



Business To Business By Phone®
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Business to Business by Phone®: What They Hate, What They Like

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How many of you can hardly wait to get home from work so you can be telemarketed? Wow! Look at all the hands not going up!

For more than 16 years in my consulting and training practices, I have been compiling opinions from our clients and their business customers about how phone business is conducted, what we should avoid, and what we should do. Check it out:



Telemarketing	Establishing the value of the conversation
Pitches and hype	Sensitivity to time
Presumptions	Clarity of purpose
Assumptions	Asking before telling, learning before selling
Same old stuff	Targeted v. generic benefits
"Just" anything	A reasonable, definitive next step
Interrogation	Knowing when to back off
Gadgets and trickery	Courtesy, humility, and respect
Having to repeat their story	Timely follow-through and commitments met
Random contact	Context, continuity, consistency

Thumbs down

Telemarketing. No explanation required.

Pitches and hype. They have heard 'em all. They recognize them. They reject them.

Presumptions. The self-congratulatory attitude and verbiage caused by worshipping our own ads and press releases. Example: "We're the leading provider of high tech two-funnel framistats and have just been named best of breed by two magazines where we ran big ads. Have you heard of us?"

Assumptions. The premature, wishful behavior and words that follow a prospect's indication of possible interest, such as response to a direct marketing piece or visit to our web site. Usually goes something like this: "Thank you for your inquiry ... what's your budget and timetable for purchase? Are you the decision maker?"



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Same old stuff. The uninspired, undifferentiated lines that prospects and customers hear all too often. For instance, "We recently sent you a mailing. Did you get it?" Or, "Did you have a chance to look at the information we sent you?"

"Just" anything. The most self-diminishing word in marketing is "just" ... "I'm just calling to follow-up and see how things are going." Yawn. "I just want to take a couple of minutes of your time to learn a little bit about your company." Snore.

Interrogation. A stream of closed-ended questions designed to populate the data capture fields in CRM systems. The effect is that the calls sound like depositions not conversations. The worst I have seen was a 22-question pre-qualification script for a Silicon Valley company. We fixed it and results improved right away.

Gadgets and trickery. The most despised phone gadget is the predictive dialer (PD), a specialized computer that cycles through a database and calls automatically based on an algorithm that "predicts" when a rep will be available to talk to the prospect or customer. But when the prior call runs long, the PD dials anyway, and the prospect hears dead air. Click. The most common form of trickery is the sales call disguised as a survey. My advice: lay off phone surveys for a while until the nefarious marketers move on to their next scam.

Having to repeat their story. This one is curious, given all the databases and CRM systems that companies have bought. It happens when the content and results of prior conversations are not noted, or worse, *are* recorded but then ignored on subsequent calls. Nowadays, prospects and customers insist that we have both human and institutional memories and use them to advance the dialogue not rehash it.

Random contact. These are the calls that appear "out of the blue," motivated by something in the would-be vendor's life rather than the prospect or customer's business life. Examples include cold calls to lists that are based on demographics rather than on actions or affinities. The absence of a relevant event in the *recipient's* business life ... recent past, present, or pending ... reduces the likelihood of the call's being accepted. Future contact attempts usually fall on resistant ears as well.

Thumbs up!

Establishing the value of the conversation. Business customers are adamant that before we try to sell our products or our companies, we first have to sell the value of having a conversation. That is why our "reason for the call" ... right up front ... must be where we make and win the case for dialogue and confirm that the time is right to talk.

Sensitivity to time. None of us would barge into a prospect or customer's office unannounced. But some marketers and sales people believe they can phone prospects and customers any time they want to and start their spiel. Because our phone calls always interrupt other thought streams in the recipient's mind



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and/or other real-time activities, we should always follow our "reason for the call" by asking, "Is this a good (or convenient or appropriate) time to talk?"

Clarity of purpose. Get right to the point to help realign the contact's thought stream to your new subject matter. But do not pitch! Rather, state what you know, what you want to find out, and what causes you to believe that there may be a good fit between their requirements and preferences and what you are offering.

Asking before telling, learning before selling. We need to dispel the outdated notion of making an "opening benefit statement." The reason: we do not know yet which products, services, or benefits, if any, to offer. Instead, begin by asking an open-ended question about what the prospect is doing, has just done, or intends to do that causes you to believe that there may be a matchup with what you sell. Doing so *earns* us the right to present our product or service and legitimizes our offerings.

Targeted v. generic benefits. Sell the pluses of your product or service based exclusively on the contact's responses to your questions. Customers tune out elevator pitches, feature-dumps, and self-aggrandizing "we're so cool" serenades. To sell your benefits most effectively, apply the "you get ... because of" approach. For example, "You can redeploy your IT talent to more productive projects, save a ton of overtime, and still rest easy because the new software monitors and automatically fixes the network problems you described."

A reasonable, definitive next step. Some calls simply dissolve at the end. That is, the conversations trail off into a lame, "Well, OK ... feel free to call me if you have any questions." To keep your calls from evaporating and to help assure forward motion, issue a solid call to action. For example, "It certainly seems that we have a good matchup. Here's what I recommend ... " Also, train your reps to secure the next step by saying, for example, "I will send you exactly what we talked about. And the only thing I'll ask in return is that we can have a conversation on Thursday so you can tell me what you and your colleagues think. Will that be OK?"

Knowing when to back off. Not every prospect is viable. Not every customer is ready to advance or purchase now. If they are not viable, leave them alone. If they are not ready, take the straightforward, bold, but often overlooked step of actually asking them when, how often, and in what medium they want you to stay in touch.

Courtesy, humility, and respect. Great marketers, sales people, and companies are unfailingly polite and usually much more profitable than those that are not. Humility is the opposite of presumptuousness and arrogance and gets you wealthier than either. Regarding R-E-S-P-E-C-T, do what Aretha Franklin sang.

Timely follow-through and commitments met. If you do what you promise before the sale, your prospect or customer has more confidence that you will perform once they have committed the great act of faith by saying "yes." Plus, you continue the favorable differentiation because of the dismal record of *non-response* by many companies, probably including your competitors.



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Context, continuity, consistency. Customers want our phone calls to occur within a communications context that focuses on them, not us. Our phone calls must establish and maintain a logical content flow, so that our messages build a powerful case and make our recommendations understandable and do-able. Consistency means that the messages the prospect or customer experiences on the phone must match and augment what they see and hear in our ads and when they visit us in person.

To start benefiting from the "what they likes," I recommend four proactive steps:

- Communicate your expectations to your employees and your promises to your customers
- Assure that systems and data are in place to perform the "likes"
- Hire people who actually *want* to perform the "likes"
- Train all your people to deliver on the "likes"

Not always easy, but quite profitable!

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