then ask a question like this: *"Can you help me with why you were interested in the white paper, and what you were hoping to learn?"* This technique will help you to engage the prospect in a meaningful conversation and find out whether there are challenges in his world that you can help to address.



### 3. If you do leave a voicemail message, follow up with an email message.

In the email, you will essentially repeat what you said in the voicemail message. For instance:

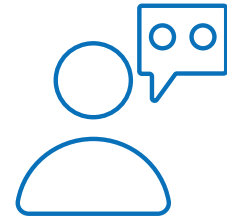
*Hi Jack,*

*Thank you so much for reaching out and downloading “Why Salespeople Fail and What to Do about It.” I just left you a voicemail message as I have a question for you.*

*It’s kind of important, but not urgent, so please give me a call when you get a chance at 123-456-7890.*

*Sincerely, Greg*

In the subject line, here’s what we suggest: “Can we get 15 minutes on the calendar this week?” This way they are likely to read the message sooner rather than later. If you don’t like that or have already used it, another great subject line is just the word, “Question.” **Everyone opens the email to see what the question is... and then they have to call you to find out more.**



## The Key Sandler Takeaways about Email Prospecting

- **Remember, prospects' email inquiries typically create a "Wizard Syndrome."** Your job is to get the prospect out from behind the curtain. Once you do that, you can have a meaningful telephone conversation and create the best odds of winning the business!
- In most cases, you will want to reply with an email and work toward a phone call or in person meeting. **But remember, time kills deals** . . . so be sure to respond with an email of your own quickly. Then, as soon as it makes sense, take the conversation to the phone.
- The exception comes when you're following up on white paper or content requests - basically anything downloaded from your website where the prospect was looking for a specific piece of information. **In those instances, call as soon as possible to uncover the pain behind that action.**
- In your email response, **mirror and match the way the prospect writes**, so you establish bonding and rapport. . . and support better communication.

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