



Michael A. Brown's

Business To Business By Phone[®]

Happy New Year 2001 Edition

FIRST PHONE PHUNNY OF 2001!

I laughed out loud upon reading this in *DM News*: "Business-to-business magazine publisher (name withheld) is peppering its direct mail subscription-renewal campaign with *prerecorded phone messages to give its marketing efforts a personal touch.*" (Italics added.) Ah yes, we all love those oh-so-personal prerecorded messages!

NOT FUNNY AT ALL

The worst phrase to come out of customer relationship management (CRM) is "customer intimacy." I can think of only one profession where this phrase applies. Get it out of your marketing materials and corporate vocabulary *now*, before your company suffers embarrassment, loses customers, gets sued, or a combination thereof.

E-BUSINESS v. THE LAWS OF PHYSICS

Two stories in a recent *Washington Post* appeared unrelated at first. One article reported some interesting physics research about subatomic particles that bump into each other. The other told about the difficulties of running e-businesses and turning a profit with them. Then it occurred to me that perhaps the stories are related after all! Maybe some e-businesses are trying to do things that run counter to the laws of physics!

For example, in quantum physics the Pauli Exclusion Principle states that no two things can occupy the same space at the same time. But lots of e-business web sites are crammed so full of "things" (such as worthless banner ads) trying to occupy the same space in the site visitor's mind, that the things bump each other out of the way instead of into the would-be customer's consciousness.

Also in physics, part of the Heisenberg Uncertainty Principle posits that if something is moving, we cannot be certain where it is ... and if we

know where it is, it can't be moving. Yet, some e-business marketers with CRM believe that if they know a company's market share, number of employees, and buying patterns ... all of which move constantly ... they can translate those data into sales at any point they, the marketers, choose. Neither physics nor business nor life works that way.

The other part of Heisenberg's principle says that when we try to measure something, the something is affected by the measurement attempt itself, so the measurement will be uncertain. I think this is true in business also, which would help explain why even well-crafted e-business focus groups sometimes yield predictive metrics that are way off the mark in the larger business marketplace.

So, leveraging this possible physics-business correlation, here's my *Best Advice*:

- Keep your e-business sites and messages clean and streamlined. Don't try to fill marketing space or your customers' minds with too many things at once.
- Pay less attention to non-moving facts such as SIC codes, and more attention to your prospects' and customers' business *movements*. Time your marketing actions to what they are *doing*.
- Do keep score of your business, but don't chase illusory "absolute metrics." Instead, measure ranges, medians, trends, and progress.

BEFORE YOU OUTSOURCE

Write a detailed program charter that serves as the "constitution" for your phone-based marketing and/or selling endeavors. Write explicit position descriptions. Also write the "laws," i.e., the behaviors that callers must do and not do to keep their jobs. Design the hiring model and process you would want if you were hiring directly. Then, negotiate with your agency to implement it.

I will help you do all this, including finding the right service bureau for your business. Call me at 800 373-3966, e-mail mabrow2@attglobal.net.



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CHANGE THE VOCABULARY. CHANGE THE BEHAVIOR

Are you as repulsed as I am by all the "business is war" language from some marketers, sales people, and authors? These folks, who really ought to know better, worship and quote the ancient Chinese *Art of War* treatise by Sun Tzu. One advertising CEO reportedly *dresses* like Sun Tzu at sales meetings! And listening to certain other pundits and technology "hot shots," you'd think they *live* just to smell napalm at dawn in the foyers of their competitors.

Lest anyone think that this is a minor metaphoric snit, please recognize that the corporate vocabulary of war too often provokes the corporate behavior of war: lying to customers, colleagues, and investors, account tampering, phony orders, book-cooking, espionage, patent piracy, price-fixing, cyber-sabotage, sometimes physical violence.

Fellow business people and human beings, let us put an end to this "business is war" talk right now!! Business is *not* war. Never has been. Never will be. Business is business. *So let's talk business!* We have competitors, not enemies. We wield no "strategic weapons." We sell competitive advantages. We need not die for the company, nor make our competitive counterparts die for theirs. And goodness knows we do not capture our customers. We earn their business and serve them.

IMPORTANT NEW CONFERENCE FOCUSES ON OUTBOUND PHONE!

If you run an outbound marketing or sales operation, either corporate or agency, I urge you to attend the *Increasing Sales & Performance in Outbound Call Centers* conference, Feb. 25-28 at Scottsdale's DoubleTree La Posada Resort. Top-flight presenters and seminars! My session: "*Strategies and Techniques to Build Outbound B-B Sales.*" Visit www.callcenterexchange.com for all the details and to register. I hope you'll join us!

KEEPING THE AIRLINES HONEST

The two most beautiful words on your airline's departure board are "on time." But wait! What does the *arrival* board show? Your "outbound" departing plane has to arrive "inbound" from *somewhere!*

On a recent evening at Chicago O'hare, United showed 1171 to Austin departing "on time" from Gate E2A. But when I found E2A on the arrival board, it showed 1171 from White Plains arriving more than 2 hours late! Enough time to dash over to American and get home at a reasonable hour. *Best Advice:* Before taking your "on-time" at face value, carefully scan the arrival board for your gate.

ADMINISTRATIVE OVERHEAD

Business to Business By Phone[®] includes pre-call preparation and post-call note taking and database refreshment. The time to do those things is called *administrative overhead* (AOH), expressed as a percent of the conversation time itself. AOH depends on the business premise, the position of the call within the contact sequence, and the caller's role or non-role in what happens next. I recommend these AOH ranges:

Seminar registration, order acceptance, max. 25%
Contact verification, seminar invitations 25-30%
Inquiry response, 1st level qualification 30-50%
Multi-contact, multi-level marketing, 50-75%
Full account management, 75-100%

THE GREAT TELEPHONE RIDDLE

by Jeff Brown (age 11)

What number is always at the end of the telephone?

Can you figure it out? Send an e-mail with your response. The first correct answer wins a \$50 American Express gift certificate! (provided by dad.)