

PASS IT ON

Visiting Hours *

Between sales reports, meetings, and answering e-mails, fitting in client visits can seem like a monumental task. Mark Holmes, president of performance-improvement firm Consultant Board Inc., in Springfield, Missouri, offers tips for squeezing in more client time: **LIMIT INTERRUPTIONS** Hallway discussions and so-called quick questions can interrupt appointment scheduling. Ask a colleague nicely if she can ask her question later in the day. Or go to her office – that way you're in control of when to leave.

GATHER UP TIME SCRAPS "Saving just fifteen minutes a day can add up to sixty hours a year." If it takes you 15 minutes to write an e-mail, challenge yourself to get it down to 10. Then use those extra minutes to call clients and prospects.

CUT OUT TIME STEALERS Be honest about your time wasters, such as procrastination or Web surfing. Cut down on those bad habits each day. If you put off calling clients until later in the day, schedule time the next day to call three clients.

S&MM
SURVEY

Sales reps could use assistance accessing the top dogs at their client firms. According to **54 percent** of executives, getting to the decision maker is the sales skill that reps most need to beef up. Help with closing is a close second, cited by **50 percent**.

SOURCE: S&MM/EDUCATION RESEARCH SURVEY OF 329 EXECUTIVES

LEAD GENERATOR

Quick Ideas for Better Sales Leads

Kate Purmal, president of Driver Group Inc., a sales and marketing consultancy in San Carlos, California, offers these suggestions to revive a lead you thought was dead in the water:

DIVERSIFY Hounding a prospect by either phone, e-mail, or fax won't get you far. Instead, try a smattering of modes, but don't inundate. Keep your methods of contact short and respectful.

PROVE YOU'RE INVALUABLE Offer a piece of industry insight (via e-mail is often the best way) and never mention your product. But keep it short. Don't turn off a prospect with a lengthy e-mail.

BE TRUE TO THE NUMBERS Prospecting is a numbers game. It's not unreasonable to hit up a prospect seven times within a four-week period, Purmal says. But be strategic. Leave a voice mail to say you've e-mailed an article, but don't hound them to make sure it's been read. Don't despair if they don't respond; following up every six weeks can turn some dead-end leads into hot deals.

Done Deal

How one sales pro closed a big customer

FOR 72 YEARS, BLUE BIRD CORPORATION, IN Fort Valley, Georgia, has been making the school buses thousands of students ride each day. But the company recently changed how it manufactures vehicles, thanks to **Fritz Marinko** and his six-man sales team. Marinko, vice president of sales and marketing for Pickens Plastics Inc., a plastics manufacturer based in Jefferson, Ohio, recently turned Blue Bird from a \$500,000 Pickens client to one worth \$4.5 million.

Three years ago, Marinko and his team proposed a way to revolutionize the firm's manufacturing: Prebuild the entire front grill and hood of the buses, including wiring, turn signals, headlights, and body paint, and deliver that portion in one piece, making Blue Bird's assembly line faster. The problem was that the change would require a \$1.5 million investment by Blue Bird. So Marinko and his team drafted reports that showed how returns would improve. "If we had a design-packaging issue, we brought in design-packaging experts. If it was about paint, we would grab our paint people. Hardware, we grabbed our hardware people," Marinko says.

In nearly 20 meetings over two years, Marinko also tweaked his pitch to his audience of the moment, whether it was Blue Bird's executives, engineers, or purchasing agents. "You have to truly make the [deal and decision] a partnership and make yourself an integral part of the decision making process," Marinko says.