

CASE STUDY

25 New Sponsors. Zero Cold Calls.

How a Single Salesperson Rebuilt a Six-Figure Sponsorship Program from Scratch—Then Left to Build a Company Around It.

25	\$500K	91
New Sponsors (One Season)	Revenue Recovered	Quiz Leads Generated
Zero cold calls or cold emails	After pandemic wipeout	From 3,200 views • 57% completion rate

The Situation

Muncie, Indiana is not an easy place to sell sports sponsorships.

Ball State University sits in Delaware County—the second poorest county in Indiana—still recovering from the manufacturing collapse of the 1990s. Most major companies once headquartered there had closed, relocated, or been absorbed by out-of-state conglomerates. The city had become a collection of franchises, regional offices, and distribution centers.

And then there was the competition: one hour south sat Indianapolis, one of the most dynamic sports cities in the country, with the NFL, NBA, WNBA, and college programs like IU, Purdue, and Butler all competing for the same sponsorship dollars.

When the pandemic hit, Ball State Athletics lost more than \$500,000 in sponsorship revenue virtually overnight—roughly half the total program. Shane Nichols, the sole person responsible for rebuilding it, faced a six-figure revenue goal, a battered economy, and a market that had every reason to say no.

Most sales organizations in that position have one answer: make more calls.

Shane chose a different path entirely.

“I made zero cold calls and zero cold emails—and still hit my goals, made up \$500,000 in lost revenue, and won Property of the Year.”

The Approach

Rather than default to cold outreach, Shane implemented two systems that worked simultaneously—one active, one passive.

Cold-2-Warm™ Outbound Prospecting

Instead of cold calling, Shane ran structured outbound campaigns designed to warm prospects before any conversation took place:

- Direct mail campaigns with lumpy mail, sequenced sales letters, hooks, offers, and deadlines
- Chamber of commerce advertising and networking
- Radio spots during live game broadcasts on local and Sirius XM radio
- LinkedIn and Facebook advertising to targeted business audiences

The Bridge™ Inbound Lead Generation

Running in the background at all times, Shane’s inbound system captured leads from prospects who were already curious—without requiring any of his time:

- A vanity URL and funnel-style landing page directing all traffic to educational resources

- The Ball State Biz Quiz—an interactive lead magnet that qualified prospects while building credibility
- The ‘10 Ways to Profit’ Guide—a downloadable resource that positioned Shane as a trusted advisor rather than a salesperson
- Display ads running year-round across the athletics website, which reached over one million visitors annually
- Print ads in game-day programs and banner signage at football and basketball venues

The principle was simple: every prospect who came to Shane had already raised their hand. No one was cold.

The Results

2021–22 Season: Rebuilding from Zero

Coming off a pandemic that cut revenue in half, Shane ran his full system for an entire selling season without making a single cold call or sending a single cold email.

- 6 new clients signed—all of whom reached out to Shane first
- Recovered the full \$500,000 in lost sponsorship revenue
- Crushed his sales goal and maximized his bonus
- Named Property of the Year among his peer group for sales excellence

But the headline number understates what actually happened. Dozens more prospects raised their hands that season. Many became sponsors the following year. And critically, because Shane wasn’t burning time on cold outreach, he was able to invest that energy in warm prospects and existing clients—the activity that actually moves revenue.

2022–23 Season: 25 New Sponsors Under Pressure

The following year brought a harder test. Two of Shane’s largest sponsors—representing \$135,000 in revenue, about 15% of his total book—were both acquired by out-of-state companies that immediately cut local marketing. His sales goal was simultaneously raised to pre-pandemic levels. He now needed to find over \$300,000 in new revenue, in Muncie.

He responded by launching his Dream 100 direct mail campaign in spring 2022. Six sequenced sales letters, each including a lumpy item or gift, sent to his highest-potential prospects over several months.

- By letter five, in early August: 15 new clients signed
- By end of October: 25 new sponsors—zero cold calls, zero cold emails
- Hit his full sales goal by October
- Named General Manager of the Year among his peers

2023–2025: The System Runs Itself

The final two seasons confirmed what the system was built to do: generate consistent, predictable pipeline without individual heroics.

- 20–30 solid leads generated every year, on autopilot
- The Ball State Biz Quiz: 3,200 views, 91 qualified leads, 57% completion rate
- The ‘10 Ways to Profit’ Guide: 1,000+ downloads
- Client churn nearly eliminated—losses only when corporate acquisitions or leadership changes made retention impossible

- Revenue goals consistently hit. Compensation consistently maximized. Burnout eliminated.

“The favorite part of my job now is watching my lead generation marketing work.”

Why He Left to Build This Full-Time

In May 2025—while still at Ball State—Shane founded Nichols & Associates.

He didn't wait for a safety net. He launched the company while still employed because the four years of results weren't a lucky streak. They were a repeatable proof of concept, built deliberately, tested under pressure, and refined each season. And he was confident enough in what the system could do to bet his career on it before he walked out the door.

Shane left Ball State in September 2025.

The Cold-2-Warm™ Outbound Prospecting System and The Bridge™ Inbound Lead Generation System are now the foundation of everything Nichols & Associates builds for B2B sales organizations—helping teams replace unpredictable cold outreach with pipeline they can actually forecast.

What This Proves

The Ball State story is not about a great salesperson working in ideal conditions.

It's about what happens when you replace random effort with a reliable system—in one of the least favorable selling environments imaginable. Small market. Low brand awareness. Intense regional competition. No team. No support staff. A revenue hole created by a global pandemic.

If these systems worked in Muncie, Indiana—competing against the NFL for sponsor dollars in the second poorest county in the state—they will work for your organization.

Want the full playbook?

Everything Shane built at Ball State—the exact campaigns, lead magnets, sequencing strategy, and direct mail approach that generated 25 new sponsors without a single cold call—is documented in his free book.

Download free at WhiteCollarProspecting.com

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