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That dead file isn't as dead as you think

We all have dead files or something analogous to the dead file. It is filled with information about accounts that we did not close. Those prospective customers who chose to go with someone else are for the most part out of sight and out of mind. After all, they committed to go elsewhere and they have not indicated interest in working with us.

So we tend not to pursue them. Sometimes we forget about them. Other times we just don't see the return on investing time to try again. So they just sit there. In the dead file. And that can be a big mistake.

We know that the hottest prospects we have are out existing customers. And that's why we are look for new opportunities on a consistent basis. That's one way we grow the business.

But former customers or prospective customers that didn't materialize are also viable prospects. So why not make the attempt to revive some of them.

Think about it. A former customer or prospect we pursued and lost knows who we are. They know our strengths, our capabilities and our people as well as our shortcomings and in some cases disappointments.

An e-mail or letter is the logical first step. Drop a note letting them know that you are checking in to see how they are doing, that you'd like to make contact and that you will be calling shortly. Then when you call, at least they will know why.

When you make the call, be open and direct. If you had the business and lost it, let them know that we have made significant progress over the last year and would like to resume communications. If we never had any business, let them know you would like to meet to see how things are going and let them know what's new in your organization. The customer hopefully understands that it is in his or her interest to meet.

If you only communicate via voice mail that's OK. Explain how you would like to resume communications. If you never met them, let them know you would like to meet.

But remember, you are calling to get an appointment. If they only give you 15 minutes, take it. Your objective is to rekindle that relationship.

Remember, the longer you manage an account, the more likely they are to lose share at that account. You will recall that's because there is a tendency to get comfortable, complacent or even lazy. Assume your competitor has fallen into that trap and as a result some of those lost accounts can be revived.

Try it and see what happens. Start with smaller accounts and progress to the big ones. But give it a try.