



Michael A. Brown's

Business To Business By Phone[®]

Fourth Quarter 1998 Edition

SERVICE BUREAUS: WHY THE BLOOM IS OFF THE ROSE

Some "tele" publications still are gushing about the wonderfulness of the for-hire phone business, and how corporate phone operations soon will be replaced by near-total outsourcing. I disagree, and so do a number of you!

Indeed, several of my clients have **fired** their service bureaus! Others have scaled back their phone services outsourcing and are doing more in-house. What's happening?

First, too many service bureaus are over-promising but under-delivering. For example, an east coast service bureau touts high tech industry expertise. But their call content and quality belie a serious lack of ability to communicate appropriately with the technology executives they must call on behalf of their clients.

Second, some bureaus' business models are mismatched to their clients' requirements. A west coast service bureau which places its people at clients' locations is struggling with their on-site managers saying one thing and clients' management saying another. Whom are callers supposed to obey?

Third, some bureaus simply are in the wrong marketplace. An Illinois bureau attracted a few business to business clients, at least two of which have left because the bureau was unwilling and unable to change its business to consumer behaviors.

Best Advice: Phone service bureaus can be viable, valuable assets to your company. Some perform specific functions admirably. But be skeptical of bureaus' pitches about doing phone better and cheaper than you can. Be especially wary of claims that phone communication is their "core competency" but not yours. In most cases, who better to woo, win, and keep your customers than your own company and your own people!

Need help about service bureaus? Call **512 330-0444** or e-mail, michael@michaelabrown.net

WHAT'S IN A NAME? TROUBLE!

Texas authorities are trying to stop a long-distance company from calling itself "I Don't Care" and "It Doesn't Matter." These are common responses from consumers when the company calls and asks them who they want for their long-distance service provider.

Unwitting consumers then would be stuck with the deceptive carrier and would find out that it *does* matter. Caveat emptor!

CALLER ID FLAP CONTINUES IN THE GOLDEN STATE

While many phone customers in the US have quietly adopted Caller ID, most Californians have ignored it. The state's biggest phone company, Pacific Bell, doesn't like to be ignored. So Pac Bell launched a new offensive (ed., *noun and adjective*) called "Anonymous Call Rejection."

According to Alan Canton in the *San Francisco Business Times*, Pac Bell has activated software which allows a called party to reject your call if you block their Caller ID! Instead, Canton writes, you may hear this recorded message: "The party you called does not accept calls from blocked numbers. To reveal your number and complete your call, dial 82."

However, many subscribers are reluctant to reveal their numbers to Caller ID for fear Pac Bell will sell their name and their demographics to telemarketers. Canton alleges Pac Bell is pitching the new software to businesses in an attempt to recoup its huge losses on Caller ID and its failed promotion.

I think the whole matter may be self-correcting. Businesses that refuse calls will find their business going elsewhere fast. Consumers whose numbers become fodder for boiler-room phone mills will bombard Pac Bell with orders for unlisted numbers. (More than half of California's residential numbers already are unlisted.) And old Pac Bell ...



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well, as soon as alternative dial tone becomes a reality (not much longer!), maybe they'll figure it out.

BUSINESS CARD REVERSAL

From San Mateo, Calif., Skip Corsini notes that some business cards now show their owner's *e-mail address first!* Phone and fax follow, with traditional address *last*. Simply a matter of card design and print layout? Or an indication of how the person prefers to be contacted? Better ask!

PERFORMANCE YES, BUTTONS NO

A message to retailer Best Buy: lose the big "*I Care*" buttons worn by clerks who often don't. A similar message to Marriott Hotels, whose people sport "*Whatever It Takes*" lapel badges while it takes too long to check in.

If staff have to wear buttons to remind themselves to provide good service, the battle already is lost. And if the buttons are supposed to convey what the customer isn't experiencing, they're an insult. Buttons, badges, and sloganeering don't impress customers. Performance does.

Best Advice: Turn away the button-makers and the branding consultants. Focus instead on hiring people who actually do care. Do whatever it takes to implement service processes and systems that are easy, that work, and that keep 'em coming back.

PROSPECTS EXPECT YOU'VE DONE YOUR HOMEWORK!

Before your first call to a prospect, I strongly recommend you *visit their web site*. What's there, and what's *not* there, can directly affect your contact strategy, account acquisition approach, and call content.

Also, use the web site as a springboard to inside information about the company, its officers, and its processes. You can do this via "hot links" to other sites and with information service sites such as *hoovers.com*.

CONFERENCE RECOMMENDATION

Attend *The Business Marketing Conference*, May 16-18 at Chicago's Hyatt Regency O'hare. New sessions, new speakers, big fun. **The-BMC.com**.

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

www.michaelabrown.net 800 373-3966