



Michael A. Brown's

Business To Business By Phone[®]

Third Quarter 2003 Edition

IMPROVE COMMUNICATION SKILLS TO IMPROVE SALES RESULTS

Our K-12 teachers were right on the money when they tried to teach us how to speak correctly, apply proper syntax and grammar, and convey ideas clearly. They tried to convince us how important those things would be in our lives. But too many callers apparently were not listening.

That's why in 2003 we hear verbal performances peppered with self-inflicted speech impediments such as "y'know" and "like." We hear otherwise bright reps say, "let me axe you a question." We hear convoluted ramblings rather than cogent, understandable presentations. We hear callers who don't realize that verbs influence more powerfully and sell more reliably than puffed-up adjectives, and who therefore spout puffery instead. We hear unfocused product spiels, and calls that trail-off and evaporate rather than culminate in clear calls to action or sales.

It is very easy to blame educational systems for the reps' verbal shortcomings. And indeed, schools usually do not emphasize the building blocks of communication as they used to. However, the B2B community exacerbates the problem by too often hiring callers more for their content knowledge than their communication and selling abilities. As a result, it falls to managers and trainers to fulfill the role of remedial language arts teachers.

Best Advice: At sales meetings, play tapes of masters of spoken English such as Bill Moyers of PBS, Bob Edwards of NPR, the actor Ossie Davis, and the late Rep. Barbara Jordan of Texas. They are not sales people, but oh my, can they sell! Pay particular attention to their word choice, elocution, and questioning techniques.

Also, get out the tape recorders and direct your callers to listen to their own calls. They will assess themselves even more critically than you. And with your guidance, plus my training, they will improve. Call **800 373-3966** and together, we will enhance their performance and results!

STOP MAKING COLD CALLS!

That's right: zero "cold calls."

Yes, it's marketing heresy, but don't look so surprised! You don't like making cold calls either. You don't accept them at dinnertime at your home, and business prospects hate them, too. (Ask your CEO how many he or she accepts!) So don't cold call any more. Instead, call because:

- There is a relevant event in the prospect's business life ... recent past, present, or pending. That way, your caller can build a conversation around *their circumstances*, not your pitch.
- The prospect has responded to your marketing message(s) in another medium such as your web site or direct mail. Your caller can thank the prospect and begin the dialogue by asking about the business motivation for their response.
- The contact already is a customer. They are "in your store" so sell them more!

WHERE THE MONEY WENT, PART TWO

From *DM News*: "A survey of nearly 700 companies conducted by research firm Gartner indicates that 42% of enterprises that purchased CRM software licenses have yet to install them."

Sidebar: This story inspired colleague David Foley of Toronto to suggest "a new business -- malpractice insurance for CRM professionals! Here's a possible headline for the (cover) letter: 'If 42% of the people you sold never unwrapped your product, would you be worried?'"

HOW TO TURN DOWN BAD BUSINESS

We all agree that not all business is good business. The earlier your reps can smoke out a sure money-loser or shady customer, the better.



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Here are some examples and guidelines:

A prospect wants an instant quote on a custom product or a variable service. *Best response:* "Last year, our smallest order was \$ and the biggest was \$\$\$\$." Vague or deceptive answer? "We probably don't have a good fit this time, but if things change ..." OK answer? Start learning their circumstances, requirements, preferences, and qualification. *Then quote.*

A new customer calls the day after placing her first order and says, "We've been talking with a few other vendors and you need to lower your price." *Best response:* "Ms Customer, do you still need and want what you ordered? If so, we're ready to fulfill at the price we agreed and honor our commitment. May we proceed on that basis, please?" If yes, ship it as booked, get paid, *then* re-engage about volume discounts, payment terms, etc. If no, "Thanks for considering us. If circumstances change, we'll be pleased to work with you."

A prospect strings along your rep through six calls, always with a promise that "next time is for real." *Best response:* "Mr. Customer, if you still need it, we still have it, and I will serve you the best I can as soon as you're ready. So when the P.O. becomes official, please get in touch." Or, sell higher-up.

Turning down business is emotionally wrenching for sales people, and I do not suggest doing it in a cavalier manner. But neither our reps nor we nor our companies can afford to throw good effort and good money after questionable business or flat-out bad arrangements. Net: if it's not right, bow out confidently, courteously, and quickly.

CAREFUL WITH TRADE SHOW GIVEAWAYS

Some people who attend trade shows go to great lengths to get giveaway premiums. They endure long lines and boring demos to come away with shirts, hats, mugs, pens, and a chance to win another PDA although they have three already.

Are such people viable prospects? It is very unlikely. In my experience, there is a clear and inverse relationship between the value of the giveaways (called "promotional products" or "tchotchkes") and the value of the prospect ... the more desirable the freebie, the lower the probability that its seeker will be a good opportunity for you.

Best Advice: Offer premiums that are related to what you sell, not gizmos for gizmos' sake. And to get the premiums, requestors have to pre-qualify by telling you, at least, their business motivation for coming by your booth. If the main motivation is that you have the coolest gizmos at the show, that's bad marketing. (Check the order-to-gizmo ratio.) If they stopped by because they are actively considering the category of product or service you sell, go sell 'em!

A FUNNY BUT RISKY LINE

Administrative assistant asks, "Is this a sales call?" Rep replies, "It is if I do it right!"

DUMB MARKETING STORIES, CHAPTER ONE

by Steve Hirst, CEO of maat.net in Pennsylvania

A big copier distributor near here brought on a line of telephone systems from the same company that makes the copiers. So far, they can't *give* away a phone system. It is draining the profitable "copier" part of their business. I asked the distributor's president if he had leveraged his installed base. He put his hand on his chin and said, "why no, we never did that" ... 3000 plus companies have their copiers!

POWERFUL NEW BUSINESS EVENT COMING TO NORTHERN VIRGINIA!

Leads, Sales, and Customer Retention: Profitable Strategies for Business to Business and Government Marketers. October 14 at the Regus Centre. Check it out at www.federaldirect.net or call me, 800 373-3966. It's going to be good!