Michael A. Brown's

Business To Business By Phone®

"Results-Booster" Special Edition

TWELVE TIPS FOR OPTIMIZING YOUR PHONE-BASED MARKETING AND SALES

1. Customers dislike calls to "update our database." Database update is not a valid reason for a business to business phone call: there must be genuine value-add for the customer, i.e., "what's in it for me?" Here's a better opening: "I'm calling to hear your opinions and preferences about us and our products\services with an eye toward keeping each other up to date and informed."

2. In probing for needs and preferences, and in qualifying, ask no more than three closed-ended questions in a row. Asking too many closed questions makes you sound like a police interrogator, not a marketer. Early in the conversation, the best ratio is two open to one closed. Mid-way, when the customer is fully engaged in the conversation, make it 1-1. As you approach the close, one open and two closed.

3. Marketing by phone means you're working in an audio medium. But too often, callers let the visual distractions of their computer screen or data capture form drive the questioning. The resulting conversation sounds forced and customers don't like it. Attend to the audio content of the conversation first, data capture second. Try closing your eyes and really listening.

4. Prospects and customers talk faster than anyone can type. Do not attempt real-time keystroking. Take notes on paper, then enter the information in summary form at the end of the call. Buy or create a software facility to do a key-word search on the notepad section of the computer record.

5. Scenario: On a phone call to reactivate a dormant account, the customer tells you that your information is out-of-date, incomplete, or wrong. Example: "We don't have your equipment anymore ... we replaced it a year ago with your competitor's system." Don't panic or simply say goodbye. Rather, be ready with a response such as "I'm hoping to hear your update on your business requirements and preferences to see if we might re-earn your consideration."

6. Do not pay incentives for lead quantity or quality. Quantity incentives lead to fudging the qualifying factors. Quality incentives lead to inflated rating and overestimation of the opportunity. Clear, unambiguous, mutually-agreed qualifying criteria drive information capture. Therefore, information completeness and accuracy are job performance requirements, not a contest. It is OK to offer incentives for referrals, more phone numbers, etc.

7. Scenario: Your outside service bureau receives inbound calls and\or conducts outbound pre-qualification calls after inquiry. Pre-qualified leads then come in-house for second-tier, full qualification, then go to field sales. Problem: Two-tier qualification annoys prospects because it usually is repetitive. Solve this by developing different question sets for first tier pre-qualifiers and for second tier opportunity developers. Also, provide the first tier answers to second tier callers.

8. Some service bureaus want to conduct full account management for you, often with their people working from your facility, which can appear very tempting from an operational cost-containment view. But this is not a tactical matter, it is *main-line strategic.* Before talking with any such vendors, convene a high-level management meeting and open it with this question: Even if a for-hire bureau *could* manage our accounts, would we really want them to?

9. You have three and only three ways to conduct simultaneous inbound and outbound calls. First, you can let them happen at random. Never ever let your business operate at random. Second, you can separate inbound from outbound, which works well in high volume transactional environments and for "spot sales." Third, you can establish a schedule for inbound and outbound

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time blocks, which works well in account development and account management scenarios.

10. Phone-based marketing and selling create administrative overhead: pre-call research, fulfillment, follow-up e-mail, and so on. A good working guideline is to *build-in* administrative overhead time by assigning your phone-based reps to six live phone hours a day and providing two hours for pre-call prep and post-call admin. This also keeps your reps' voices from getting tired or stale by day's end and reduces the complaints about not having enough support. Do use technology as much as reasonable and also budget for adequate administrative help.

11. Think and plan very carefully before transitioning field reps to phone-based positions. Many have the ability but lack the will to strike the balance between the production and artistry of selling by phone. For example, a "lone ranger" field rep used to 1.7 calls per day and infrequent management may be ill-suited for 20-25 substantive phone conversations per day, silent monitoring, and the absolute requirement to participate as a team member. Do not allow your phone group to suffer the lack of direction and monitoring that often characterizes field sales.

12. When considering job structure and compensation issues, talk with human resources *last*, not first. Start by talking with your senior management about the phone program's strategic positioning, your colleagues about tactical implementation and performance issues, and your reps about what smoothes or inhibits their efforts. Then when you *do* talk money and titles, you're much more likely to get what you and your phone people are really worth.

A BAKER'S DOZEN

13. Lots of phone managers invest too little time doing the management activity with the highest payout: live calls monitoring, coaching, and counseling. These duties are not interruptions of management ... they *are* management. Get in the cubes, get on the phones, and listen!

IMPROVE THE DIALOGUE, IMPROVE THE RESULTS!

- Do not say: "Just following up"
- Say: "Hear your reactions and arrange our next step"

- Do not say: "I see that you visited our web site … do you have any questions?"
- Say: "Thank you for visiting our web site. Tell me about what caught your eye!"

- Do not ask: "Did you receive our quote?"
- Ask: "How does the quote look? Are we ready to talk business?"

- Do not ask: "Are you the decision-maker?"
- Say: "Tell me about your responsibilities."

- Do not ask: "Why?"
- Ask: "How?"

- Do not say: "Have a nice\great day"
- Say: "Thank you! Good bye."

- Do not say: "No problem"
- Say: "You're welcome!"

PHONE PHUNNY

The caller asked me, "So what does your company do?" I replied, "We help business marketers do profitable **Business To Business By Phone®** via consulting and training." Three second pause, then the caller sighed, "Oh man, my very first day on the job and I have to call *you*!"

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