



Business To Business By Phone®
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Business To Business By Phone®: How to Find, Land, and Keep Worthwhile Customers

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Astute marketers know that the Internet and e-business are not the be-all and end-all of business-to-business marketing and sales. Especially for "considered decisions," business people *insist* on some form of live human communication. Fortunately, we all have phones! The challenge, and the opportunity, is to conduct **Business to Business by Phone®** with clear focus, great skill, and demonstrable results.

For starters, please recognize that unless and until your callers demonstrate otherwise, their BtoB calls usually are perceived as unwelcome "telemarketing" intrusions. This *perception of similarity*, along with the scourge of "spam," mandates that we favorably differentiate our phone strategy and tactics more carefully than ever. So here's the rule: make no call that your boss, your CEO, your mom, or you yourself, would not accept!

Next, make 100% certain that every one of your marketing callers is 100% clear about the business premise: their charter is to locate and develop viable opportunities. It is NOT to conduct a satisfaction survey about what your prospects use now. It is NEVER "just gathering information" or "just touching base." Your callers are ... or need to be ... making legitimate business inquiries and explorations. Their objective is to find out, by asking, what prospects are doing and/or considering that might make what you sell viable and desirable.

The operative word is *asking!* One of the best questions to get the conversation underway is, "Of all the seminars, shows, web sites, direct mail, ads you encountered, what got you to respond to ours?" Ask additional qualifying questions about:

- Their circumstances and intentions
- How they consider, select, implement your category of product or service
- Their preferences
- The competitive landscape: theirs and yours



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- Their role and responsibilities
- The money and authority to use it
- Their willingness to proceed

Ask leading questions not loaded questions. Here's the difference:

What are you planning to do about (a function or requirement your product addresses)

Do you need to have ... (a specific product feature you're trying to push)

How far along are you in the consideration process?

Would you say you'll be deciding in 1-2 months, 3-6 months, 6-12 months?

What have you seen or experienced elsewhere that you *didn't* like?

What's it going to take to get you into this car *today*?

Strive for a ratio of three open-ended to one closed-ended question to keep the call a conversation not an interrogation. Counsel your callers not to say "decide" or "decision," but rather "consider" and "consideration."

If you get good answers and there appears a good matchup, close on the next step: no-go, not yet, or let's go. If no-go, thank the prospect and end the call gracefully. If not yet, ask the prospect when and how ... and in which media ... he\she wants your company to stay in touch. If let's go, either ask for the sale or pass the opportunity to people who can.

Marketing should not bow out after the customer has said "yes." Quite the opposite! Smart business marketers provide for live inbound contact and for periodic outbound dialogue to stay close to customers, keep them happy, and keep the revenue generators humming. Watch the sales and account figures for:



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- How do they compare with our profile of a profitable account at any level?
- What percent of their relevant business do we represent?
- How do they perceive us? What can we do to become \ remain the preferred source?
- What makes them a viable candidate for a new product or service?
- Based on their prior buying behavior with us, how are they likely to respond?

Nowadays, the quality and location of inbound phone response can make or break a firm's reputation and profitability. So do not get caught up in over-automation or CRM. Make sure prospects and customers always can reach a knowledgeable, courteous live human being. And do not "offshore" your phone operations: your customers really don't like it, and the willful displacement of jobs is harmful to the United States of America.

We all know that customers support what they help create. So welcome and honor them. Listen and heed them. Make it easy to interact with you in all media. Conduct "relationships" in their terms, not yours ... some want attention, others transactions only. Do what you promise, on time and right. Grow wealthy doing so!

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Michael A. Brown is internationally-known as the ***Business To Business By Phone***® expert. His clients include a "who's who" of profitable business marketers, from startups to the Fortune 100. E-mail michael@michaelabrown.net or even better, call him! 800 373-3966