



Michael A. Brown's

Business To Business By Phone[®]

Second Quarter 1996 Edition

THE SOFTWARE BOX

Many software companies still send free trial diskettes or CDs ("dog and pony shows") to begin wooing prospects. They believe that once prospects see and experience the demo, the product will "sell itself." But software buyers are "demoed-out."

Indeed, by my desk, I have a box with 21 unopened software programs that have shown up without my asking for them. Sometimes the manufacturers' phone sales people call to ask what I think of their product. I tell them I haven't looked at it yet. They ask why not and I say, "Because you haven't given me any compelling reason to do so."

Usually, they start bubbling enthusiastically about the product's features and how cool the software is. I listen for a few seconds. Then I ask the caller to tell me the two most important things he or she knows about my business. Long silence. Then I tell the story of how I have 21 unopened software programs in a box by my desk.

GOOD CUSTOMER SUPPORT GROWS MORE IMPORTANT, HARDER TO FIND

Ever been mentally mulched by a product or by its confusing or incomplete instructions? (Allegedly "plug 'n' play" computer devices come to mind.) You're not alone!

Too many companies are believing their own advertising about how easy their products are to use. But when you try to *contact* the company for a straight answer or technical help, you may find the help process as frustrating as the original problem! For example, some companies have installed interactive voice response (in *their* jargon, of course, not plain English) plus fax-back and Web sites and "universal agents." But all this is lose-lose if it makes the company hard to do business with. In the worst cases, companies try

to avoid their customers by hiding behind their communication technology.

Best Advice: At your company, keep the communications machines and the software in context. It's people-to-people that creates and keeps customers. Always has been. Always will be.

SPEAKING OF WHICH

A major step toward making it *easy* to do business is to *institutionalize* your phone communication practices in terms of accessibility, content, and format. Good airlines do this well. When you call United, for instance, there is a distinctive "flavor" to the conversation. The rep can talk appropriately with harried business travelers or with grandparents planning leisure trips, while maintaining poise and engaging the customer in comfortable discourse.

Formatted phone communication does not imply stifling individual styles or creativity. It does mandate well-spoken, educated people who are reminded frequently about what to say and how to say it. In turn, their managers must be paid, fired, or promoted based in large part on the quality of people-to-people interactions.

YOW! 10 YEARS!

June 20 marks Redwood's first decade! Know what I like best about this business? You! You are smart *and* nice *and* good business people! It has been my privilege to contribute to your success and I deeply appreciate your contributing to mine. Let's continue! Thank you very much!

ON "NETWORKING"

I received a phone call from a woman who said she was contacting me to "network."



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Then she immediately began an excited and detailed recitation of her "accomplishments."

When she finally inhaled, I asked, "Are you looking for work?" Somewhat startled, she confessed that, yes, her objective was employment. But not with me!! She had read my article in *TeleProfessional* magazine and wanted me to "network" her with *you*, my clients!!

"How bizarre," I thought. Here's a person whom I've never met and certainly can't vouch for, acting like she's known me for years. *And* she wants to tap my contact file because she's "networking."

Two other examples of misguided "networking" come to mind. In Florida, I watched a man hustle his way into a group of conference attendees to size up job opportunities, and then huff away when none materialized. Then there was the San Francisco marketing executive who boasted to me that he had "crashed" a paid event intending to meet venture money and to collect competitors' materials. He called it "networking." I called it criminal.

Best Advice: If you find yourself being "networked" inappropriately, remind the offender that good, proper networking takes a long time. It's selling on a very personal level and it's OK to do. But networking is a terrible medium for pretense and deception because it's transparent. It's a great medium for honesty and ethics because it showcases one's true values.

PHONE PHUNNIES

It's fun tracking the sale and rental of a list with my name mis-spelled. Consumer phone is the funniest, when the caller tries to pronounce "BRONW."

In a recent *San Jose Mercury News* classified section, there were 11 ads for phone-based positions in which the hiring company

requested "No phone calls." I guess they like listening to paper resumes instead.

Marketers and sales reps dislike NATO prospects: No Action, Talk Only. David Foley in Canada also laments NORAD customers: Never Order, Request Additional Documentation.

MANAGERS' NOTEBOOK

Here are 2 performance measurement guidelines which most managers aren't using but *should use*, starting today. Rule 1: Medians (mid-points) are better and more meaningful than averages because they are less susceptible to peaks and drops. Rule 2: Ratios are more meaningful than absolutes. Example: sales v. conversations is more significant than number of calls.

PUT THIS IN YOUR DATABASE

Oct. 14-16 in Atlanta: the 3rd annual *Business To Business Database Marketing* conference. It's a top-flight event! Call (800) 373-3966 and I'll tell you all about it.

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