



Michael A. Brown's

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

Second Quarter 2002 Edition

### "MAY I ASK WHY YOU'RE NOT INTERESTED?"

That's the very uncomfortable line creeping into some business-to-business "scripts." Here is the context in which I first heard it:

*American Express Small Business caller:* "Hi, Mr. Brown, we're introducing a special extended payment offer for purchases over \$200 on your Gold Card. May I tell you about it?"

*My Response:* "Well, I don't use my Amex card for extended purchases, and choose to pay in full every month. However, I appreciate your call."

*Amex:* The bad line.

No doubt Amex's intention was to validate the campaign targeting and the list. But besides the fact that I had just explained why the offer was not relevant to me, the line sounded abrupt ... borderline rude. So what should we say instead?

*Best Advice:* Listen very carefully to the customer's reaction to your offer. If you hear "I'm not interested" or the actual reason for no interest, respond by saying, "Thank you for letting me know. What types of products or services might be a better fit for you going forward?" Adjust subsequent campaigns and calls to this customer accordingly.

Whether you refer to this process as database marketing, CRM, or simply good business, it is the right and profitable thing to do!

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### DON'T LET PURCHASING DEPARTMENTS KEEP YOU FROM DOING BUSINESS

Purchasing departments are supposed to implement acquisition decisions but many of them presume to judge the decisions instead. Under the guise of "consistency," "fiduciary duty," or "negotiating," purchasing agents all too often question their colleagues' motives and rationale, even when the requisitions have high-level approval. This

behavior frustrates and infuriates colleagues and suppliers alike, and is bad business all around. Here's how to ease the strain of dealing with purchasing departments:

*At your prospect's or customer's company:* as soon as "yes" appears likely, arrange a 3-way phone conversation with you, your customer, and the PA. The objectives: to introduce yourself, learn precisely how the ordering or contracting process works, what specific paperwork and/or data formats are required, and the most common obstacles. By including the PA, you usually reduce resistance and mutual anxiety. But if you experience the other kind of PA (pain in the), ask your customer and his or her boss to intercede with the Purchasing Manager. Still no go? Take it upstairs.

*At your own company:* show respect but not deference to your PAs. "Please" can sometimes work wonders. At the same time, get business-friendly with people in big offices and, as warranted, leverage their power to get things bought.

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### COMPENSATION LAW UPDATE

The proposed labor law change that would allow business marketers to convert phone-based sales and marketing reps from hourly to exempt employees is on hold for the time being.

Rep. Pat Tiberi's (R-OH) bill, HR2070, passed subcommittee on a narrow 8-6 vote, and was slated for a full committee hearing. However, a Tiberi spokesman tells us that the congressman decided to postpone bringing his bill before the full body, preferring to await greater leverage to get it passed. He says that the measure might be a "bargaining chip" if and when minimum wage legislation comes up again in Congress.

Tiberi's bill is intended to modernize a section of the 1938 Fair Labor Standards Act that *mandates* non-exempt (hourly) status for almost all phone-based reps. Many marketing, sales, and HR



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departments do not know of this regulation. But it is the law, and companies that violate it are subject to back-pay settlements for overtime, hefty fines, and long-term oversight by the US Dept. of Labor.

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### WHY YOU MAY NEED AN "ID TAG"

In times past, most business names described what the businesses did: the Pennsylvania Railroad, Austin Floor Coverings, Allstate Insurance. But in recent years, the trend has shifted to manufactured names that do not reveal the nature of the business. For example, what do Avaya, ComSys, NetGenesis, and Eczel do?

If your company's name does not identify what you do, create an "ID tag" that your callers can say to quickly clarify the realm of business that their conversations will address. For example, "We make advanced network servers for e-commerce." "We provide accounting and business management software." "I'm the **Business To Business By Phone<sup>®</sup>** guy."

The ID tag serves two purposes. First, if your company's name is not universally known (think IBM or Walt Disney), prospects need to hear who you are and what you do. Second, at the outset of the call, you need a phrase that helps realign the listener's thought-stream from the prior topic to what you want to talk about.

The test of a good ID tag is that even people outside your industry or marketplace will "get it." So, no jargon, no self-congratulatory hype, no "leading," no "have you heard of us?" Instead, tell it straight and fast, like the great ID tag on the fire engines in Wimberley, Texas: "We put wet stuff on hot stuff."

The hardest aspect of implementing good ID tags for phone use is that others in the company may want you to say the same corporate positioning blurb that Wall Street analysts see as *printed words* but that sounds awful when *spoken*. The best way to resolve this is to get the others to say theirs out loud. When they can't, your ID tag wins.

### SOFTWARE FIRM PROPOSES DOING BUSINESS WITHOUT PEOPLE

From an actual advertisement by an e-business software vendor:

"Known as Enterprise Self-Service (ESS), this new business model allows your major stakeholders to interact with your enterprise in a personalized, collaborative way using the power of the Web. ESS means changing all of your relationships - interactions, transactions, and services - from a manual, human-assisted paradigm to a personalized, self-service model. The result is immediate business value in the form of reduced costs, enhanced growth, improved productivity, and long-term customer satisfaction and retention."

Oh? Fire everyone and get rich? Rubbish.

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### ADVICE IN A SENTENCE OR LESS

For banks: remember whose money it is.  
For insurance companies: if you don't want to pay for our losses, get out of the business.  
For airlines: learn how to use clocks.  
For marketers: to find out why people are skeptical and response rates low, let's read our own stuff.  
For sales people: let's tell the truth, folks.  
For telecom, cellular, and cable companies: please see "For marketers" and "For sales people."  
For campaign strategists: people distrust promotions with asterisks (\*), so don't do them.  
For broadcast journalists: ask your question, then stop talking and let the person answer.  
For Budweiser: bring back the frogs and lizards!

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### DM DAYS NEW YORK!

Here's a super reason to re-visit NYC! The direct marketing community's major talent, along with 6,500 expected guests, are gathering for *DMDays New York*, June 17-19 at the Javits Convention Center. Check out [www.dmdays.com](http://www.dmdays.com) for all the info and to register. Make it there! Make it anywhere! New York! New York!