



Michael A. Brown's

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

First Quarter 1998 Edition

### KEEP YOUR EYES AND EARS ON THE REAL CUSTOMERS!

Too many companies are getting hung-up on the "internal customer" concept ... the notion that people within businesses have constituents whom they must serve as "customers." This view holds, for example, that MIS has "client" departments just as the company itself has external customers.

This is *flat-out wrong* and here's why: companies and the people within them have only one kind of customers ... REAL CUSTOMERS. The kind who buy things and, we trust, pay for them ... the revenues from whom cover salaries, commissions, benefits, the building, the equipment, lights, heat, and everything else.

Herb Quilitzsch, Netcom's Director of Education and Training, draws a helpful analogy: "There's a big difference between a budget and real money. You have to work within the budget. But the money ... the *real* money ... is what drives the budget. If you focus too much on the budget, you lose sight of the money. Likewise, it's easy to forget that the real money comes from real customers, not from other people who are part of your company's budget. Plus, real customers can fire us!! And we can fire them. Just try firing your MIS department."

In no way am I promoting adversarial behavior amongst colleagues. Quite the contrary, the best way to *avoid* internal friction is by aligning everyone toward real customers. Do not allow the "internal customer" thing to mislead your staff into thinking that their colleagues pay the bills.

---

### BUSINESS PARITY: THE ELUSIVE KEY TO SUCCESS ON THE PHONE

Are you equal to your customers and prospects? As professional in your career as they are in theirs? Are you prepared to communicate

with customers and prospects as a business peer? I hope you and your callers can answer "yes" to these questions, because parity is what it takes!

If you abide by the "laws" of good *Business-To-Business-By-Phone*<sup>®</sup>, you bring a number of important values to the phone communication: yourself, your preparation for the call, a powerful and compelling "reason for the call," a clear sense of what you want to achieve and what the customer/prospect will do differently or better as a result of the call, and a plan for how you want to manage the communication sequence.

So at the tactical level, the moment of truth arrives when you get your customer or prospect live on the line. *You absolutely, positively must communicate as a business peer.* Behave as an *equal*, not a subordinate. Specifically:

- Deliver your opening as planned, with enthusiasm, not breathlessness. Conduct your call in FM, not AM.
- Demonstrate great respect for your prospect or customer's administrative and support staff, but *do not act like one of them nor communicate with them as if you were.* Remember that you want to establish parity with your prospect or customer. If you behave as a peer of administrative or support staff, you'll find it almost impossible to achieve business parity with the real customer.
- Do not diminish yourself with phrases such as, "I know you're busy ... " or "Can I take just a minute of your time?" or "I'm just calling to ... " Make your case. Do not plead for access nor apologize for requesting it.
- Attend to your word choice: verbs compel attention and interest better than nouns or adjectives. Use lots of verbs.
- Make sure that each customer and prospect hears your best inflection and modulation. Inflection



Michael A. Brown's

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

First Quarter 1998 Edition

means variation in your vocal pitch. Modulation means changing your tone of voice and/or pace. A hint: listen to how the great broadcast interviewers do it.

- Ask your questions with interest rather than with emphasis on recording the answer.
- Ask follow-on questions based on the customer or prospect's responses, *not* on the next data field on your contact screen.
- Temper your enthusiasm and your questioning with humility, but not subservience.

As you adopt and enforce these business parity tactics, recognize that the issue goes way beyond technique. Indeed, achieving and demonstrating business parity often is very difficult for callers who, in their heart-of-hearts, may *never* consider themselves business peers of their customers and prospects. For example, a caller who formerly provided administrative assistance to a VP may lack the ability, the life experience, and, hence, the will, to talk "ear-to-ear" with a prospect at his or her old boss's level. Likewise, the brash "hot-shot" who acts as if arrogance equals parity may bully customers and prospects and lose you more business than he or she wins.

*Best Advice:* Make sure you have the right people assigned to the right phone activities, especially inbound or outbound. Then, to improve technique, practice, practice, practice with audio taping and critique. Also, bring actual customers into your business so your callers can meet them, talk with them, and understand that they are genuine human beings! Most are nice, smart, and eager to communicate at business parity.

---

### HOW COMPANIES MAKE IT HARD FOR PROSPECTS TO BECOME CUSTOMERS

Only one way to request information.  
Dumb, confusing web sites.

Multi-tiered lead qualification processes.  
Forcing prospects to tell their story more than once.  
Phone reps who can't execute an order because of systems limitations and/or "company policy."

Your company? Call today and let's start fixing things. (800) 373-3966.

---

### HISSES AND HOORAYS!

The "*You Shouldn't Say It If You Don't Really Mean It*" hisses to AT&T for this line: "Thank you for using AT&T, where every customer is important."

The "*Rising*" hoorays to United Airlines' staff at Denver Airport who managed to get 200+ customers home to San Francisco despite mechanical problems and a thunderstorm.

---

### GREAT FOR EXECUTIVE SESSIONS!

"Make Integrated Marketing *Really* Take Off"  
"Profitable Database Marketing By Phone"

**Check 'em out! (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](http://www.michaelabrown.net)