



Michael A. Brown's

Business To Business By Phone[®]

First Quarter 1997 Edition

TELLIN' IT LIKE IT SHOULD BE

The winter issue of American Express's magazine for small business cardholders, *Your Company*, carried an article about selling by phone. Most of it was wrong. *Really wrong!* For example, the writer contends that "It's all in the script." Citing "telemarketing experts," she advises readers to hone their "spiels" and be prepared with "comebacks" to common objections. These and other harmful recommendations compelled a response. I fired off this letter:

Dear Editor:

How appropriate that you show 1950s era callers in your dreadful piece on telemarketing (Forecast 1997 issue, p.17). The approaches and techniques Aimee Stern and her "telemarketing experts" recommend are woefully outdated and damaging to employees, customers, and the bottom line. Here's why:

^The notion that "It's all in the script" is nonsense. People hate being "spieled" to. Indeed, when was the last time you or your readers were *narrated* into submission? Further, in these personalized, Internetted '90s, a "one size fits all script" offends. It represents a futile attempt to individualize mass marketing. If you have to script it, don't do it.

Task #1 for any phone-based marketer is *NOT* to establish rapport. It's to *sell the value of having the conversation*. If the caller cannot do so, it's impossible to establish rapport or anything else. Rapport is not established by asking "how are you today?" or with small talk. One establishes rapport by asking before telling, and by listening.

Both the tone and the specific words (e.g., "comeback," "monologue") demonstrate an inward focus on the seller's product or service, rather than on discovering and meeting a legitimate customer need. Inward focus was wrong in the '50's; it's the death of businesses nowadays.

Business buyers as well as individual consumers reject bad "telemarketing" and instead demand thoughtful, appropriate contact. If you're going to dispense advice about how businesses should do it, please make the advice up-to-date and correct.

Respectfully,
Michael A. Brown
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CONFERENCE REVIEW

"Biggest and best ever!" That's the book on this year's *Direct Marketing To Business* conference in Orlando. More than 1300 marketing executives and practitioners heard new twists on enduring themes plus several provocative and "threshold" ideas:

"Sales can be account-driven, but marketing has to focus on segments."

"Soon, *all* marketing will be direct!"

"Good chairs are profit centers. Be prepared to invest \$800 per chair for your phone reps."

"Let's stop talking about leads as if they were binary ... qualified or unqualified. And let's quit the adjectives ... hot, medium, cool. Establish clear criteria and rate the leads on a point scale. Everyone benefits."

SIDE EFFECTS

Corporate right-sizing and the resulting "flat" organizations were supposed to yield better communications between top management and regular employees. But *Performance* magazine reports contrary results from a Council of Communication Management study of 705 employees at 70 companies:

64% don't believe what management says



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61% feel under-informed about company plans
54% say decisions are not explained well

OUR GRAMMMAR TEACHERS WERE RIGHT ALL ALONG!

One of the greatest aspects of e-mail for business communication is that *writers actually have to write!* E-mail requires correct spelling, cogent composition, and bright, lively messages. All that "stuff" we learned in our English lessons comes alive again. Let's all write e-mail messages to our grade school teachers, thanking them for preparing us to capitalize on the new e-mail medium with old but durable writing skills.

LOW TECH, HIGH OUTPUT

The hottest, coolest tool for marketing communications isn't the Internet ... it's the *fountain pen*. Coupled with a top-flight behavioral and/or affinity list, a handwritten letter in a stamped first-class envelope can work wonders. Try it!

CAUTION FLAG

Do not make a marketing call based on a specific technical support transaction. Reason: vehement customer resistance.

PHONE PHUNNY

A customer called the technical support group at one of my software clients, wanting to know why some references to the number "2" in the product manual were written in Spanish. (DOS.)

DATABASE MARKETING: WHAT THEY DO v. WHO THEY ARE

Too many marketers are acting as if their static, descriptive data is going to win customers and break the bank. Unfortunately, "mining" the base for companies with a certain number of employees, or firms with a specific SIC code presents an incomplete and often misleading picture of genuine opportunities.

On the other hand, mining for *actions* taken by your customers and prospects is much more illuminating and valuable. That's because what the employees *do* is more significant than how many employees there are. Likewise, *changing market conditions* in a segment may reveal opportunities that a sort on SIC code would never reveal.

Best Advice: To make your database marketing really start to pay off, focus on the behavioral and affinity *verbs* rather than the classical descriptions. Behavioral indicators include growth or reduction in ordering patterns, purchases from previously inactive locations, and so on. Affinity indicators include purchases of related products, products which imply service requirements, acquisitions of companies in new market segments, etc.

THOUGHT WHILE FLYING

Marketing is nature's way of saying, "don't cold-call."