



Michael A. Brown's

Business To Business By Phone[®]

Special Leads-to-Sales Edition

BUSINESS PARITY: THE ELUSIVE KEY TO LEAD GENERATION AND QUALIFICATION

If you practice good *Business To Business By Phone*[®], your reps bring a number of important values to the sales lead process:

- Themselves
- Their diligent preparation for the call
- A powerful and compelling “reason for the call”
- A clear sense of what they want to achieve
- What they want the prospect or customer to do as a result of the call
- A plan for managing the communication sequence

With all that in place, the moment of truth arrives when you get your prospect or customer live on the line. *Your callers must communicate as business peers.* Train them and direct them to:

- Deliver their openings as planned, with enthusiasm, not breathlessness. Do *not* ask "How are you today?"
- Demonstrate respect for your prospect or customer's administrative and support staff, but *do not act like one of them or communicate with them as if you were one.* You need your callers to establish parity with your prospect or customer. If callers behave as peers of administrative or support staff, they will find it almost impossible to achieve business parity with the real prospect.
- Do not diminish the call's value with phrases such as “I know you're busy ...” or “Can I take just a minute of your time?” or “I'm just calling to ...” State the reason for the call. Do not plead for access nor apologize for requesting it.
- Attend to word choice: verbs compel attention and interest better than nouns or adjectives. Use lots of verbs.
- Make sure that each prospect and customer hears your reps' best inflection and modulation. Inflection means

variation in vocal pitch. Modulation means changing tone of voice and/or pace. Without these, calls sound deadpan and boring.

- Ask questions with interest rather than with emphasis on recording the answer. Temper enthusiasm and questioning with humility.
- Ask subsequent questions based on the prospect's or customer's responses, *not* on the next data field.

Even with these techniques, achieving and demonstrating business parity often is very difficult for callers who, in their heart-of-hearts, may *never* consider themselves business peers of their prospects and customers. For example, a caller who formerly provided administrative assistance to a VP may lack the life and business experience, and hence the ability, to talk “ear-to-ear” with a prospect at his or her old boss's level. Likewise, the self-important “hot-shot” who acts as if arrogance equals parity may bully prospects and lose you more business than he or she wins.

Best Advice: Whether you hire callers directly or engage an outsourced phone service bureau, make sure you have the right people, train them well, and monitor them often. We help you do those things. Contact us at **800 373-3966**.

STRATEGIES FOR LIST VALIDATION

The smart money in direct marketing says that 50% of any campaign's success derives from the list. The more current and RFM-based, the better. The more verb-based or affinity-based, better still.

Unfortunately, many of today's rented and purchased calling lists are awful. Outdated. Missing phone numbers. Names and titles having nothing to do with your category of product or service. Worse, the names on the B2B lists you get likely are on a dozen other lists as well. “List fatigue” is especially



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rampant in the high tech sector. As a result, the very people you want to talk with are receiving tons of calls from other marketers also. How should we deal with this?

Best Advice: Consider outside lists as raw data only. Apply one or the other of these techniques to convert the raw data into a valid and worthwhile prospecting resource:

Reactive Validation: accept the list names at face value and ask for them by name. If he or she is not who you need, ask for the person **responsible for** doing whatever your product or service does.

Proactive Validation: start out expecting that the name is outdated or wrong. Say to whoever answers the phone, "I hope you can help me. (Pause) I'm trying to reach the person **responsible for** (what your product does.) Who would be the very best person to speak with? Can you connect me please."

Test both approaches to see which works better with your lists. Either way, hold your list broker accountable for the level of completeness, accuracy, and timeliness that you're paying for.

SEARCHING FOR THE REAL NOUN

What is "it" that you market or sell? What is the real noun that our senses can detect so we can know that we have your product or service?

I pose these questions because sometimes it is hard to determine what a company actually is offering. For instance, many technology companies pitch "solutions." "Solution" is an ambiguous noun if ever there was one. Often, it takes much probing and clarification to get the "solutions" marketers to admit that their "solutions" actually are software.

Software is a perfectly fine, unambiguous real noun. And if the software works as promised, then

why would its makers want to disguise their noun as something else? Maybe they think that "solution" sounds cooler than software and produces more leads? It does not.

When I presented these notions at a recent conference, a brash "solutions" marketer took great exception. "The software plus the services equals the solution," he protested. Of course, he completely missed the point that while "solution" may be the required mantra at his company, it is murky at best to his intended clientele.

Best Advice: If we make prospects and customers search for our real nouns, we are marketing and selling poorly. Indeed, software is software and solutions are what chemists work with. So "tell it like it is!" Market your software as software. Sell your hardware or services as hardware or services. Only customers have the right to say whether our real nouns constitute "solutions" for them.

HOORAY FOR NEW YORKERS!

Surprise, surprise! A midwestern polling company reported in *Direct* magazine that it's *tough* to telemarket or survey-call people in the Big Apple! So tough that the firm pays its phone staff assigned to NYC \$3 more an hour than agents who dial into less "hostile" territory. Maybe they called my client's customer Lou in the Bronx, who answers his phone with a gruff, "It's yaw quawtuh ... so staht tawkin' awready!"

PHONE PHUNNY

The caller asked me, "So what does your company do?" I replied, "I help business marketers do profitable **Business To Business By Phone**[®] via consulting and training." Three second pause, then the caller sighed, "Oh man, my very first day on the job and I have to call *you!*"