



Business To Business By Phone®
 4520 Dusik Lane Austin, Texas 78746 USA
 800 373-3966 www.michaelabrown.net

TWO NEW CHALLENGES: FEAR AND VOLLEYBALL MARKETING

© 2005, Michael A. Brown

Challenge 1: fear causes call reluctance and devaluation. Challenge 2: the business marketplace dislikes and resists “volleyball” marketing.

Of increasing concern for outsourced B2B service bureaus (and for some in-house marketers as well) is callers' *fear* of approaching and speaking with executive-level and wealthy prospects. The fear is exacerbated by the callers' youth and lack of business experience. The fear generates three unfortunate and damaging behaviors:

- *Call reluctance and excessive call overhead.* Fearful callers dial less often than callers with self confidence. They spend too much time preparing to dial ... it should take no more than one minute. After the call, they spend too much time on database updates and sometimes write “novels” in the note fields to avoid having to dial their next contact.
- *Timid, apologetic communication.* Fearful callers diminish their purpose and weaken their positioning by saying, “I know you’re busy” or “I want to talk to you real quick about” or “I hope I haven’t caught you at a bad time.” Doing so sounds like a peon’s plea rather than a forthright statement of purpose, and prevents establishing business parity with the prospect.
- *Criminal misrepresentation.* In California and Illinois, seven phone-based lead qualifiers have been fired for falsifying their call counts and talk-time.

To counteract the fear factor, several service bureaus are trying to hire older callers ... retirees and laid-off 50-somethings. In my view, doing so is a wise business move, because to talk at parity with senior-level corporate prospects and customers, callers first need to “pay their dues.” They need life and business experience, emotional maturity, intellectual curiosity, and a bit



Business To Business By Phone®
 4520 Dusik Lane Austin, Texas 78746 USA
 800 373-3966 www.michaelabrown.net

of chutzpah, too. It is unreasonable to expect a kid who has never even *visited* a Fortune 500 company to communicate at parity with the people who run it. It is unrealistic to expect that a call guide or script will compensate for the brevity of time on earth and relevant business experience.

Please know that this is not age-ism any more than the constitutional requirement that US presidents be at least 35 years old. Nor does it mean that young people cannot sometimes communicate and market and sell with competence and finesse beyond their years. It simply represents prevailing reality.

“Volleyball” marketing is my term for the three-touch lead generation and qualification process that has become quite common in the B2B world. Touch number one ... the “bump” ... is the first phone contact, either cold or in response to an inquiry in another medium. Usually, the call is made by a low-level caller, often outsourced, and is designed chiefly to validate the contact. Touch two ... the “set” ... is the opportunity identification call that normally includes the qualification questions and, way too often, an elevator pitch plus “stories and glories” about the would-be vendor. Depending on the contact’s responses and level of qualification, the caller recommends touch three ... the “spike” by a sales person or channel partner.

So why the big-time resistance to “volleyball” marketing? Three main reasons ...

- *All prospects consider themselves qualified.* If they have responded already, they dislike the “bump” because they expect a business conversation, not a low-level “are you real?” call.
- *Prospects hate having to repeat their story.* Despite all the contact tracking and CRM systems, all three calls often include the very same questions, which annoys prospects no



Business To Business By Phone®
 4520 Dusik Lane Austin, Texas 78746 USA
 800 373-3966 www.michaelabrown.net

- end. Nowadays, business people insist that would-be vendors have both institutional and human memories and actually pay attention to what has come before.
- *Level of caller v. level of contact.* Varsity prospects, i.e., those actually authorized to commit and buy, want to talk with varsity “spikers” ... not freshmen (“bump”) or JV (“set”) callers.

A number of my clients are discontinuing “volleyball” marketing and are combining the “bump” and “set” calls. They are staffing with and training smart, experienced people capable of conducting substantive dialogue. They are very careful to set the transition point for marketing calls v. sales calls. Is it working? Oh yes! Much less call resistance, lower cost, and sometimes speedier lead-to-sale conversions.

#####

Michael A. Brown advises and trains BtoB marketers about telemarketing and telesales strategies and techniques. Contact him in Austin, Texas. www.michaelabrown.net or 800 373-3966

FREE! Michael Brown’s ten-point Phone Marketing Checkup for Lead Generation and Qualification. Call 800 373-3966.