



Michael A. Brown's

Business To Business By Phone[®]

2005 Happy New Year Edition

METRICS FROM 35,000 FEET

Imagine attending a routine marketing or sales meeting and being blind-sided by an executive's request/demand for instant validation of your phone team's worth. Would you respond with the current staffing level or call count or sales figures? Or would you be prepared with the high-altitude strategic stats that Ms or Mr. Big is really asking for? Here is the important difference:

- Operating stats: raw numbers and ratios of performance against specific standards such as sales quotas, or leads-to-pipeline
- Strategic stats: the contribution of departmental or divisional performance toward corporate financial performance requirements

Best Advice: Reporting the first without the second can hinder your aspirations for greater things. Reporting the second with the first as backup can enhance your standing amongst the heavies. So ask your boss's boss and your CFO which metrics are considered most important and are discussed most at senior levels, and how the executives prefer to see them presented. Then do it. Get a raise! Get promoted!

SPHERICAL QUALIFICATION

Five years into the 21st century, most sales lead qualification guides remain mired in outdated linear formats. For example, the BANT model calls for reps to probe for Budget, Authority, Need, and Time frame. Well-meaning but behind-the-times callers too often ask qualifying questions in that very sequence.

There are two main problems with the linear approach. Conceptually, it changes what ought to be an exploratory conversation into a forms-completion exercise, very uncomfortable for both caller and prospect. Closed-ended BANT questions inhibit rather than promote dialogue. Practically, it is out of sequence because people do not think or talk that way.

Indeed, asking about budget first, before the prospect has even evaluated viability, comes off as premature and rude.

Better way? Apply "spherical qualification." Ask open-ended questions in these categories:

- Their business motivation
- Circumstances and intentions
- Their requirements and preferences
- How they consider, select, implement your type of product or service
- The competitive landscape
- Their organization and politics
- The money and authority to use it
- Their willingness to proceed

The objective is not to plow through the categories one after another, but rather to derive a "sphere" of answers. Begin with the first two categories and then move around with subsequent questions based on the prospect's responses. You will enjoy more substantial and valuable conversations, still get all the information to complete your data fields, and produce a more believable and actionable opportunity for your sales or channel colleagues.

Making the transition from linear to spherical qualification takes some doing, but it really pays off! Call **800 373-3966** for strategic and tactical guidance, and training for your callers.

ANOTHER REASON TO KEEP IT HERE

From a study led by Dr. Jon Anton of Purdue University, reported at the DMA's web site:

"Of concern for US companies considering offshore outsourcing is that 65 percent of American consumers would alter their buying behavior toward a company if they knew or had the impression the business was using an offshore call center, regardless of the level of satisfaction the customer received from the call center experience, according to the study. This



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response was found to be consistent across all call categories -- high value calls (product information, purchases, reservation), low value calls (account or order status), technical support, and complaint calls.”

THE SPEED OF BUSINESS, OR LACK THEREOF

For years we have heard slogans and hype about “lean and mean,” “agile enterprise,” “flexible organization,” and so on. Well folks, take ‘em with a grain of salt. We all know that lots of companies move way too slowly. Here are three reasons why, along with some suggestions to speed things up:

“Flat” organizations. At many firms, there is a huge gap between the executives and the managers. The former have all the authority, with lots to attend to and limited attention spans. The latter have broad responsibilities, with lots to attend to but no authority. As a result, execution lags way behind strategy. The fix: rebuild the “director” level and give directors authority. Charter them to act with due diligence but rapidly and without fear.

Guilt by history. At some companies, to suggest change implies that an earlier decision must have been wrong. So nobody says anything and the companies keep following outdated, underachieving practices, or they accept chronically inferior service from providers. The fix: regularly test new programs and approaches to determine their viability. Promote and reward new, do-able ideas. Fire those who exhibit business cowardice. Do not abuse vendors but *do* insist they keep up with you and perform properly.

Change fatigue. Too rapid and too frequent shifts in business processes wear people out, especially if the changes are also complex. After a few such jolts, management and staff tend to hunker down in an effort to maintain some sort of continuity. That is, they ignore or subvert additional new stuff that is thrust upon them suddenly. The fix: communicate constantly and give new programs and processes at least one fiscal quarter to work or not. Then communicate some more.

ARE YOUR GATEKEEPERS PREVENTING GOOD BUSINESS?

Dialing-in to some companies nowadays is like trying to enter the Pentagon: “Say your name again. And what company do you represent? And what is this about? And what is your need-to-know?” (It’s true ... I actually heard that last one!)

Defensive, officious behavior by the people who answer a company’s main number reveals a corporate “garrison mentality.” It speaks volumes about how the company views “outsiders” ... outsiders are not to be trusted. They may be infidels or spies or even worse ... sales people!! Conversely, businesslike yet friendly initial phone response shows an organization’s openness and its receptiveness to customers and other legitimate business callers.

Best Advice: Call your own main number and pretend to be an outsider making a business inquiry. How does it sound? How does it feel? Would you want to do business with your company? If there is any doubt, call me and let’s talk about the fix. You and your call WILL be welcome here. **800 373-3966**

REACTIONS TO THIS NEWSLETTER

Most editions, something I write ticks off a reader or two. Usually it is because I have criticized a strategy they employ, or have suggested that their business model may not be right for everyone. For instance, a for-hire call service bureau complained when I opined that for some companies and functions, in-house phone is better than outsourced. Such knocks don’t trouble me, because other readers ... many more of you, actually ... tell me to keep being provocative, and I intend to do so.

That written, please know that I still want to hear from readers who disagree with me. Multiple perspectives keep me on my toes and make for a more interesting newsletter. Kudos are gratefully accepted also. Net: I *LOVE* y’all! Happy New Year! michael@michaelabrown.net or call **800 373-3966**