



Michael A. Brown's

Business To Business By Phone[®]

Third Quarter 2004 Edition

DIALS AND TALK-TIME v. BETTER METRICS

The author of the *Best Practices* manual at a Dallas-area client wrote me this message: "Our phone managers will go nuts if we mess with the talk-time metric. The big bosses all think that 70 dials and 3.5 hours is the magic formula. What should I do?"

I wrote back: "Please be assured that I am not suggesting your managers and executives disregard talk-time. Rather, I urge them to acknowledge that what really matters is not how long you talk ... it's what you *accomplish* toward your quota of leads or sales as a *result* of dialing and talking.

So multiply the median conversation length times the number of daily conversations (not dials) necessary to generate or qualify enough leads or make enough sales. For example, if the median conversation length is 12 minutes and the rep conducts 15 such conversations a day ... which absolutely is 'do-able' ... then you get 180 minutes of 'talk-time.' Thus, talk-time is a *result* of what the reps do, not the *cause*."

Best Advice: Emphasize the results and return on effort, not how many dials or clock hours.

THE WRONG WORD THAT MUST GO AWAY

One would think that by now, "solution" would have run its course as a marketing and sales word. But it remains everywhere ... in advertising, at web sites, in technical documentation, in executive presentations, and even in the *very names* of some companies. From high tech to bedding to coffee filters, marketers hawk their "solutions."

Yet its ubiquity is precisely why "solution" has utterly lost its value, and why all of the more meaningful words that "solution" inappropriately replaces go unused.

Moreover, even if "solution" *were* distinctive, it still would be wrong in marketing and sales for two

important reasons: it is ambiguous and presumptuous. Ambiguous because, except in the chemical and cleaning supplies businesses, it does not describe the product or service. Presumptuous because only customers have the right to tell us what does or does not solve their business needs.

You may be thinking, "If not 'solution,' what word *can* we use? *Should* we use?" How about the straightforward noun or phrase that actually describes what your product or service is! Software? Office furniture? Direct marketing programs? Optical equipment? Everyone understands these things. And because they understand what it is and what it does, they are more likely to consider it and buy it!

ANOTHER WORD TO BANISH

Delete "award-winning" from your marketing and sales repertoires. In both B to B and consumer realms, this overused adjective self-congratulates products and services ranging from software technical support to bread to car dealers, in each instance eliciting a yawning "so what?"

Best Advice: Recognize that an award is your decoration and people don't buy those. Better to tell prospects and customers what they get from you and how they benefit.

HOW IT SOUNDS

Create or re-label fields in your databases and contact management software for the *phonetic pronunciation* of each contact's name.

Because phone is *audio*, the phonetic field lets your reps know how names *sound*, which is more important than how they look. Indeed, consider Duke University's basketball coach, Mike Krzyzewski, who says his name sheh-SHEV'-ski. If there is any doubt, politely ask the person to say his or her name again, and to spell it also.



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And if a *rep's* name is hard to pronounce, consider adopting a "radio name." As a radio newsman, I worked with a colleague named Robert Schildmeyer. On the air, he was "Bob Meyers."

Leading: What have you seen and experienced elsewhere that you *didn't* like?

Loaded: What's it going to take to get you into this car *today*?

HOURLY v. SALARIED UPDATE

From a recent article by Leigh Strope, the *Associated Press* Dept. of Labor reporter: "More than 340,000 workers received a record \$212.5 million in back wages as a result of Wage and Hour Division investigations last year, the department said. That compares with 263,593 workers who received \$175.6 million in back pay in 2002." Some of that money went to callers!

By law, almost all phone-based marketing and sales reps *must* be hourly employees. You can pay them as much as you want to, but you must account for their time on an hourly basis, with overtime after 40 hours. You cannot get around this regulation by ignoring it or by giving your callers a fancy title.

Best Advice: Because of the extra political attention and news coverage overtime pay is receiving, I urge all clients to consult your corporate counsels to assure that you and HR are doing the right things right. Compliance beats writing big checks and suffering embarrassment for back-pay settlements and fines.

ASK LEADING QUESTIONS, NOT LOADED QUESTIONS

Leading: What are you planning to do about (a function or requirement your product addresses)?

Loaded: Do you need to have (a specific product feature you're trying to push)?

Leading: How far along are you in the consideration process? When do you want to be up-and-running?

Loaded: Will you be deciding in 1-3 months, 3-6 months, or 6-12 months?

STILL CRAZY AFTER ALL THESE YEARS

Not the Paul Simon song. Rather, some companies' crazy adherence to mass marketing when business customers and prospects overwhelmingly prefer custom communication, and when the means to do it are within all marketers' reach.

For example, I received a sample pen from a company that wants to sell me *customized pens*. But what was embossed on the sample pen barrel? "Your company name and phone number here." Crazy.

Perhaps even more than craziness, the main causes may be familiarity and laziness. Mass marketing endures because we are creatures of habit: most marketing we see is mass. Also, mass marketing allows us to be lazy: to write only one message, design one ad, prepare one call guide. Whereas in genuine direct, we have to *work* at research and individualization. But it is worth doing because it yields better response and more sales!

Best Advice: Let us take our intellectual and creative vitamins, get off our "mass" duffs, and produce custom-targeted marketing. When we do, success and self-renewing energy will be our rewards.

SMART MARKETING AMONGST THE CACTI

The event: the *Business To Business Marketing Conference*. The venue: Scottsdale, Ariz. The dates: Sept. 21-23. This is an executive-level event with a strategic (v. operational) focus. You'll benefit from sessions about phone, of course, and also direct mail, on-line interactive, advertising, database, PR, and marketing-sales integration. Check it out at www.dmab2b.org See you there!