SALES, MARKETING & PR

A Study of Inside Sales and Business Outreach Practices for Early-Stage Startups: An Internship-Based Study at Heloix Startup Minds Pvt. Ltd.

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Abstract

Inside sales and business outreach have become important activities for organisations seeking to establish connections, identify potential prospects and develop business relationships. These activities are particularly relevant for early-stage startups, where founders often manage several responsibilities and have limited time for external communication. A structured outreach process can help organisations identify relevant prospects, initiate conversations and maintain professional relationships.

This research paper examines inside sales and business outreach practices for early-stage startups, based on an internship experience at Heloix Startup Minds Pvt. Ltd. The study focuses on prospect identification, founder-level communication, cold outreach, follow-up practices, interview scheduling and lead tracking. The internship was conducted for 60 days, from 1 July 2026 to 31 August 2026, under the Heloix Associate Opportunities Program in association with Crazy for Success Foundation.

The research follows a descriptive and exploratory design and uses a qualitative, experiential approach. Primary information is based on the intern's direct participation, outreach activities, communication history, tracking records and observations. Secondary information is drawn from organisational material, the Startup India portal and academic literature relating to inside sales, customer relationship management and business development.

The study highlights that successful outreach depends on more than the number of contacts approached. Prospect research, relevant communication, professional etiquette, timely follow-up and accurate record keeping collectively influence the quality of engagement. During the internship, interviews were successfully scheduled and conducted with founders of approximately six to seven startups. The experience demonstrates the importance of a structured and relationship-oriented approach to business outreach.

Keywords: Inside Sales; Business Outreach; Early-Stage Startups; Lead Generation; Cold Calling; Founder Engagement; CRM; Prospecting; Follow-up; Business Development

1 Introduction

The Indian startup ecosystem has developed into an important part of the country's business environment. Startups operate across several sectors, including technology, healthcare, education, financial services, manufacturing, logistics and consumer services. These businesses contribute to innovation, employment and entrepreneurial development.

However, early-stage startups often face challenges relating to limited resources, market visibility, customer acquisition and relationship development. Founders generally participate in several business functions, including operations, marketing, sales, hiring and strategic decision-making. As a

result, reaching the right decision-maker and communicating a clear purpose becomes important for business outreach.

Inside sales provides a structured approach to connecting with prospects through communication channels such as telephone calls, emails, professional messaging and online meetings. Unlike traditional field sales, inside sales allows organisations to communicate with prospects without requiring physical visits.

Business outreach involves identifying relevant organisations or individuals and initiating communication for a specific purpose. The purpose may include sales, partnerships, networking, research, interviews or business development.

This research paper examines these practices through the internship experience at Heloix Startup Minds Pvt. Ltd. The internship involved identifying early-stage startups through the Startup India ecosystem, researching founders or CEOs, contacting them and requesting short, free interviews about their entrepreneurial journeys, challenges and future plans.

The study connects the practical activities performed during the internship with important business concepts such as lead generation, prospect qualification, cold outreach, relationship building and customer relationship management.

2 Organisation profile: Heloix Startup Minds Pvt. Ltd.

Heloix Startup Minds Pvt. Ltd. is based in Hinjawadi Phase 1, Pune, Maharashtra, and was established in 2019.

The organisation is associated with startup ecosystem engagement and professional skill development. Its programmes provide participants with opportunities to gain practical exposure to business functions such as sales, business development and outreach.

The internship was conducted under the Heloix Associate Opportunities Program in association with Crazy for Success Foundation.

The programme provided practical exposure to founder-level communication and startup engagement. The intern's responsibilities included identifying potential startup prospects, researching relevant decision-makers, initiating communication, explaining the interview opportunity, arranging suitable time slots and maintaining outreach records.

The internship provided an opportunity to connect classroom concepts of marketing, sales and business development with actual professional interactions.

3 Conceptual background

3.1 Inside sales

Inside sales refers to the process of engaging potential customers or business prospects through remote communication channels instead of traditional face-to-face field visits.

Common activities include:

- Identifying potential prospects.
- Researching relevant organisations and decision-makers.

- Making telephone calls and sending emails.
- Explaining a business opportunity.
- Handling responses and objections.
- Following up and coordinating meetings.
- Maintaining lead information.

Inside sales is not limited to selling products. It can also support business development, partnerships and professional networking.

3.2 B2B lead generation

Business-to-business (B2B) lead generation involves identifying organisations or decision-makers who may be relevant to a particular business objective.

In early-stage startup outreach, founders and CEOs are important contacts because they often participate directly in business decisions.

Effective lead generation requires more than collecting company names and telephone numbers. It involves understanding the organisation, its industry, its activities and the person who should be contacted.

3.3 Cold outreach

Cold outreach refers to contacting individuals or organisations with whom no previous relationship has been established.

The recipient may not be familiar with the organisation or the purpose of the communication. Therefore, the opening message should establish:

- The identity of the person making contact.
- The organisation being represented.
- The reason for contacting the prospect.
- The opportunity being offered.
- The expected time commitment.

Clear and respectful communication can help create an opportunity for further discussion.

3.4 Prospect qualification

Prospect qualification is the process of assessing whether an organisation or individual is relevant to the intended outreach objective.

In the context of this internship, qualification involved checking whether the organisation was an early-stage startup, whether sufficient company information was available and whether a suitable founder or senior decision-maker could be identified.

3.5 Customer relationship management and lead tracking

Customer Relationship Management (CRM) involves managing interactions and information relating to prospects and customers.

A tracking spreadsheet can function as a basic CRM tool by maintaining information such as company names, contact details, communication status and next actions.

Accurate lead tracking helps prevent duplicate communication, missed follow-ups and confusion between prospects at different stages of the outreach process.

3.6 Founder outreach and relationship building

Founder outreach involves communicating directly with startup founders to establish professional connections and create opportunities for engagement.

The process requires preparation, confidence, professional etiquette and respect for the founder's time. Consistent and relevant communication can help establish credibility and maintain relationships.

4 Review of literature

Existing literature on sales management and customer relationship management provides a conceptual foundation for understanding structured outreach practices.

Payne and Frow (2005) presented a strategic framework for Customer Relationship Management, highlighting the importance of value creation, information management, multichannel integration and performance assessment.

Their work is relevant to this study because founder outreach involves managing interactions across different communication channels and maintaining organised information about prospects.

Buttle and Maklan's work on Customer Relationship Management explains CRM as a combination of business strategy, processes, technology and customer relationship management.

This perspective supports the importance of maintaining accurate prospect records and ensuring that communication activities are supported by organised information.

In SPIN Selling, Rackham (1988) emphasises the importance of understanding the prospect's situation and requirements rather than relying entirely on a one-directional sales presentation.

Although the internship focused on arranging interviews rather than selling a commercial product, the broader principle of listening, understanding the recipient and responding appropriately remains relevant.

4.1 Business outreach and relationship development

Business development literature commonly emphasises prospect research, communication relevance, follow-up and relationship continuity.

These concepts are reflected in the internship experience, where successful engagement required identifying the correct founder, understanding the startup and explaining the interview opportunity clearly.

4.2 Research gap

Much of the established sales literature focuses on commercial lead generation, customer acquisition and sales conversion.

However, the internship involved a different form of outreach in which the desired outcome was a founder interview rather than a product purchase.

The study therefore examines how inside-sales principles can be applied to founder engagement, particularly through prospect research, communication quality, follow-up, scheduling and lead tracking.

It also highlights the connection between the quality of prospect research and the effectiveness of the first interaction.

5 Research objectives

The study is guided by the following objectives:

1. To understand the process of prospect identification and founder-level lead generation.
2. To document the outreach workflow from research to follow-up and scheduling.
3. To study the communication challenges associated with cold outreach.
4. To understand the role of organised lead tracking in business development.
5. To identify the professional skills developed during the internship.
6. To provide practical recommendations for improving similar outreach programmes.

6 Research methodology

6.1 Research design

The study follows a descriptive and exploratory research design.

The descriptive approach is used to document the activities performed during the internship, while the exploratory approach helps examine practical challenges and learning associated with founder-level business outreach.

6.2 Nature of the study

The study is qualitative and experiential in nature. It is based on the intern's direct participation in prospect research, telephone communication, follow-ups, interview scheduling and lead tracking.

6.3 Duration of the study

The internship was conducted over a period of 60 days, from 1 July 2026 to 31 August 2026.

6.4 Sources of data

Primary information:

- Direct participation in startup outreach activities.
- Telephone communication and call records.
- Outreach tracking spreadsheet.
- Communication history.
- Personal observations and internship notes.
- Experiences from scheduled founder interviews.

Secondary information:

- Startup India portal.

- Heloix internship offer letter and programme material.
- Intern Starter Guide.
- Crazy for Success Foundation programme material.
- Academic literature relating to inside sales, CRM and business development.

6.5 Unit of observation

The unit of observation was the startup prospect and the associated founder-level interaction.

Prospects could move through different stages, including not contacted, contacted, no response, interested, follow-up required, scheduled, completed or not interested.

6.6 Tools and techniques

The following tools supported the outreach process:

- Startup India portal for identifying potential startups.
- Telephone calls for initial communication.
- Formal email communication.
- Professional messaging channels.
- Calendar communication for scheduling.
- Shared spreadsheet for lead tracking.

6.7 Data analysis

The study uses descriptive analysis and interpretation of actual internship experiences. It examines recurring patterns in communication, follow-up, prospect qualification and documentation.

No statistically representative survey or conversion-rate model is claimed because the internship did not involve a formal questionnaire administered to a statistically selected sample of founders.

7 Analysis of inside sales and business outreach practices

7.1 Prospect identification and research

The outreach process began with identifying potential early-stage startups through the Startup India ecosystem and other available company information.

After identifying a potential organisation, basic research was conducted to understand its business profile and identify an appropriate founder or senior decision-maker.

The information examined included:

- Startup or company name.
- Industry and business activities.
- Official website.
- Founder or CEO details.
- Available communication information.

This research helped ensure that the communication was relevant and that the correct person was approached.

Analysis: Prospect research was an important foundation of the outreach process. Contacting the correct decision-maker with a basic understanding of the organisation helped create a more professional and purposeful first interaction.

7.2 Outreach preparation and initial contact

Before making a call, the intern prepared the basic information required to introduce the organisation and explain the purpose of the communication.

The interview opportunity was presented as a short, free interaction concerning the founder's entrepreneurial journey, challenges and future plans.

The initial conversation involved introducing the organisation, explaining the purpose of the call and checking whether the founder was interested or available.

Different responses required different approaches. Some founders requested further information, some were busy and requested a later call, while others declined the opportunity.

Analysis: The first interaction was important because it established the tone of the relationship. A clear, brief and professional introduction helped communicate the purpose without overwhelming the recipient with unnecessary information.

7.3 Follow-up and scheduling

Follow-up was an important part of the internship because initial interest did not always result in an immediately confirmed interview.

When a founder expressed interest, suitable time slots were suggested. Once a time was agreed upon, the interaction was confirmed through calendar communication and a reminder was sent closer to the scheduled time.

The process required attention to timing and accuracy. Repeated or poorly timed communication could inconvenience the founder, while a lack of follow-up could result in a missed opportunity.

Analysis: Follow-up helped maintain continuity between the initial conversation and the final scheduled interaction. It also demonstrated the importance of respecting the recipient's availability and maintaining professional commitments.

7.4 Tracking and documentation

A shared tracking spreadsheet was used to maintain information about startup prospects and their outreach status.

The tracker included details such as company name, founder or CEO, contact information, website, outreach status and next action.

The status system helped distinguish between:

- Not contacted.
- Contacted – no response.
- Interested.
- Follow-up required.
- Slot proposed.
- Scheduled.

- Completed.
- Not interested.

Analysis: Lead tracking helped convert multiple separate conversations into an organised workflow. It reduced the possibility of missed follow-ups and supported better planning of daily activities.

7.5 Outreach workflow

The outreach process followed during the internship can be represented through the following sequence:

Startup Identification → Prospect Research → Founder Contact → Response Handling → Follow-up → Interview Scheduling → Confirmation → Lead Tracking

Each stage contributed to the next. Research supported relevant communication, communication generated responses, follow-up maintained continuity and tracking helped manage the overall process.

8 Challenges faced during the internship

8.1 Low response rate

Many prospects did not answer calls or respond after the initial interaction. This made cold outreach unpredictable and required patience and consistency.

8.2 Founder availability

Startup founders often manage several responsibilities. Even when interested, they may not have an immediately suitable time for an interview.

8.3 Handling rejection

Some founders were not interested in participating. The intern had to maintain professional communication and represent the organisation respectfully despite rejection or hesitation.

8.4 Maintaining accurate records

When several prospects were at different stages, updating the tracking spreadsheet became important. Delayed or incomplete entries could lead to missed follow-ups or confusion.

8.5 Maintaining motivation

Cold outreach involves uncertainty, and not every attempt produces an immediate result. The internship required the intern to remain focused on preparation, communication quality and process discipline rather than judging performance only through positive responses.

Analysis: These challenges demonstrated that business outreach requires resilience and organisation in addition to communication skills. External factors such as founder availability and business priorities can influence outcomes independently of the quality of the outreach process.

9 Major findings of the study

The internship experience produced the following observations:

- **Research improves outreach quality:** Understanding the startup and identifying the correct decision-maker helped make communication more relevant.
- **Clarity is important during initial contact:** A brief introduction explaining who is calling, why the contact is being made and what is being requested helped establish the purpose of the conversation.
- **Personalisation supports engagement:** Communication connected with the startup's business and founder experience was more relevant than a generic opening.
- **Active listening is necessary:** Different founder responses required different next steps, such as providing additional information, arranging a callback or closing the conversation politely.
- **Follow-up maintains continuity:** Initial interest did not always result in immediate scheduling, making appropriate follow-up an important activity.
- **Timing should be respected:** Follow-up should reflect the founder's availability and previously communicated preferences.
- **The value proposition should be clear:** Explaining that the interview was free, short and focused on the founder's entrepreneurial journey helped communicate the purpose of the opportunity.
- **Lead tracking supports process discipline:** Maintaining accurate records helped identify pending actions and avoid unnecessary repetition.
- **Repeated interactions improve confidence:** Regular communication with founders helped the intern become more comfortable with professional conversations.
- **Outreach produces both positive and learning outcomes:** Interviews were successfully scheduled and conducted with approximately six to seven startup founders. Other outreach attempts resulted in non-response, requests for later contact or decisions not to participate.

These findings are based on the internship experience and should not be interpreted as statistically generalisable results for the entire startup ecosystem.

10 Overall analysis

The internship can be understood as an organised lead-management process that connected prospect identification with meaningful founder engagement.

The process began with identifying suitable startups and researching their founders. Initial communication was then used to explain the interview opportunity and understand the prospect's response. Where interest was expressed, follow-up and scheduling helped move the interaction towards completion. The tracking spreadsheet supported continuity throughout the process.

The experience also highlighted the difference between activity and outcome. Making a call is an activity, whereas creating a meaningful conversation or successfully scheduling an interview represents an engagement outcome.

Approximately six to seven startup founders participated in successfully scheduled and conducted interviews during the internship. The remaining outreach activity included different outcomes, such as non-response, requests for later follow-up and lack of interest.

The study does not calculate a conversion rate because a complete, verified numerical record of all prospects and outreach stages is not presented in the report.

Overall, the findings suggest that successful outreach depends on the combined contribution of research, communication, follow-up and accurate documentation.

11 Professional skills developed

11.1 Communication skills

The internship improved the ability to introduce an organisation, explain an opportunity, listen to responses and communicate professionally over telephone calls.

11.2 Research skills

Identifying startups, understanding their business activities and locating appropriate decision-makers strengthened practical research abilities.

11.3 Networking skills

Communicating with founders and senior business stakeholders provided exposure to professional networking and entrepreneurial interactions.

11.4 Time management

Managing prospect research, calls, follow-ups and record updates required prioritisation and effective use of time.

11.5 Digital communication skills

The use of formal emails, calendar communication and professional messaging helped develop written communication and coordination skills.

11.6 Problem-solving skills

Different responses from founders required the intern to decide whether to clarify information, schedule another call, follow up or close the prospect.

11.7 Professional resilience

The experience helped develop patience and the ability to maintain professional behaviour despite non-response or rejection.

12 Recommendations

Based on the observations made during the internship, the following recommendations are proposed for similar outreach programmes:

- **Introduce a dedicated CRM system:** A structured CRM can improve visibility of lead status, follow-up reminders and communication history.
- **Prepare a standard opening guide:** A short communication guide can help new interns introduce the programme consistently while allowing natural conversations.

- **Strengthen prospect research:** Startup information, current business activities and relevant decision-maker details should be verified before contact.
- **Segment prospects:** Grouping startups by industry or business stage can help make introductions more relevant.
- **Establish follow-up guidelines:** Clear callback and closure guidelines can reduce uncertainty and improve process discipline.
- **Review common objections:** Regular discussions about typical founder questions and responses can help interns prepare for future interactions.
- **Maintain accurate lead records:** Mandatory fields and standard status labels can improve data quality and reduce missed actions.
- **Encourage regular reflection:** Weekly reviews can help interns identify communication strengths, recurring challenges and areas for improvement.

These recommendations are intended as practical process improvements for comparable outreach programmes and do not represent an audit of Heloix's overall organisational performance.

13 Limitations of the study

The study has the following limitations:

- The research is based on one intern's experience over a 60-day period.
- The study does not represent all startup outreach activities or the entire Indian startup ecosystem.
- No large formal survey of startup founders was conducted.
- The findings are based on actual outreach experiences, communication records and internship observations.
- The study does not independently evaluate the business or financial performance of the startups contacted.
- Founder responses can be influenced by external factors such as workload, timing, business priorities and availability.
- The total number of prospects and complete stage-wise outreach figures are not established in the report; therefore, a statistically authenticated conversion rate cannot be calculated.
- The findings are more suitable for understanding practical business outreach processes than for statistical generalisation.

14 Conclusion

Inside sales and business outreach play an important role in helping organisations establish professional connections and engage with potential prospects. These activities are particularly relevant in the early-stage startup environment, where founders have limited time and often manage several business responsibilities.

The internship at Heloix Startup Minds Pvt. Ltd. provided practical exposure to the complete outreach process, beginning with startup identification and research and continuing through founder communication, follow-up, interview scheduling and lead tracking.

The experience demonstrated that successful outreach requires more than simply contacting a large number of prospects. It depends on understanding the organisation, identifying the correct decision-maker, explaining the purpose clearly and maintaining professional communication throughout the interaction.

The internship also highlighted the importance of timely follow-up and accurate documentation. The tracking spreadsheet supported the management of multiple prospects and helped maintain continuity between conversations and subsequent actions.

Approximately six to seven startup founders participated in successfully scheduled and conducted interviews during the internship. Other outcomes, including non-response and requests for later contact, provided additional learning about the uncertainty involved in cold outreach.

The study concludes that effective business outreach is built through a combination of preparation, communication, relationship management and process discipline. The experience strengthened the intern's communication, research, networking, time-management and professional resilience skills while providing a practical understanding of inside sales and business development.

Overall, the internship successfully connected academic concepts with real business activities and provided a foundation for future professional development in sales, marketing, entrepreneurship and business development.

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