



Michael A. Brown's

Business To Business By Phone[®]

Fourth Quarter 1996 Edition

FIRST-CALL OFFERS?

There's an ongoing debate in direct marketing circles about the wisdom or dangers of making an offer on the first phone call to a prospect or customer.

On the "pro" side, the chief argument is that a straight-up offer cuts to the chase. And if there's a matchup, the offer can create an instant sale. It's very easy to measure results because it's binary ... you either make the sale or you don't. It also is easy to out-source such calls to a service bureau.

The "con" side's strongest point is that on a first call, *you don't know yet what to offer*. Unless and until you conduct a substantive conversation, your campaign or product, not the customer's requirements, becomes the focus of the call. Even if the call is database driven, it represents an inward v. customer focus. Such calls often sound like, and are perceived as, "telemarketing pitches."

Further, on a first-call, single-focus offer, we would risk missing the bigger story, the whole story about the account's needs, which could lead to even greater things.

Best Advice: First-call product offers reflect the old definition of direct marketing, but are risky, given business customers' preferences and buying behaviors. We could be viewed as breaking our promise to conduct thoughtful, coordinated marketing.

"Soft" offers, such as white-paper reports, "expo" diskettes, and such certainly are OK, provided they are integral to your marketing process (i.e., provided to rated prospects with a confirmed follow-up commitment) and not merely general distribution "freebies."

SELL WITH THE PARTS OF SPEECH

"Public" the noun is noble ... the American *public*. But "public" the adjective is disrespected, distrusted, sometimes reviled and despised ... *public* officials, *public* transit, *public* housing, *public* enemy.

The point here is that words have power. Nouns have more power than adjectives. But verbs have more power than adjectives *or* nouns. Verbs influence and sell.

Best Advice: Use more verbs in your marketing and sales messages. Limit nouns to explaining what your product/service includes. Lose the "hype," most of which is adjectives.

THE REAL RAP ON RAPPORT

When I was first learning about selling by phone, step one was to "establish rapport." As Humphrey Bogart said, "I was mis-informed."

Step 1 is to *sell the value of having the conversation*. If the customer won't buy the value of the conversation, it's impossible to establish rapport or anything else. Besides, rapport implies a substantive, interactive dialogue. It's *not* accomplished by asking "how are you today?" or with small talk.

Best Advice: Plan, prepare, and execute to distinguish yourself and your call favorably. Here's how:

Provide for context and continuity.

Write down what you want to achieve AND what the prospect or customer will do differently or better as a result of *this call*.

Rehearse your opening:

- Your full name and company



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- Quick identifier: Who you are\what you do
- Reason for the call in 25 words or fewer. This is where you sell the value of the call by attracting attention and interest.

Apply the "golden rule": "Is this a good (or convenient, or appropriate) time for us to talk?"

THREE GOOD INTELLIGENCE RESOURCES

Customer Service and Tech Support Reps at your prospects' and customers' companies will tell you almost anything.

Your own CSRs and TSRs know a ton of good stuff about your customers. And if you ask them, they'll tell it to you.

People and companies that have bought from you know why they did so. And if you ask them, they'll tell you about their decision process, the most important factors, who your competitors were, and so on.

COLD-CALLING STILL IS A HOT TOPIC

At a Chicago-area training event, one participant vigorously defended his cold-call prospecting using the yellow pages in his geographic territory. He starts with the "A's."

I asked what would happen to his earnings if there were only 2 viable users of his products in the geography, or if all the genuine opportunities happened to start with Y or Z? He retorted sharply that I "don't know anything about his business." His vice president calmed him down, explaining to him that this was a strategic matter, not a tactical choice issue. Indeed.

If this sales rep actually is doing phone as he described, he, his vice president, and his company are paying for it dearly. I encouraged them to consider and then implement better, more

creative and targeted leads\prospects acquisition, such as database-driven mail with BRC, 800, fax, and Internet\ e-mail response mechanisms.

STOP THE PRESSES for news from Chicago ... the VP has just announced a new marketing initiative, plus revised rep duties to include both present account development and new account acquisition! Hooray for them!

HEAD SOUTH FOR THE WINTER

Direct Marketing To Business conference. Orlando, February 3-5. It's always a terrific event. It's usually warm in Florida. Be there.

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.
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HOLIDAY GREETINGS!!

As the song says, "It's the most wonderful time of the year." May you, your family, and friends enjoy this festive season and each other with fun and bright hopes for a marvelous 1997!