



# How ISRs Improved Sales Appointment Rates by 19X

A 4-week, 4,100-call test sheds new light on what works when cold-calling new prospects

By Andrew Briney

**Today many B2B inside sales teams rely on decades-old tactics for generating appointments:** volume-based teleprospecting, “dialing for dollars” and call scripts focused inwardly on product features, not on the customer’s needs. It should come as no surprise, then, that appointment rates average 1 in 200 dials and declining. It’s time for a different approach. It’s time to flip the script and see if we can do better.

## Purchase Intent Isn’t Just for Marketing

Many B2B tech marketers now include purchase intent data in their workflow in an effort to expand their reach and gain customer insights not available via traditional demand generation. This data, available on both account and prospect levels, helps marketers tap into undiscovered opportunities, understand details and considerations for upcoming purchases and empower more personalized marketing promotions.

But despite its growth in marketing, few tech providers are leveraging project intelligence in their ISR outreach. The challenge is partly workflow-related (ISRs already have lots of data points and screens competing for their attention) and partly due to old habits dying hard (they’re comfortable calling into inbound/syndication leads and don’t know how to adjust their approach for non-lead prospects).

TechTarget recently conducted an extensive inside sales test to answer key questions related to purchase intent data. Specifically: Is there a compelling reason for ISRs to flip the script? What’s the best type of intent or project data to use? And what sort of results can you expect when you do?

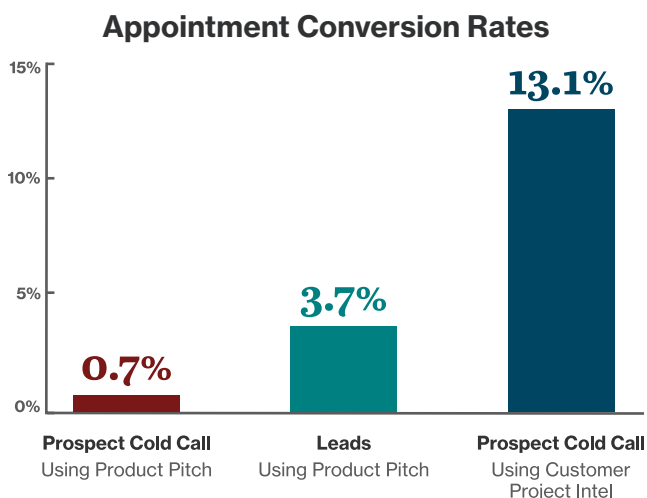
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## Results of 4,100 Calls

Over a four-week period, we trained a team of enterprise tech ISRs to use purchase intent intelligence embedded in TechTarget’s [Qualified Sales Opportunities™](#) (QSOs). These PDF-based reports provide project insights such as the top drivers for an upcoming purchase, desired product features, a short list of vendors being considered, relevant install environment and how the company plans to use the new solution. We divided the test into three approaches and compared results:

- **Test 1:** ISR engaged leads with a traditional “me-first” approach – basically, a pitch focused on the features and capabilities of the product, not the customer’s pain points or buying needs
- **Test 2:** ISR engaged non-lead prospects with a me-first approach
- **Test 3:** ISR engaged non-lead prospects using the QSO project insights

The results were surprising: ISRs who used project intelligence and closely referenced the details of a prospect's purchase environment improved their appointment rates by up to 19X (see chart).



While there's no silver bullet to replicating these results on your ISR team, the study showed there are a few critical ingredients of success:

## 1. It's Not You, It's Them

Every good party host knows the easiest way to make guests comfortable is to get them talking about themselves. It's no different in prospect calling, yet most ISRs habitually use the me-first approach no matter who they're calling. This is a time-tested, if not ideal, approach for landing appointments with leads and MQLs. But our tests showed the me-first approach often failed when used on new (non-lead) prospects.

Contrast that to the success rate of ISRs who opened up cold calls using a customer-first approach. On average, they were able to **land an appointment for every 67 dials, with strong ISRs generating appointments at a rate of 1 per 30 dials.**

So what's the best way to gather insider info on the prospect and their needs without playing 20 questions? There are multiple strategies you can use, some obvious, some not.

## 2. Make Sure Your ISRs Are Focused on Prospects That *Have a Chance of Caring About You*

An obvious first step is prioritizing accounts that have demonstrable research activity in your specific market category. Some third-party providers help you rank accounts based on domain-level research activities in your topic area. Others offer contact lists and org charts at those accounts. But even using the two together isn't enough. Without knowing *who exactly is involved* with the purchase decision, you waste a lot of time blindly calling people who look the part (senior titles or market-relevant roles) but in reality have no role in the buy.

Instead, focus your ISR efforts on contacts with direct activity and inside intelligence on the project. The keys to success here are the *relevance* and *recency* of that activity. If you sell backup storage solutions for the cloud, it's not enough that a prospect browsed content at some point on data center architecture solutions. You need to know if they have an active interest or a live project in cloud backup, and you need to know that activity/interest happened recently (within the last quarter or sooner).

We're talking about "warm cold" prospects here. They're warm because you know they're actively researching options or have an identified project, but they're cold because they haven't engaged with you yet. Given that scenario, what are the best ways to get them to convert once you get them on the phone?

### 3. Gather Multiple Entry Points Into the Conversation

Every opportunity begins with a pain point, but until your ISRs have a chance to dig in it's impossible to know the exact triggers driving the initiative. In the inside sales test we conducted, ISRs navigated across three different types of inroads in the QSO reports:

- **Key purchase criteria:** the top purchase drivers; the product features they're looking for; and the vendors they're considering
- **How the new solution will be used:** Platforms the new solution will integrate with, workloads supported by the purchase, etc.
- **The install environment:** Current tech installed that supports the new purchase; or competitive solutions that will be replaced by it

While not all of these data points are useful in every call, the three categories contributed in roughly equal amounts to landing appointments. The trick is to train ISRs to touch on all three quickly and see which one(s) evoke the strongest response, then dig in deeper.

### 4. Suggest a Consultation, Not a Sales Call

Once you have the prospect engaged, one secret to landing and scheduling the appointment is not to hard-sell a sales follow-up. The thought of inviting an aggressive field rep into their office may scare them away. Instead, suggest a consultation. A script that was very effective in our tests was:

*"Over the course of the next couple weeks we're giving presentations on the future of [topic]. Would you be interested in one of our presentation teams dropping by your offices?"*

The lasting takeaway from our test was that inside sales teams now have at their disposal more ways to build inroads into in-market accounts. But sustained success will require a transformation in how they access and use the purchase and project intelligence in their day-to-day calling efforts.

As a result of the study we have continued to hone our ISR calling guidance, including recommended icebreakers to use for each different type of project data. We've expanded the types of materials we use to educate ISRs and are experimenting with different call/email cadences using a more personalized approach. Change won't happen overnight, but as reps get more and more comfortable flipping the script, we expect conversion rates to continue to improve.



For more information about Qualified Sales Opportunities, contact us at [QSO@techtarget.com](mailto:QSO@techtarget.com)

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## About TechTarget

TechTarget (Nasdaq: TTGT) is the global leader in purchase intent-driven marketing and sales services that deliver business impact for enterprise technology companies. By creating abundant, high-quality editorial content across more than 140 highly targeted technology-specific websites, TechTarget attracts and nurtures communities of technology buyers researching their companies' information technology needs. By understanding these buyers' content consumption behaviors, TechTarget creates the purchase intent insights that fuel efficient and effective marketing and sales activities for clients around the world.

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