



Michael A. Brown's

Business To Business By Phone[®]

Third Quarter 2000 Edition

RECRUITING AND HIRING FOR THE PHONE AND BEYOND

Finding, luring, and landing competent, energetic callers is very hard nowadays. There are midwestern cities where almost every adult who could possibly work at a call center either is doing so or already has done so. In high tech communities, most of the *good* phone people are gainfully employed (some near San Francisco are earning 6 figures!) while the bad callers keep bouncing from one desperate startup to another. To meet your recruiting and hiring challenges, I recommend a 2-part approach:

First, get past trying to find new callers in the same old places. For example, most mid-size and larger call centers are suffering the same hiring challenges you are. So their "lowest common denominator" likely is below your required performance level. The risk is even greater in trying to recruit from consumer "telemarketing." It's usually too expensive and time consuming for you to get the "dialing for dollars" crowd to do the thoughtful, respectful, B-B marketing or sales you want and need. Also avoid general temporary agencies. They are people brokerages that, of necessity, put production first. Even the supposed phone placement specialists don't really "get" what *Business to Business By Phone*[®] is all about.

Instead, seek new phone staff from industries where questioning, listening, and conversational skills are *required* for success: travel and hospitality, health care, and journalism. Airline and hotel reservationists, business travel agents, medical and dental office assistants, and news reporters (all underpaid) often bring enthusiasm and fresh outlooks to your phone-based marketing and sales efforts. Also consider trying to spirit good callers away from your competitors. But do so carefully, because you often get unfortunate "baggage" from their old company, and an attitude as well.

As part of your revitalized recruiting, write a brand new ad or hire me to do it for you. Run the ad under "marketing" or "sales" cross-referenced to "business development." Don't include the prefix "tele" even if the newspaper tries to force you. Run the ad no more than two Sundays in a row. Create an inbound phone mailbox with a complete description of exactly what the phone positions are and are not. Then invite and encourage candidates to record their *verbal resume* to convince you why you should consider them. If they are unwilling and/or unable to do so, you don't want them anyway.

Second, begin strategically repositioning your phone program into something more distinctive and desirable within your company and in your local and regional labor marketplace. That's because if your call center is perceived as routine and average, you'll get "average Joes" and high turnover. So rewrite the phone marketing and sales charters. Add the requirements that phone reps also respond to and compose marketing e-mail, and conduct tours of your web site. "Phone-only" is yesterday's job.

Besides full-time, offer part-time, flexible employment. Provide training to enable administrative staff to advance onto the marketing team. Challenge your younger marketers to leverage their education and phone experience into full account management. Net: apply your marketing wisdom on yourself and your company! Put the good phone word out. Promote phone like crazy.

NOW LET'S TALK ABOUT MONEY

From the first "telemarketing" operation decades ago, most call centers and their people have been relegated to second class corporate citizenship and the lower pay scale that goes along with it. *Those days must end now!* I am convinced that reps' compensation must represent their value to your company in your marketplace for what they do.



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So worry less about national salary surveys, local pay scales, and HR's notions of "comparable worth." Instead, upgrade *your company's* phone-based marketing and selling and pay your phone staff well. For example:

Inbound

Seminar registration with 1st level qualification \$20-25k
Order acceptance, inquiry-order conversion \$21-28k

Outbound

Contact verification and/or seminar invitations \$20-23k
Direct mail follow-up, opportunity identification \$22-28k
Inquiry response, opportunity development \$26-44k
Multi-contact, multi-level marketing \$35-52k

Combined

Full account management *UNLIMITED!*

UNCLE SAM CARES HOW YOU PAY, AND YOU *BETTER* PAY ATTENTION!

Your phone-based marketers and sales reps must, by law, be non-exempt employees. You can pay them as much as you want to, but you must account for their time and wages on an hourly basis. Most HR departments and many managers don't know this. But the US Department of Labor does, and they never, ever lose a battle over it. Indeed, more than a few employers have been hit with huge overtime back-pay settlements, fines, and long-term governmental oversight for ignorance or willful violation of this rule. It dates from the 1930s, everyone except the unions hates it, but there is no congressional will to do anything about it. So abide by the law, adjust your comp plan, and move ahead.

FOR SUCCESSFUL OUTSOURCING

Many business marketers consider all these phone-related matters and determine that either they can't do everything themselves, or choose not to.

The question then becomes, what to do in-house and what to outsource? Here are the strategic guidelines for the "make or buy" phone decisions.

You and Only You

Full account management
Complex buy \ sell process
Collaboration (team selling)
Proprietary information for which you require non-disclosure
Customers demand substantive business and financial content and/or technical capability

Consider Outsourcing For

Consistent (but not "mass") process and content
Easily learned
Opportunity identification with limited criteria
Sudden volume, e.g., events invitations and registration
Order acceptance
Multi-contact, multi-level Opportunity Development only with specialized, proven providers of this service

PHONE PHUNNY

I received a call starting with "How ya doin' today?" followed by an inquiry about whether I intend to upgrade or replace my accounting software. "No," I told the woman, "but may I ask where you're calling from?" "Colorado!" she replied. "Good! I'll see you next week!" And sure enough, there she was, participating in the phone marketing training program I conducted for her company. She doesn't ask, "How ya doin' today?" any more.

BRIGHT MARKETERS, BIG CITY

The fall edition of the excellent *Direct Marketing to Business* conference lights up Chicago's Palmer House Hilton, Sept. 13-15. Among the best new seminars: *Sales v. Marketing Smackdown: How to Win the Integrated Marketing Wrestling Match*, and *Let Phone-Based Marketing Lead Your CRM Parade*. 800 373-3966 for info.