



Michael A. Brown's

Business To Business By Phone[®]

2005 Holidays Special Edition

A CAUTIONARY TALE

From *CMO* magazine: "Data is supposed to give marketers the Midas touch, creating golden relationships between a company and its customers. But as in the fable, there can be unintended consequences: companies often end up with the same customer data as everyone else has, which gives them little competitive value but plenty of security issues."

TELLING IT LIKE IT IS ... OR NOT

Hooray for Samuel Greengard, William Lutz, and Brian Fugere, in *American Way* magazine, for translating lots of silly business jargon into normal English. Examples:

- Eliminate human resource redundancies = fire
- Career-change opportunity = layoff
- Negative advancement = demotion
- Reduced demand for product = low sales
- Significant adverse financial effect = decline in profits
- Leverage enterprise core competencies for maximum stakeholder value = take advantage of strengths
- Create synergistic alliances = work together
- Eliminate non-value-added work effort = cut waste
- Initiate project action plan = start
- Repurpose intellectual assets = use existing knowledge
- Paradigm shift = change
- Think outside the box = be creative

And then there are the schoolteachers in England who, according to Reuters, want to delete the word "fail" from the educational vocabulary and replace it with ... are you ready? ... "deferred success." As other Brits would say, "rubbish!"

THE INTERNET AS A CRIMINAL ENTERPRISE

We had a good thing going for a while. The Internet was a wonderful new technology that actually worked and provided exceptional two-way access between inquirers and companies, between people

with similar interests, between citizens and their governments. Too bad the bad guys stole the Internet. Now it functions mostly as a criminal enterprise.

Too strong? Not when you consider that the world spends billions of dollars every year trying to protect its technology and human lives from Internet-based encroachment, disablement, and destruction. We suffer viruses, spam, spyware, adware, hackers, ID theft, and phishing. Legitimate marketers have next to no chance versus the bad guys' onslaught. More and more our defensive efforts are in vain. We have rules. They have sociopaths who hack and steal and destroy because they can. Despite our best intentions and efforts, we have ceded Internet management, if not control, to deceptive businesses and malicious criminals, both organized and independent.

Best Advice: Until a more secure Internet v.2 arises, write off the Internet as a trustworthy marketing medium. Don't spend a lot of money on it. Business marketers still can use the Internet, but in much different ways than presently. In particular:

- No more e-mail "blasts." They are the antithesis of the personalized medium the Internet can and should be. "Blasts" reek of spam, hucksterism and implied fraud. Instead, write and send e-mail that equals the personal letters of old. One sender, one recipient ... relevant ... focused ... meaningful ... very effective.
- No more self-aggrandizing web sites. Lose the vacuous adjectives and patently false hype. Lose the ambiguous "solutions." Instead, establish a web site with truth and substance ... one that explains, reveals, provokes thought and consideration, excites, and compels response.
- No more cavalier selling, renting, or swapping of names you collect at your web site. Prospects' and customers' names are sacred and are not to be hawked like trinkets at a flea market.
- No more small print or rapid-fire disclaimers. If



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your offer is real, then mean it and honor it uniformly without qualifying asterisks. Business buyers know what asterisks mean and will leave your site in a New York second if they see asterisks. And if the “deal ain't real,” don't even think about presenting it.

Internet crime comes as no surprise: every new medium brings a new array of scams that eventually recedes, or at least becomes recognizable and avoidable. TV scams used to bamboozle, but not anymore. In time, the Internet may return to mostly proper use or be replaced by a better version. Meantime, let us keep our defenses up, our noses clean, and our marketing 100% straight-arrow.

AS THE BUSINESS DAY BEGINS

Task #1 for many business people nowadays is to log on and check e-mail. Then, they exercise their index finger pressing the delete key to clear the dozens of unwanted messages and spam that accumulated overnight.

Next, they access their phone mail and hear, “Good morning ... you have 29 new messages.” Again the delete finger goes to work.

Volume, time pressure, and competition for mind-share are why our messages don't get through, don't get listened to, don't get read, don't get acted upon. To compensate, we must communicate proactively rather than passively.

- Do not leave unsecured “call me back” phone mail messages. Rather, state the reason for wanting to have a conversation and say the day and time you will call again. Make the reason relevant and timely to their business life.
- Mix your contact media: phone + e-mail, with a maximum of three attempts over ten business days. Still no contact? Try again next month, next quarter, or next campaign.

- Write e-mail subject lines with relevant, targeted verbs rather than adjectives. Write wisely to counteract the perception of similarity. Correct spelling, grammar, and composition *do count!*

GIFTS

My family and I have been blessed over the years by unexpected acts of kindness and charm performed by people who just as well could have considered us nameless, faceless customers.

In 1970, I completed Army basic training and went to retrieve my car from the recruits' parking lot. Although I arrived more than three hours before the lot's official opening time, the sergeant who managed the facility opened the gate, smiled, and said, “Good luck, soldier!”

When my son Jeff was ten months old, we were badly delayed at Chicago O'hare. A completely harried but very nice United Airlines gate agent gave us a pass to the Red Carpet Club and an upgrade to business class to make sure my wife and I and our baby would be comfortable. The coolest thing was that we didn't have to ask ... the United lady simply knew to let kindness prevail.

Last year on a business trip to New York City, I had breakfast at the famous Carnegie Delicatessen. I forgot that the eatery doesn't accept credit cards and so was very embarrassed when the check arrived. I asked the cashier if I could leave collateral while I went to the ATM at the market next door. “I trust you, honey,” said the cashier, “you look honest.” With fresh cash from the ATM, I hurried back, paid the bill, and tipped the waitress. I offered the cashier a gratuity also. “Feh!”, she exclaimed. “I should worry that you skip the check? Naah!”

May similar memories of kindness lighten your burdens and gladden your heart. And in this holiday season, let us think kindly of those who have been kind to us and, in turn, be kind to others.