

# Building a Great Prospect List

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## What exactly is a good prospect list?

- In a recent poll that we conducted, eight out of 10 sales managers indicated that their business and commercial bankers did not have good prospect lists. Some bankers are looking for the magic list that the marketing department has that contains all creditworthy prospects that want to move their accounts tomorrow.



“Give me a better list,” they wail. A word to the wise: Rule No. 1 in prospecting is that all of the good customers are already taken. While the good news is that some of these good customers are yours, the rest are probably reasonably happy with your competitors. Marketing is not holding out on you. There is no magic list.

Other bankers think they have a good list if they know all the companies on it. While that may be possible in some markets—large corporate comes to mind—it can lead to too narrow a focus for business bankers and branch managers. While you want your bankers to focus their energies on the best prospects in the market, be sure that you are the one defining what best means. That entails building a target profile of desirable prospects that incorporates guidance on the industries you want more business from and those that you don’t, as well as the characteristics of the businesses themselves.

How do you build a bigger list? Most sales managers are well advised to start with published sources like D&B and InfoUSA. Most lists that were purchased within the past 12 to 18 months are probably 80 percent accurate, and that is acceptable as a point of departure. You need to get the following basic information on any prospect: sales size, year start-

ed, number of employees, industry (or SIC code) and at least one contact name, preferably the owner, president or CEO.

The best prospect lists use a variety of sources. In addition to D&B or InfoUSA (or their online do-it-yourself entities Zapdata.com and ReferenceUSA.com), these include electronic versions of state and local directories, Chamber of Commerce rosters, business publications and specialized sites. Some lenders like to review UCC filings to see which banks the prospects have borrowed money from in the past.

Trade associations provide useful data on their members. If you are going after dentists, architects or veterinarians, use the “Find a Member” feature at the [ada.org](http://ada.org), [aia.org](http://aia.org) or [avma.org](http://avma.org). [Guidestar.org](http://Guidestar.org) and other sites furnish valuable information on 501(c)(3)s and other not-for-profits, including copies of tax returns that may help you determine whether they are viable prospects. [FreeErisa.com](http://FreeErisa.com) will give you information on companies that have retirement plans.

If you are able to assign the task of building and maintaining the prospect database to someone in the bank, do so. It could be something that marketing can do for you, but most banks we work with have more success using an administrative assistant who is

good with Excel or Access. Sales managers are the only ones who should be able to add or drop names from the master database.

Sales managers can help individuals decide whether an industry-specific approach is right for them. You should review your list regularly with your sales managers and with your line of business partners.

So what is a good prospect list? It must meet the following criteria:

- It matches your bank’s target profile.
- It incorporates various sources of leads.
- It has an appropriate number of business names.
- It has been vetted by your sales manager.
- It is a written document that you can share in whole or in part with satisfied customers, centers of influence and others in your network. **■**

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