



***OWEN MORRIS 'Smart Marketing' Bulletin***  
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**USING THE PHONE TO PROMOTE YOUR BUSINESS**

If you want to drive your business forward, get on the phone !

Using the telephone to support your sales, marketing and customer service – often called 'telemarketing' – is a very powerful communications tool which all businesses should use as much as possible.

However, when some people think of telemarketing they think of consumers at home receiving aggressive calls from sales people trying to sell double glazing, life insurance or time share products. Or they may think of people receiving one of those very annoying, silent or robot-sounding calls generated by a computer.

Such perceptions of telemarketing are unfortunate and are caused a lot of the time by a small number of unprofessional companies with large, cash-incentivised 'telesales' teams which are not properly managed.

In fact, most telemarketing happens away from large telesales teams and involves many different types of people who do some telemarketing as part of a wider job. For example, 'customer service' staff use the telephone as part of their job along with other business tools like a computer, email, fax and hard-copy mail. The same goes for jobs like sales executives, account managers, and territory managers.

Furthermore, many small business owners and managers – including professionals like lawyers, architects, and doctors - also extensively undertake telemarketing – even if they don't call it as such. Making a call to a customer to follow-up a letter or update a database record is actually a form of telemarketing. So is ringing up a customer reminding them to come to an appointment or seminar.



### The benefits of telemarketing

- It is a targeted and direct form of marketing. Provided you have a suitable contact list, you can reach a precisely defined target group of people or niche market without wasting lots of promotional effort and money on mass-marketing.
- The phone gets noticed and gets an immediate response. When it rings, the chances are someone will pick it up and answer it, even if it is not necessarily straightaway the specific individual you want to speak to.
- It is personal. Telemarketing involves a personal dialogue between two people, which most people prefer to mass marketing methods. Furthermore, a phone call allows the caller to build up a rapport with the other party and project some warmth and personality into the dialogue. Also, two-way communication is enhanced because both parties can listen to *how* the other is saying what they are saying, not just listen to their words.
- A phone call is a flexible form of communication. The phone allows free response by the person called and the opportunity for them to express their answers in the way they want, which should help understanding by the caller. Furthermore, the caller can adjust his/her questions or points to suit what the other person says.
- A telemarketing project is quick, cheap and easy to set up. All you essentially need is a phone, a list of people to call, and something to say. You can control how and when you want to call and you can start and stop when you want.
- Telemarketing easily allows testing and measurement. Because it is flexible, you can try out different things to say, how you say them and in what order. You can easily track and record the calls you make and the results achieved, especially – if you plan to do a lot of telemarketing – by using one of the many forms of database and customer-contact systems on the market today.

### Where to use telemarketing

Telemarketing can be used in so many ways to benefit a business. It involves both 'outbound' calling where you make the call to a customer or prospect and 'inbound' calling where customers or others ring you up.

Examples of 'outbound' applications include:

- Contacting customers to invite them to an event
- Following-up a mailing (email or hard-copy mail shot) to stimulate interest in a product, service, idea or opportunity
- Widening awareness amongst existing customers of your full range of services
- Cleaning/updating records on your customer database



- Alerting a specific range of customers with specific proactive advice, guidance or information about an issue
- 'Keeping in touch' with customers who you have not heard about in a while
- Canvassing customers' levels of satisfaction or opinions concerning your company or views about development ideas or plans you may have

#### **Examples of 'inbound' applications include:**

- Receiving general enquiries from customers – e.g. availability of products, your opening hours, etc.
- Answering specific queries from customers regarding products or services before they buy
- Taking reservations or bookings
- Taking orders / selling products or services
- Handling specific follow-up queries, where appropriate, from customers regarding their current use of products or services
- Receiving updates from customers regarding their personal details e.g. changes in name and address

#### **How to get the best results**

Here are some tips for making telemarketing work for you, focussing on outbound calling:

- The most important thing to get right is the list. Telemarketing is a targeted, personal communications tool, not a mass-marketing tool, so it becomes costly and wasteful if you use a poor list.
- Next, think about the purpose of your calling and what you are going to offer and say to the people you speak to. Make sure you have a relevant reason for calling and have a specific objective in mind as to what you would like the customer to think or do following the call.
- Before you start calling, plan what you are going to say and write it down as an overall 'call guide'. This should include a list of essential questions to ask and a list of key points you want to convey. You should not be a 'slave' to this, but it will guide you and steer you through each call.
- In your 'call guide' pay particular attention to how you are going to open the call and get the listener's attention. You need to answer four initial questions that the listener will have on their mind: 'Who is calling me? Do they know who I am? Why are they calling? What's in it for me?'. Introduce both your name and that of the company.
- Treat each call and each person you speak to as if it was the first.



- Bear in mind that the person you call may be in the middle of something – going out, preparing for a meeting, or driving, for example. Always ask if it is convenient to speak after you have introduced yourself and the reason for calling.
- Consider the best timing to make your calls to suit availability of the people you are calling and when they are likely to be most receptive or interested in what you have to say.
- Keep all calls short. Even if the other person is friendly and willing to talk, do not take up their time unnecessarily. Keep the conversation moving as much as possible.
- Use the right people to do the calling. Ideally, this should be individuals who have an outgoing personality, have a warm and friendly manner, speak clearly and confidently, are patient, can listen well, and do not easily get annoyed or irritated by other people.
- Ensure the people calling have a good knowledge of your business, products and services and so they will be able to answer likely questions from people they speak to.
- Ensure each caller records the results of each and every call they make and maintains an overall log.
- A great way to handle a telemarketing call is to imagine you are sitting opposite the person you are speaking to, outwardly smile at the start of the conversation, and do gesticulate (e.g. nod, or move your arms) as you talk because this will aid the effectiveness of how your voice comes across on the phone (for example, you will sound more sincere, lively and convincing).

### **Telemarketing performance**

Don't be put off by how some people see 'telemarketing' as intrusive: it is only so if you are 'cold-calling' (i.e. there is no advance contact e.g. a letter) or you are impolite or 'pushy' in how you handle the call. Remember too that telemarketing calls are actually welcomed by many people when they know the company calling or they are interested in what is being proposed.

Inevitably, in any telemarketing project it will not be possible to make contact first-time with everyone on your list. Other people who you do manage to speak to may be negative and may decline to speak to you. Don't try and have a conversation with someone who is obviously in a negative frame of mind: it is better to ask for an alternative time to call or just end the call and try another time on another topic. If you are trying to sell or persuade a customer to do something, be prepared for needing perhaps up to three or four separate calls before the person will say 'yes'.



To get best results from telemarketing, be sure to use the technique in conjunction with other marketing methods. When you can't get hold of a customer on the phone on a few occasions, it is valuable, for example, to count on their receiving a copy of a periodic newsletter or brochure from you.

### Stay lawful

Don't forget that – like with direct mail – you should **not** make marketing calls to individuals who have specifically told you they do not wish to be contacted in this way.

With your existing customers, you do *not* need to get each and every person's advance permission or refusal, but it is good practice to advise customers in general literature or signage that they may receive calls from you, so you give them the chance to decline such contact, if they want to.

The same goes for non-customers, but, anyway, calling such individuals without any prior contact (e.g. a letter or speaking to them in-store) is *not* generally to be encouraged, because most people dislike receiving 'cold' calls.

If you do intend to do lots of telemarketing to customers or non-customers, you also need to know about the '*Telephone Preference Service*'. This is a central list (register) of individuals (together with sole traders and partnerships) run by the government who have indicated they do not want to receive marketing calls from any businesses. You must not call anyone on this list, otherwise legal action can be taken against you.

For further information visit [www.tpsonline.org.uk](http://www.tpsonline.org.uk). You can get an agency to 'clean' your customer list against the register, but the simplest thing to do is always make sure you inform people in advance if you think you may want to make marketing calls to them, so you give them a chance to decline if they wish.

Overall, telemarketing can be a very effective technique. Like any marketing tool, though, it needs careful planning and application. If you would like further advice, please contact us at **Owen Morris**.

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