

The Art of the Cold Call

by Joanne Rile

You have just volunteered to raise funds for a new hall. You're starting a job as a booking agent. Your organization is launching an outreach program. These are just a few of the many situations that require chamber music professionals to make cold calls. It's a chore that few people anticipate with relish. That first call can be "cold" indeed—like taking your first dip in the ocean at the start of the season. But like that initial swim, it's better to plunge in completely than just to stick your toe in the water. You might even enjoy it.

In my years of experience of making unsolicited phone calls, I have discovered a number of methods that can get real results. Here are my 11 key elements of successful cold-calling:

1) Know your stuff.

Even though the call is "cold," you should be warmed-up and meticulously prepared. You should know every aspect of your mission, with no uncertainties about the project, the artists or the programs you are trying to sell. Know who has already given and mention the level of donation; know the artists' programs and technical information; know what the school program will include. If you'd like, there's no dishonor in using index cards or cheat sheets to keep important information—the kind that nervousness could make you forget—right at hand. A response like "I'll check on that" can dismantle even your best pitch.

2) Do your homework.

You shouldn't just know what's happening on *your* side of the phone call,

though. You have to learn as much as you can about the *target* of your pitch. Use the Internet and professional publications as resources. If you are unclear about exactly whom you should be calling, make a preliminary call to ascertain the real decision-maker—who books the series, who allocates donations, who plans curriculum. Getting to the right person immediately saves hours of needless calling and emailing. And if you find some piece of personal information that will help break the ice ("I see that you are a flute player yourself")—by all means, use it.

3) Practice makes perfect.

Before you pick up the phone, imagine the conversation that you would *like* to have. The recipient, if not completely hostile, will almost certainly be wary: you must devise tactics to charm her before making your ultimate request. Rehearse the conversation in your head or even with a co-worker or friend.

4) Set it up.

In the best circumstances, your call won't be entirely "cold": your target will expect to hear from you. The best way to set this up is to send a written communication, via email or snail mail, explaining who you are and saying that you will be telephoning on a given day. Among other advantages, when the target's assistant answers, you can legitimately say, "Mr. Brown is expecting my call."

5) Be persistent.

Unless your target has already agreed in writing to take your call, he certainly will *not* be waiting with bated breath to hear from you. If the assistant says, "He is not available at this time," simply ask when a good time to call might be. If you are put off again with, "I can't say—he's in and out," ask to make a specific telephone or in-person

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Mark Your Calendar!

Chamber Music America's 2008 National Conference

January 4–7, 2008

Westin New York at Times Square

Watch for updates at www.chamber-music.org.

The Fundraising Letter

Fundraising is a year-round activity for any non-profit organization. Whether you're sending out a year-end donation request letter, launching your Spring drive, or developing a mailing targeted at a special project, the components are pretty much the same.

Regard the letter as an opportunity to convey your enthusiasm for what you do, to share news, and to let your subscribers, audience members, and donor base know how important they are to the enterprise. Below are some tips and a sample letter.

Start out with recent musical (or other) accomplishments.

Dear Mr. Johnson:

The Acme Chamber Ensemble has received a robust response to its subscription series at Memorial Hall. We have played four performances out of our ten-concert season to packed houses. George Smith of the Racine Journal-Times described our performances as "scintillating, with original programs and top-flight artistry."

Stress service to the community. Include specific details and anecdotes.

Our education program, now four years old, serves ten elementary schools. This year, we are reaching more than 200 children with coachings and masterclasses; and more than 2,000 children have heard us in concert.

We have identified—and have begun to mentor—several elementary school ensembles. They have shown remarkable progress and they have been performing with us locally. Together, we have played at places like the Racine Public Library, the Aurora Health Center, the Racine Art Museum and Johnson Wax corporate headquarters. One of our audience members, Mrs. Thelma Jones, a 90-year-old resident at the Lincoln Lutheran Home, wrote to us, "The performance by your high school quartet was uplifting. How wonderful to see how young players are playing the great masterworks. They were so expressive! Thank you for remembering us."

Give information about some of your upcoming goals and how you plan to meet them.

Because our string program has been so successful in the elementary schools, the Racine Unified School District has asked us to increase our activities to include the middle school students.

The school board has outlined its new strategy for engaging the youth of our community and has asked us to be a partner. In discussions with our local musicians, they feel just as committed to this as we do. Our reach will now expand to 1,000 more children.

While the School District has pledged its support for this program, unfortunately their ability to provide all of the necessary funds to pay the artists is limited.

Thank them for their past donations and ask them to continue supporting your organization.

Our past successes have been made possible by the support you and others in the Racine community have given to the Acme Chamber Ensemble.

We invite you to take part in our expanded educational program with a tax-deductible contribution, so that we can join together and provide our youth with access to music that they need and deserve.

Some other things to think about:

You know your community and local issues. Tell your reader about how your organization will meet some of the needs and make the community a better place to live.

Fundraising experts have noted that long letters are the ones that most often read from start to finish. It is important to address local concerns and identify other potential ones in order to grab people's attention. If you use bullets, keep them to no more than three. The bullets should contain some information that draws the reader in.

A postscript is also an eye-catching element. Many people read the P.S. before they read the body of the letter. Make sure to have a compelling statement in your postscript.

Show them that you're committed to what you do. If they don't feel your dedication, they won't give. People give to causes, but more often, they give to people. □

appointment. The assistant may say that the boss prefers to respond to emails. In that case—even if you’ve already contacted the person once in writing—go to it. Make sure you mention the assistant’s name in the text, and try to point the email exchange toward a definite phone appointment. Don’t be discouraged or intimidated if your call is refused—or if it is taken, and you get an icy response. Remember that you *believe* in your mission. That will keep you persistent.

5) Turn on the charm.

You must always be polite—assertive enough to take control of the conversation, but never pushy. Let your enthusiasm show—like laughter, enthusiasm is contagious. Even if your efforts were not successful on this try, the call can lay the groundwork for a strong relationship. Needless to say, whatever the results, a “thank you” is in order.

6) Think on your feet.

Be prepared for objections and know how to overcome them. If you’re trying to book a client and the target says, “My budget is spent and I can’t afford to give any more or book another concert,” you might respond, “I understand—can we be first on your list for next season?” Or if you’re soliciting contributions and your target seems unwilling or unable to meet your request, ask for a smaller donation. Flexibility is key.

6) Drop names.

The more credibility you can give yourself the better. If you’re pitching an artist, mention other series that have booked him or her. If you’re looking for contributions, talk about other important donors. It’s much easier for your target to say “yes” if someone she knows and admires is already on board. Most people prefer hopping on the bandwagon to driving it.

7) Keep an open ear.

You’ll have thought long and hard about your pitch. But it’s a truism among salespeople—a group that now includes *you*—that more than half the job is *listening*. Pay attention to what your target is saying. He’ll be giving you clues that can help you determine how to succeed and successfully finalize the project.

8) Anticipate your next step.

A receptive target can help you find other leads. If the conversation is going well, ask her (for instance) “Do you know any other presenters in the region who might be appropriate for this trio?” or “Do you know of any other arts patrons who might be interested in chamber music?” Most people are happy to give advice and suggest names—perhaps even make an introduction for you.

9) Follow up.

One conversation may do the trick—but don’t count on it. Whatever the result of your initial call, drop a note afterward. If you and your target have discussed print materials or CDs, send them promptly. And follow up soon afterward with another call in the hopes of nailing down what you want.

10) Keep track.

Set goals and assess whether you’ve met them. Write down what you want to achieve—the number of calls, the number of positive responses. Check your progress each day, each week and each month. Keep track of your accomplishments and—more importantly—your mistakes, which will teach you more than your successes.

11) Build on the relationship.

Keep in touch over the months that follow. Even if you have no favor to ask, call to say “hello.” You’ll help build a friendship, and the next time you actually need to make a request, it will be a *warm* call.

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- Introduce yourself and link up with other CMA members by completing your Member Profile.
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Joanne Rile is the president of Joanne Rile Artists Management. She has served on National Endowment for the Arts chamber music panels and is a long-time CMA member.

Chamber Music America
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New York, NY 10001-6008

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DATELINE

CMA New Works: Creation and Presentation Program—support for composer-led jazz ensembles. DEADLINE: February 28, 2007. FMI: www.chamber-music.org, William Pace, wpace@chamber-music.org, (212) 242-2022, ext. 14.

CMA Commissioning Program—support for new chamber works to ensembles and presenters. DEADLINE: April 6, 2007. FMI: www.chamber-music.org, Susan Dadian, sdadian@chamber-music.org, (212) 242-2022, ext. 13.

Trust for Mutual Understanding—grants to non-profits conducting cultural exchanges with institutions and individuals in Russia and Eastern/Central Europe. Letter of inquiry required prior to application. DEADLINE: February 1 and August 1, 2007. FMI: www.tmuny.org

The Joyce Awards—support to enable Midwest cultural institutions to commission new work by artists of color, expand the repertoire of art that speaks to diverse urban audiences, and enhance the creative environment. DEADLINE: April 16, 2007. FMI: The Joyce Awards, www.joycefdn.org, Michelle Boone, mboone@joycefdn.org.

USArtists International—funding for U.S.-based music ensembles that have been invited to participate in international festivals. DEADLINE: May 7, 2007. FMI: www.midatlanticarts.org.

The Aaron Copland Fund for Music Performing Ensembles Program—general operating or project support to professional performing ensembles with a history of substantial commitment to contemporary American music and plans to continue that commitment. DEADLINE: June 30, 2007. FMI: www.amc.net, Anna Smith, American Music Center, (212) 366-5260 ext. 29 or anna@amc.net.

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