



Michael A. Brown's

## *Business To Business By Phone*<sup>®</sup>

Fourth Quarter 2006 Edition

### AFTER ALL THIS TIME AND MONEY?

From *B-to-B* magazine: "A large majority of b-to-b marketers (87%) have little confidence in their customer data, according to an on-site survey of attendees at (a DMA event.) Fifty-four percent of those surveyed by Extraprise said the lack of collaboration between sales and marketing is their biggest challenge. (Only) fifty-two percent said they integrate sales and marketing systems. Fifty nine percent said customer data reside in at least four different internal locations ... and 23% in more than ten locations."

Hey wait a minute ... wasn't CRM supposed to prevent or fix all that? Didn't businesses spend somewhere between a gazillion and a megazillion dollars on CRM to get a "360-degree customer view?" And 87% still distrust their customer data? Wow! Tom and Larry must have laughed all the way to the bank. We all got fooled again.

*Sidebar:* If your company has CRM, ask your customers if they have noticed. If your company is thinking about getting CRM, ask your customers what they would do if you had it.

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### FIRST-CALL OFFERS: PRO AND CON

On the "pro" side, the chief argument is that a straight-up offer cuts to the chase and can create an instant sale. It's very easy to measure results because it's binary: either you make the sale or you don't.

The "con" side's strongest point is that on a first call, *you don't yet know what to offer*. Until you conduct a substantive conversation, your campaign or product, not the customer's requirements, becomes the focus of the call. Such calls often sound like, and are perceived as, telemarketing pitches. Further, on a first-call one-product offer, we risk missing the bigger picture ... the whole story about the account's needs, which could lead to even greater things.

### HOLY COW ... 240 v. 7 !!

From a *YouTube* presentation by John Moore of Brand Autopsy: "Employees of The Container Store (a chain of home organizing products retailers) receive 240 hours of training during their first year. The national average is seven hours."

If the disparity is anywhere near this great, it could explain some of the ills American business is suffering. For example:

- Customer attrition: people tend to stop buying from businesses with know-nothing employees.
- Employee turnover costs: little training means little motivation which means little opportunity or advancement which means departures.
- Price wars: absent training in customer relations, marketing, differentiation, sales, and value-building, what else is left to talk about but price?

*Best Advice:* Create and implement an ongoing training regimen for your people. It's one of the best investments you can make. Hire me to advise, produce, and conduct. **800 373-3966.**

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### FILL THE ROOM OR FILL THE COFFERS?

If your company conducts live events such as seminars or product demos, or is planning some, reconsider what you *really* want the events to provide for you. Lots of fresh new names? Fewer but more sales-ready names? A forum where you can show off your product and prove its value to pre-qualified buyers? A nice but very expensive way to create "awareness" or "brand recognition?"

Your best move is to fill the room and the sales pipeline with "real deal" players, not people looking for a free lunch. I recommend diligent pre-event opportunity identification and segmentation,



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custom printed invitations that are not transferable, perhaps a non-disclosure requirement, and top-flight phone communication before and after. The objective: small, elite events that attract exactly who you want and need, and that yield higher conversion rates.

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### A PLEA TO END PHONE MAIL DIRECTIONS

We all know how phone mail works, when to begin speaking, and that we can simply hang up when done. So why have companies not removed all the unnecessary, time-wasting instructions? Imagine that every time you opened your car door, a voice told you to be seated, insert the key, turn it to the right, and wait for the engine to start.

*Best Advice:* Delete the instructions. All you need to say is, "Welcome to our company \ my phone. Here comes the tone. Beeeep."

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### DIFFERENTIATE YOUR COMMUNICATION

Some business marketers still send or say the very same thing to everyone on their mail, e-mail, or calling lists. Doing so seldom produces the higher response and conversion rates generated by carefully-targeted database marketing. Indeed, if the only thing different about the message is the person's name attached to it, we're all but begging for "delete."

*Best Advice:* Analyze how you make the "act or delete" decision for each marketing message you receive. Then consider how your customers and prospects make similar choices about what you send and say. Targeted relevance always beats generic.

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### HOW TO CLOSE 2006 STRONGLY AND PREPARE FOR 2007

The US economy appears to have stabilized and the business climate feels more positive. So I recommend we take several powerful steps ...

*Marketers:* Conduct much less "mass" and "generic" marketing, much more targeted direct. Segment your opportunities first, *then* communicate, not the other way 'round. Do not attempt to "leapfrog" the prospect's consideration process. Rather, make it easy and desirable for the prospect to take the next reasonable step: visit the web site; register; order quantity one as a test; and so on.

*Sales reps:* More than ever, do not "pitch!" Rather, ask before telling and learn before selling. Prospects and customers have lots of product and service choices, so the behavior of the sales person can quickly become the "tie-breaker." Sell wisely and nicely to win.

*Managers:* Learn how to make the case for a bigger budget based on real and potential results, not activities. When competing for budget, demonstrate your department's contribution to the corporate goals. Avoid pettiness and in-fighting. When changes are afoot at your company, double the number of questions you ask the big bosses. Be relentless in seeking clarification of your role, authority, and prerogatives. Doing so helps ward off unpleasant surprises and having your decisions over-ruled.

*Directors:* Recognize that you are not merely über-managers. You must function as the strategy-execution link between the executives and the managers. Focus on cohesion and continuity. Avoid micro-orientation and mistaking activity for results. Assure that reporting is not an end unto itself, rather, a pulse-check on execution against strategy.

*Executives:* The titles "vice president" and higher must signify clarity and authority. Communicate fully and often about the "big picture." Govern with firmness, fairness, and consistency. In particular, set the rules and grant appropriate authority ... including budgetary ... not merely responsibility. Honor the authority you grant: do not "second guess" your duly authorized directors and managers. And most important, treat all employees, customers, and stakeholders according to the Golden Rule.