



Michael A. Brown's

Business To Business By Phone[®]

Second Quarter 1995 Edition

CONFERENCE REVIEWS

Direct Marketing Association of Washington, DC. DMAW's 40th anniversary conference focused largely on business-to-consumer and non-profit direct marketing. Subjects included: technology applications; alternative media; fundraising. Plus, lots of awards and goodies.

DMA Business-To-Business Days, New York City. About 300 attendees. Several presentations appeared adapted from consumer-direct, with dated concepts and strategies, rather than original business-to-business thought. Similar topics in same time slots made session selection difficult. Terrific session on direct marketing privacy issues and legislation.

HARDENING OF THE SERVICE ARTERIES

Just as fat clogs a person's arteries, so can a company's service arteries become clogged by organizational cholesterol. It comes in 3 forms: puffery about "commitment," inadequate technology and/or people to conduct customer care, and hidden but deep resentment about having to provide service at all.

Puffery about service "commitment" runs rampant. Symptoms include advertising and annual report photos of smiling corporate officers, customers, and support reps, mismatched to the real-world scenario of 800 numbers converted to 900 numbers, phone mail prisons, and endless waits for assistance. The proof of *genuine commitment* is a company's ability and willingness to align its business practices with the promises.

In other organizations, the checkbook to actually *pay* for customer care people and technology is conspicuously tight or even closed.

Symptoms range from gross understaffing to absence of service tracking systems to high turnover to class action lawsuits. In such companies, fiscal bypass surgery is required to redirect more of the money flow to where it actually does some good; namely, customer care!

The resentment about having to provide service is worst of all. Its symptoms include speech and behavior which disparage those who request service. For example, the executive director of a technology support organization refers to all customers as "screamers." This is a man (perhaps an entire company) who apparently believes that if customers need help, they ought not acquire or use his products in the first place. Fortunately, such people and businesses self-correct by going out of business.

Best Advice: Put attention, effort, energy, time, and money where your service mouth is. But never view customer care or product/technical support as a cost center. Fund it and operate it as a *profit center*. If it's *not* profitable, you'll often find the blockage elsewhere in the organization's arteries.

"WELCOME OR GO AWAY!?"

The way in which a company's representatives answer the phone conveys either a warm, friendly "welcome" or a rude "go away." That's why I extend a figurative smile and handshake by saying, "Good morning, this is Michael Brown at Redwood!"

However, my greeting has been drawing some startled responses from callers. For example: "Hello!?" (Pause) Oh, I thought it was a recording!" My response, "Here I am, live and in color! How may I help you?"

Is my upbeat greeting misguided? I hope not. Because if the "standard" way of answering



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business phones in North America is boring or unfriendly, maybe it's something we should address. Please phone with your opinions. (800) 373-3966.

you'll tell me *your* phone number, I'll be sure to call you back. Oh, you can't do that because it would interrupt you? Well, now you know how *I* feel." Click.

WHAT U NEED

If you're doing *Business To Business By Phone*[®], make sure you have the right "tools of the trade":

Ergonomic calling stations. Keyboard height 29.5", wrist rests, foot rests. Also, good chairs, adjustable with excellent lumbar support. Ask your furniture vendor to show you "task chairs."

Lighting: subdued overheads. Tell your building engineer you want either "inners or outers" on your fluorescents, but not both. Alternate: turn off the overheads and install task lighting at each calling station.

Glare screens. Even the so-called "glare free" monitors aren't.

Headsets. Get the kind with the microphone at the mouth end of the speech tube, not at the ear end. If your environment is noisy, order the 2-eared model.

Sound control. Educate your staff and colleagues that business is being conducted by phone, even when your reps are listening not talking. Post signs to that effect. Consider installing bright, flashing "on the air" lights at the entrance to each calling station. Cubicle partition height makes little or no difference in sound control.

"TELEMARKETING" DISPOSAL TIP

Jerry Seinfeld, upon receiving a consumer "telemarketing" call just as he sat down to dinner: "I really can't talk to you now, but if

NUMBER 9...NUMBER 9...NUMBER 9

As we celebrate Redwood's ninth anniversary this month, the big THANKS go to each and every one of you, esteemed clients, for your ongoing trust and business.

1994-1995 have been especially gratifying because *you and your businesses* are doing so well. May all of us continue to ride the waves of economic recovery and remain close in business and friendship.

COME AND GET YOUR FREE DINNER!

For every referral you provide who becomes my client, you win a free American Express gift cheque, honored at all the best places. Call today! (800) 373-3966.

WHAT I DO

- Advise and train your marketing and sales groups to use the phone effectively to find, land, and keep customers, and grow your business.
- Favorably differentiate your calls from consumer "telemarketing" and from your competitors.
- Help you build and ramp-up your in-house phone team, or recommend the best outsourced call centers to conduct telemarketing and telesales for you
- "Fine-Tune" your phone operations, steering you away from the money-pits and toward profitable best practices.
- 800 373- 3966 www.michaelabrown.net