



Michael A. Brown's

## *Business To Business By Phone*<sup>®</sup>

Happy New Year 2003 Edition

### LET'S GET GOING!

Four years ago, we were marveling that Y2K had passed and the lights were still on. Well, the lights are still on and, I am confident, getting brighter! Please accept my best wishes for a marvelous 2003! May good business, family, friends, and fun highlight your year! Let's get going!

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### REAL PROSPECTS WANT TO TALK WITH THE VARSITY

The economic downturn caused lots of companies to go trolling (i.e., cold calling) for leads. Quite a few outsourced cold calling to service bureaus. In turn, some of the bureaus staffed-up with phone freshmen and "JV" 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 value.

Real prospects ... those who can authorize "yes" despite budget constraints ... want to talk with the varsity: first-string callers who have the content knowledge, skills, and prerogative to choreograph the business process. Not necessarily to consummate the sale, but at least to conduct *substantive dialogue* and arrange the next definitive step.

*Best Advice:* Assign the freshmen and the JV to relatively low-risk, low-level projects. Implement a developmental and training schedule for them. But make sure that only varsity callers ... your own or your service bureau's ... play the big games with your most important account opportunities.

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### GALILEO AND POPE GREGORY AND MARKETING AND SALES

What time is it? Look at your watch or clock. Analog timepieces have been about the same since

Galileo. What day is it? Consult the calendar that has been the same in the western world since Pope Gregory declared it official in 1582.

There is little that marketers and sales people can do to change clocks or calendars. But oh my, do we ever try! For example, how many of us have attempted to shortcut customers' normal buying cycles? We trot out all the usual enticements: price cuts, incentives, rebates, extended credit, and so on, especially at months end. The objective: to get the business quickly by convincing prospects and customers to leapfrog what they normally do.

It sometimes works in the consumer realm but not often in B2B. The reason: important business decisions take time. Sometimes we can expedite the purchase order once the "yes" decision is made, but seldom can we compress the hours and days of the consideration process itself.

*Best Advice:* For marketers, design campaigns and promotions based on reality, not on artificial time parameters. Make sure that end-dates provide adequate time for prospects' consideration processes. For sales management, implement the "sales days left" strategy to promote continual closing throughout each reporting period. That is, if we have 62 selling days in a quarter, at day 31, a rep ought to be half way toward his or her quota. Keep a tight rein on forecasts and monitor results, but do not try to force-fit customers' buying cycles to your reporting clocks and calendars.

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### EMPOWERMENT, REVISITED

A couple years ago, I applauded the *Wall Street Journal's* Thomas Petzinger for writing, "Empowerment," the most patronizing business buzzword to come along in years, perpetuates the backward and harmful notion that an all-knowing management anoints workers with purpose and initiative."

Unfortunately, we still hear and read about



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"empowering" employees. I think it's because some companies are afraid to tell employees what they are supposed to do. So managers hide behind political correctness and say instead that customer care reps are "empowered" to provide good service, for example.

"Empowered?" That's nuts! Employees ought to be *trained and directed* to provide good service, rewarded with their jobs and incentives when they do, and fired when they don't! So *there!*

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### TOP-FLIGHT BUSINESS CONFERENCE RETURNS TO FLORIDA

The *Direct Marketing to Business* event runs from March 19-21 at Orlando's Caribe Royale hotel. Come on down for sunshine and to experience the most progressive marketing and sales strategies and techniques. You'll get an intellectual workout and have fun too! [www.dmbshow.com](http://www.dmbshow.com). See you there!

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### YOU CAN ONLY GENERATE LEADS IF YOU HAVE CONVERSATIONS

At the outset of lead generation phone calls, your callers have 18 seconds at most to convince recipients that it's worth it to converse. Anything that slows down getting to a powerful and compelling "reason for my call" decreases the likelihood of a conversation and puts success at risk.

So don't make your reps say lines like "We provide products and services that help our customers maximize efficiencies and make it easier to conduct business with their customers, vendors, or partners." Stuff like that stops calls dead.

Instead, begin with an introduction using first *and* last names, your company name, a very quick "ID tag," and a right-up-front statement of why a conversation is merited. Then confirm that the time is right (or convenient or appropriate) to talk.

Also, take two more positive steps to improve your lead generation results:

- Clarify with your callers that the **business premise** for lead generation is to locate and develop viable new opportunities. It is *NOT* to conduct a satisfaction survey about the product or service the prospect uses now. Nor is it about "just gathering information." Reinforce your **business premise** often, and monitor to assure that all callers conduct their dialogs accordingly.
- Likewise, insist that reps apply the correct **call positioning**. In lead generation, they are making calls of business inquiry or exploration, i.e., they need to learn what the prospect is doing and/or considering that might make your product or service viable. Never position lead generation calls as administrative data capture.

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### TRUTH, OR NOT, IN RECRUITING

In Austin, a big marketing service bureau is advertising for "customer relationship management" reps. It turns out that their assignment has nothing to do with CRM. They simply are cold-callers.

This situation is sad for several reasons. For starters, the company apparently thinks that deception is OK in recruiting. Candidates are led to believe that they will be involved in the "new new thing" and fun will prevail. But the employer has a reputation for drudgery and periodic staff purges. Sad also because on a cold call, there is no customer yet, much less a relationship ... which is why cold calling is so grueling. Third, in tech-savvy Austin, potential candidates know the challenges of pitching CRM nowadays. So even if the positions actually *were* in CRM, reps are unlikely to be attracted.

*Best Advice:* If you are a job-hunting rep, take ads with a grain of salt and do your homework. If you are a hiring manager, make sure your recruiters keep the ads positive but not over-inflated.