



Michael A. Brown's

Business To Business By Phone[®]

Happy New Year 2004 Edition

HEY DELTA, LET'S GET REAL!

In a recent *Direct* magazine, one of Delta Airlines' marketing honchos waxed evangelical about his company's CRM efforts and how their web site is the centerpiece. Bunk. I travel a lot, including on Delta, which is why I fired off this response:

"My visits to delta.com belie any contention that it 'offers a number of services to save customers time.' To me, the site is difficult, slow, incomplete as to all flight possibilities, and unforgiving about changes.

But the bigger issue is that one's experience at the site is *not* CRM. Indeed, delta.com is nothing more or less than an interaction with a software system. And software is something a company like Delta *buys*. But CRM ... genuine CRM ... is something that a company *does* ... or not. Whether Delta does CRM or not isn't played out over the Internet, but via our live human interactions with reservation agents, check-in counter and gate staff, in-flight crews, and those poor souls stationed in the baggage claim office.

If the Delta guy really believes that he is managing customer relationships with a web site, then he is committing the other CRM: customer relationship malpractice."

INQUIRY-TO-ORDER CONVERSION AND OTHER GREAT INBOUND OPPORTUNITIES

As the economy recovers and businesses again consider purchases, firms that make it easy for prospects and customers to reach live, competent, courteous inbound phone reps can do very nicely! In particular, companies that retained inbound phone staff despite the recession and resisted the urge to over-automate now are positioned to prosper from their wisdom and patience.

When a prospect or customer takes the initiative to call a business, the company has the

opportunity to convey either "welcome" or "go away." A cordial, inviting greeting smoothes the way to providing direct answers to the inquirer's questions followed by probing context questions followed by product recommendations with "you get" benefits, followed by a request for the order.

There also is great advantage in up-selling and cross-selling. Up-selling means recommending a realistic increase in capacity or order size, such as from quantity 10 to 12 to capitalize on a price break. Cross-selling means recommending companion or accessory products. Both these selling techniques are honorable and legitimate and need to be mandatory not optional for your inbound staff.

And now the rub: when the economy tanked in 2000, inbound phone organizations were among the early casualties. Way too many companies tried to save money by laying-off inbound reps and forcing customers to deal instead with automated response mechanisms. But customers detest such systems (in a newspaper poll 94% called them "very aggravating") and deserted the non-human vendors in droves. Likewise, e-commerce can augment, but usually cannot supplant, nice, professional reps who actually know their stuff and how to sell and serve.

Best Advice: Re-visit and update your inbound strategy, structure, staffing, and processes. Prepare to adjust your automation and e-efforts to enhance, rather than replace, live reps. Contact me for guidance in these matters and for the training that enables your inbound reps to boost revenues and profits! Call **800 373-3966** or e-mail mabrow2@attglobal.net.

THE LINE BETWEEN CROSS-SELLING AND REVENUE-STUFFING

The scene is the veterinary clinic where I was picking up the family cat after a grooming and teeth cleaning. The clerk told me that a bag of teeth-friendly treats was included. Imagine my surprise when I examined the bill and found a \$17 line item for



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teeth-friendly treats! "That's what we always do," said the clerk when I challenged the charge. "Not any more," I protested, and returned the bag of cat goodies to the shelf. Hey, included means included ... not extra! The vet agreed and we fixed the bill.

The incident reminded me of the sneaky surcharges that appear on hotel folios and the handling charges that append without warning to some mail order invoices. Such hidden fees are *not* cross-selling! They reek of deception and revenue-stuffing ... no way to run a business.

Best Advice: Examine your business, marketing, and sales rules and assure that the billing practices that derive from them are right, proper, and enforced rigorously.

NEW YEAR, NEW VOCABULARY

- Do not say: "Just following up"
- Say: "Hear your reactions and arrange our next step"
- Do not say: "I see that you visited our web site ... do you have any questions?"
- Say: "Thank you for visiting our web site. Tell me about what caught your eye!"
- Do not ask: "Did you receive our quote?"
- Ask: "How does the quote look? Are we ready to talk business?"
- Do not ask: "Are you the decision-maker?"
- Say: "Tell me about your responsibilities."
- Do not ask: "Why?"
- Ask: "How?"
- Do not say: "Have a nice\great day"
- Say: "Thank you! Good bye."
- Do not say: "No problem"
- Say: "You're welcome!"

UPDATE ON APPOINTMENT-SETTING

On two recent projects, clients and I have reconfirmed these important do's and don'ts:

Finding: The biggest reason for appointments being canceled is that their value had not been established during the appointment-setting conversation.

Lesson: Qualify first, then build and sell the value of an in-person meeting, then set the appointment.

Finding: When a high-level contact relegates the appointment to a lower-level person, the meeting often takes place but produces no substantive results.

Lesson: Do not make appointments with "designated hitters." Make and win your case for an in-person meeting only with people who have the authority to act as a result of the meeting.

Sidebar: Early in my career, I made a sales presentation to a marketing staff that I believed was qualified. At the end of the "show," I asked, "What do you think? Are we ready to move ahead?" Seven seconds of agonizing silence as the participants stared wide-eyed at each other around the table. Finally, the woman whom I perceived, incorrectly, to be the decision-maker said, "Can you come back and do this again next week when our boss is in town?"

CLEARED FOR LANDING IN ORLANDO

The excellent *Direct Marketing to Business* conference flies in from March 22-24 at the Caribe Royale. Check it out at www.the-dma.org (events) or call 800 373-3966. Sign up early for a nice discount off the regular admission price. See you there!

PHONE PHUNNY

I dialed a wrong number and apologized. The woman said, "It's OK, you didn't telemarket me."