



Business To Business By Phone®  
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## **TELEMARKETERS BEHAVING BADLY**

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When the economy headed south, many companies headed to the phones with questionable strategies, poorly crafted calls, and awful results. Here are several examples.

Strategies mismatched to the circumstances. Customer retention almost always is easier, quicker, and less costly than new customer acquisition. But instead of striving to develop present accounts to cushion the downturn, many companies went trolling (i.e., cold calling) for new leads. Rented and purchased calling lists became very popular but simply could not deliver short-term results. Not necessarily because the lists were faulty, but because in a downturn new business development takes longer. Also, with many companies dialing the same lists, prospects were deluged with calls and stopped accepting most of them.

Assigning freshmen and JV callers to varsity business. Quite a few companies outsourced cold calling to service bureaus. In turn, some of the bureaus staffed-up with phone freshmen and junior varsity temporaries. Not good. Real prospects don't want to talk with freshmen because freshmen talk like freshmen. Real prospects don't want to talk with the JV either ... reps who may be adept with a pre-qualification call guide but who add little if any value. Real prospects ... those who can authorize "yes" despite budget constraints ... want to talk with the varsity, your own or your service bureau's.

Trying to short-circuit the business decision process. Business decisions take time. And because of the economy, even after "yes" many purchases have been delayed or canceled. Ignoring those realities, some marketers nevertheless pressured prospects and customers not only to make decisions, but to do so immediately! The result: arrogant, inappropriate lines like: "Sure we're in a slump, Mr. Brown. But you're a business owner who can't afford not to have this database now." Click.

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Hoping that with enough calls, opportunities would appear and business would materialize. The story: lots of identical high-intensity calls to multiple lists, sometimes even to present customers whose account history was unknown to or ignored by the caller. The results: it didn't work. The side effect: caller boredom, exhaustion, and turnover.

Lines that stop the show. You can only generate leads and business if you can have conversations. Anything that slows down getting to a powerful and compelling "reason for the call" decreases the likelihood of conversations. Yet one company's call opening included this 9-second yawner: "We provide products and services that help our customers maximize efficiencies and make it easier to conduct business with their customers, vendors, or partners." Click.

Fudging the lead qualification factors. When the behaviors described above failed to produce enough genuine opportunities, some marketers passed the leads into the sales channels anyway. They will be paying for that no-no directly and indirectly for quite some time.

Of course, not every organization fell into these malpractices. Some did phone very well and not only sustained their business, but grew! Next time, we will explore what the successful ones have done, how they did it, and how they are positioning their phone initiatives for an economic recovery.



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## **TELEMARKETERS BEHAVING WISELY AND PROFITABLY**

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**Not cold call? And still produce leads and sales? Oh joy! Read all about it ... along with two other successful lead generation heresies.**

In the previous edition, I flagged some mistakes that B2B marketers have been making on the phone. This time, as promised, we'll consider what three successful companies are doing to generate and qualify leads, develop opportunities, and make sales.

A Dallas electronic test equipment company totally overhauled their former "flood the market with catalogs and then cold-call" business model. They began by re-examining their present and legacy databases and came up with 40,000 names with whom the company had communicated through the years. It seemed reasonable to re-engage them before renting any new lists.

The calls went like this: "The reason for my call, Mr\Ms Prospect, is to reintroduce ourselves, determine whether you still use test equipment, and frankly, see how willing you and your company would be to consider us and our new offerings." Prospects who responded favorably (many did) could get a catalog by agreeing to look at it, talk it over with their colleagues and managers, and then speak again with my client's rep. The follow-up calls were splendid! The results: 2002 was the Texas company's best year ever!

A New Jersey computer products firm was experiencing diminishing returns from the numerous calling lists they rented, especially after the economy soured. When we perused the lists, it was clear that they were based solely on descriptive data such as demographics ... SIC code, how many employees, how many computers, and so on. There was nothing on which to hang a lead generation conversation.

The company changed list sources and ordered behavioral lists instead. Behavioral lists are based on business actions ... recent past, present, or intended ... that companies are taking. Examples include expand, move, acquire, and divest. Sure, such lists cost more. But the verbs give the callers relevant business events to ask about and prospects to talk about. And they certainly did talk! And buy, too! The company's 2002 revenues and profits rose despite the general technology malaise.

A Nevada dental products company stopped cold-calling entirely! The traditional business model in their marketplace involves in-person visits and lots of product samples. So while it is possible to cold-call dentists, the first thing they typically say is, "Send me a sample." The samples went out but relatively few orders came in.



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So the company has beefed up its trade show participation. Dentists can actually put the firm's tooth filling products to the test at the booth. Many of them purchase! New customer acquisition costs are down 38%. Even better, subsequent phone calls to the dentists have been received much more favorably and profitably. Dentists usually replenish their filling supply and often buy related materials and instruments, too.

The bottom line: there is no need for marketers, tele- or otherwise, to misbehave. Even in a down economy, smart phone-based marketing and customized lead generation beats generic cold-calling every time. So go make some good calls and start the economic recovery!

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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](mailto:michael@michaelabrown.net) or even better, call him! 800 373-3966

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