



Business To Business By Phone®
 4520 Dusik Lane Austin, Texas 78746 USA
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**BUSINESS TO BUSINESS BY PHONE®:
 HOW TO COMMUNICATE, DIFFERENTIATE, *SELL!***

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Even before 9/11, many marketing and sales organizations already were curtailing their in-person visits to prospects and customers because of the tough economy. But despite the downturn, and even with high-speed access to e-business sites, most business prospects and customers *insist* on some form of live personal contact, especially for "considered decisions."

Fortunately, we have phones ... more phones now than ever before ... and so do our prospects and customers. The challenge, and the opportunity, is to conduct **Business to Business by Phone®** with clear focus, great skill, and big results. Start by crafting a phone communication strategy built on these four key elements:

Full Integration Within Your Marketing Mix

Most mixes include web sites, direct mail, trade shows, seminars, field sales people, dealers and distributors, and phone. Historically, the phone component has occurred early in the contact sequence, often only once. For example, many campaigns begin with a direct mail piece or a seminar invitation. A caller then phones the prospect to conduct qualification, and afterward bows out as the resulting "lead" and subsequent selling activities go to the field sales group or a business partner.

Nowadays, that is a recipe for under-performance. Instead, I recommend you take the bold step of actually *asking* your prospects and customers how and when they prefer to communicate! Many will tell you that they still want live proactive contact *from* you and live access *to* you. This is precisely the



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entrée you need to make your phone calls the focal points of marketing and sales communication throughout the business process. Recent experiences with a number of clients clearly show that this strategy is faster, more responsive, and generates more money than the outdated linear approach.

Positioning in the Marketplace and Within the Company

Prospects and customers perceive your phone efforts either as marketing, sales, or customer relations. Determine which is, or are, right for your purposes. Then conduct your positioning deliberately, not by default, so your prospects and customers will know what to expect in their phone interactions with you.

Within your company, position the phone team physically and on the organization chart within marketing or sales, not operations or administration. Grant your callers full membership in your corporate business community ... no "2nd class citizenship." Run phone as a genuine P&L center.

Location, Staffing, and Operations

Where can you and where should you conduct your phone efforts? Field sales offices? No way! Almost always, the callers will be perceived as and/or used as administrative assistants for the field reps. A neutral, low-cost, or regional "call center?" Possibly, as long as you can assure technical and business continuity with your marketing and sales operations elsewhere. At headquarters? Most often the best choice. You are near everything and are highly visible.

Finding, luring, and landing competent, energetic callers is very hard. Don't try to find new callers in the same old places or in consumer "telemarketing" centers. Instead, recruit from travel and hospitality, health care, and journalism ... industries where questioning, listening, and conversational



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skills are *required* for success. Also consider trying to spirit good callers away from your competitors. But do so carefully, because you often get unfortunate “baggage” from their old company and an attitude as well.

In your recruitment ads, direct respondents to call an inbound phone mailbox with a narrated description of exactly what the phone positions are and are not. Invite and encourage candidates to record their *verbal resumes* to convince you why you should consider them. If they are unwilling and/or unable to do so, you don't want them.

Many business marketers consider all these tasks and determine that either they can't do everything themselves, or choose not to. The question then becomes, what to do in-house and what to outsource? Here are the strategic guidelines for the “make or buy” decisions.

You and only You

Full account management
 Collaboration (team selling)
 Proprietary information for which you require non-disclosure
 Customers demand substantive business and financial content and/or technical capability

Consider outsourcing for

Consistent (but not “mass”) process and content
 Easily learned
 Opportunity identification with limited criteria
 Sudden volume, e.g., events invitations and registration
 Order acceptance



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Phone Conduct

This is where strategy meets reality. On every single call, it is where you lose or win versus information overload and your competition. This is why all the tactical guidelines for phone conduct stem from this strategic rule:

**Commit No Random Acts of Calling,
 Nor Make Any Calls That You, Your Mom, or Your CEO Would Not Accept**

Among the implications: do not "cold call!" That's right: zero "cold calls." (Don't look so surprised! You don't like making them either. You don't accept them at dinnertime at your home, and business prospects hate them, too. So don't do them.) Instead, call because there is a relevant event in the prospect's business life, the prospect has responded to your marketing message(s) in another medium, or the contact already is a customer.

Before calling, access your databases and CRM system. Visit your prospects' and customers' web sites. Research them at on-line business information services and in their trade publications.

Make absolutely sure that your callers know and understand the business premise behind what they will do and say. Specifically, what precedes the phone call? What did your company promise? What do you *really* want to accomplish? What is supposed to happen next? How does all this fit together?

At the outset of the call, you have about 17 seconds to accomplish three objectives: introduce yourself and your company, sell the value of having a conversation, and secure the OK to actually have it. To do those things successfully, prepare and *rehearse* to "nail" your opening.

- "Hello Mr\Ms Prospect, I'm (caller's first and last names) from (your company.)" If your company's name is not yet universally known, create and say an "ID tag" that explains what you do. For example, "We're the data security people."



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- "The reason for my call is to say thank you for visiting our exhibit at the trade show, hear about what you and your company are considering regarding data security, and see how well we might match up."
- "Is this a good (or convenient or appropriate) time to talk?"

When you get 'em *live*, avoid these low-value but all-too-common yawners:

- "How are you today?" and its beer commercial spinoff, "How ya doin?"
- "I'm just calling to follow-up and see if you have any questions - or - see how things are going."
- "Have you had a chance to look at the information we sent you?"
- "Are you still interested in our (...)"
- "According to our records..."
- "We're updating our database."

Also delete this marketing drivel from your callers' professional vocabulary:

- Solution (by far the most overused word in all of marketing)
- State of the art
- World class
- Cutting edge
- Next generation
- Best of breed
- Leading \ leader
- Customer driven, market driven
- We, we, we \ our, our, our

In pre-qualification conversations, start by learning the prospect's business motivation. Ask, "Of all the web sites and exhibits you visited, of all the direct mail you received, of all the ads you read, *how* (not why) did you decide to respond to ours?"



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Ask additional questions based on the answer to the motivation question. On the first call, try for six substantive answers, settle for four. Examples: What do they do now and how do they do it? Real and perceived issues with how they do it? How do they envision using your product or service? How many people are involved now? Potentially? Of course, capture the administrative data: the proper spelling *and pronunciation* of their name, address, phone, e-mail, title, source code, plus notes and comments.

In the second conversation, update and expand but do not repeat the pre-qualification dialogue. Learn the *implications* of the prospect's requirements and issues. Ask about their criteria for *considering* (not deciding about) your product or service. Ask, "If our product or service turns out to be right for you and your company, how will you go about budgeting? When?"

To sell the next step, whether it will be an in-person visit, a product demonstration, a proposal, or an actual order, don't pitch the "it has." Rather, promote the "you get." For example, "You'll be able to see how the new machine performs and put it to the test in your own environment because my Chicago colleague will bring it right to you!"

To close the conversation, tell 'em what to do, how to do it, what you will do and when, and what to expect. Then follow-through all the way to the bank!





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Top-flight **Business to Business by Phone®** is among the best ways to expedite customer acquisition, increase customer retention, and boost our corporate and national efforts toward economic recovery. May you prosper!

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Michael A. Brown is the **Business to Business by Phone®** expert! His consulting and training clients include a "who's who" of profitable business to business marketers, from startups to the Fortune 100. Contact Michael in Austin, Texas at **800 373-3966**. www.michaelabrown.net