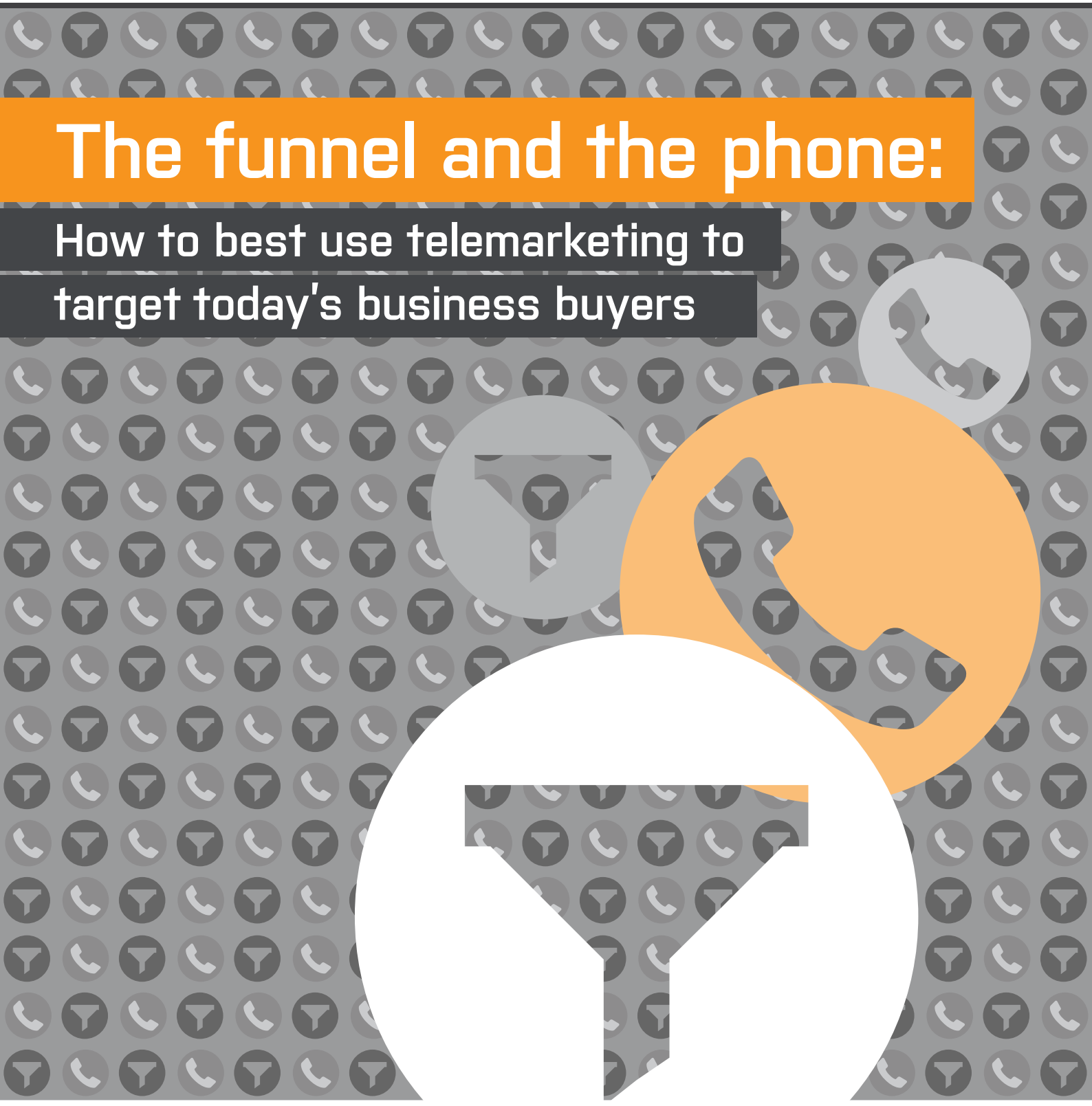
WHITEPAPER

B2B Marketing

The funnel and the phone:

How to best use telemarketing to target today's business buyers



In association with: the telemarketing company

The funnel and the phone

New technology has radically transformed both business buyer behaviour, and consequently the dynamics of the sales and marketing funnel. But despite these changes and new channels, telemarketing remains one of the most potent and powerful tools available to B2B brands seeking to generate, nurture and convert prospects into customers. This whitepaper examines the role of telemarketing in the new business buyer ecosystem, and how marketers can maximise opportunities through this channel.

While there are dozens of variations of the B2B marketing funnel model nowadays, all are based on the same fundamental principle that sees the buyer go through the stages of awareness, interest, consideration and purchase. Marketing has always sought to tap into these key touch points during which buyers are open to influence.

But while this basic model remains robust, the way in which sales and marketing departments respond is under a constant state of flux. Some even claim the funnel is no longer reliable or, more drastically, say it is 'dead', thanks to the fact buyers are now more informed, connected, and empowered than ever. This simply isn't true: the funnel is still very much alive – the fact is that because of the changing behaviour of buyers, sales and marketing now find themselves having to engage with prospects at varying touch points. This is something B2B brands must take into account when applying their telemarketing activity to a given sales cycle.

The impact of digital on buyer behaviour

First of all, let's take a look at the affect the digital revolution has had on business buyer behaviour. It has had a strong impact on the role and relevance of the funnel. Buyers are now more in control than ever and are able to access information on products and services wherever and whenever required. Crucially, they no longer need to wait to be spoon fed marketing messages.

According to a survey of 1400 carried out by the CEB, the typical B2B buyer now does not willingly engage with a sales rep until they are 57 per cent of their way through the purchase funnel – a figure that has held true for the past four years and (according to data from the CEB) is unlikely to change much within the near future.

As a result, brands and their sales and marketing teams now have to engage with prospects in a very different way. Today's business buyers are now far more sceptical about being sold to, and are anxious to deflect sales-led approaches, with the aim of completing their research and engaging at the point when they feel informed and comfortable.

"At the top end of the funnel, highly-focused, well-targeted outbound activity can also work powerfully to reach priority segments, including director-level roles that are difficult to contact via digital"

Positioning telemarketing in this new environment

These days telemarketing often carries the misconception that it's an out-dated channel, but this concept is flawed. Aside from the glaringly obvious – that a machine can never close a sale more effectively than a human being – the impact of digital means most B2B marketers rely on more, rather than less, telemarketing activity.

- **When nurturing inbound leads:** Digital technology now makes it easier to direct telemarketers to warm-up prospects. Marketing automation software means we are now able to see more easily than ever who the target market is, whether that be from knowing who has visited a website, read a piece of content or downloaded a whitepaper.

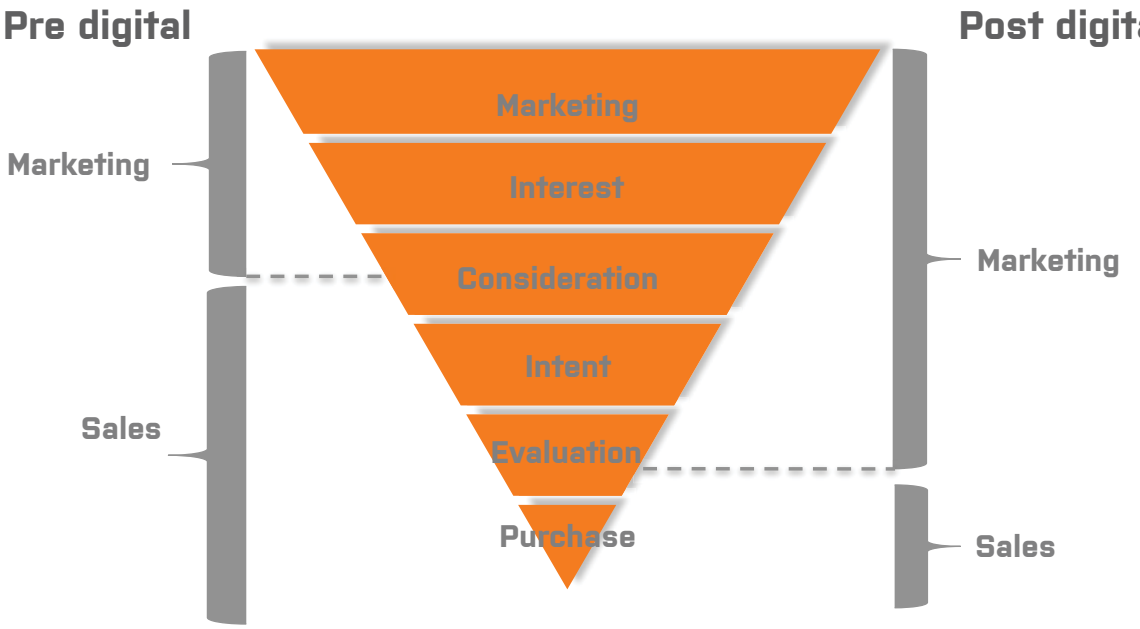
- **For detecting and nurturing outbound leads:** With the explosion in content marketing, buyers are being detected within the sales funnel at a later stage. But the more this happens, the more there is a case for telemarketing practice, because it's a disruptive channel and therefore a powerful way of getting buyers to think about your solution to their business problem.

The fact buyers are entering the sales funnel much later than they were a few years ago has important implications for both sales and marketing teams. For sales, it means the customer is largely learning on their own through digital channels and setting their own criteria – something the sales person would previously have had influence over when the buyer entered the funnel much earlier. So for sales departments, the automatic response here is to try and get in earlier, to push back on that 57 per cent. For marketers, the desire is to know how to cut through the noise at the top of the funnel and ensure the customer interacts with their content.

The new interplay between sales and marketing

In the pre-digital era, marketing would have only been responsible for driving sales mainly at the top of the funnel – at the 'awareness stage'. Once leads had been identified, sales would then take over. But in the digital age, marketing activity has trickled into lower stages of the funnel, providing customer engagement as and when it is needed; whether that be through content marketing or demand generation activity.

This essentially means that often there is an overlap, whereby a warm prospect will have been passed on to sales, based on that prospect's online engagement with a brand's content. In the pre-digital era, that would have signalled the green light for sales to go ahead and try to make an appointment to ultimately close a deal.



But in the digital age, just because a prospect has reached the interest, or even consideration stage in regard to your product, this doesn't necessarily flag the green light for sales to go ahead and make a 'final' call. There is no reason why buyers are not also downloading content from other suppliers, given the typically long purchasing cycle afforded to B2B buying and the fact they have access to all the information they want online.

In this respect, nurturing the pipeline is an exercise in itself and where the telemarketing resource can begin by making introductory calls to find out more about the buyer's needs. Given that buyers are generally now already well-informed having done their own research, they are likely to have questions, the goal of the telemarketing team is to have answers to those questions in order to move prospects further along the sales funnel. This automatically puts many of the leads that will first come into contact with your telesales team into the bracket of 'less well qualified'. But from the information gained from these individuals over the telephone, queries can be assessed and discussed so that the shape of the fully qualified lead or opportunity can be agreed and tweaked. By establishing a precise set of criteria for a qualified lead or opportunity, the sales team which receives the lead has a clear understanding of where the buyer is in the pipeline, having moved beyond the interest stage, to evaluating a purchase against a budget, a timescale and a need.

The role of telemarketing at each stage of the funnel

There is no 'one-size-fits-all' approach to integrating telemarketing as part of a marketing strategy – the sales cycle is different for every product and customer combination. But there are some general pointers to consider in regard to each stage of the purchase funnel:

- **Awareness**

Generating fully qualified leads from digital activity alone is not easy – digital activity can pick up on potential leads. But at the top end of the funnel, highly-focused, well-targeted outbound activity can also work powerfully to reach priority segments, including director-level roles that are difficult to contact via digital. The immediacy of telemarketing means it can uncover new opportunities, giving the pipeline a shot in the arm when used intelligently.

- **Interest**

Telemarketing is a proactive way to qualify interest and status. Regular contact that strategically shares the right information at the right time can develop and nurture leads throughout lengthy buyer journeys.

- **Consideration**

This is the point at which buyers will be deciding between the most likely purchases. Consequently this is where a telemarketing team can be ready with answers to questions, offer product demonstrations or provide further information in order to move prospects further along the sales funnel. It is also the stage that the buyer may have objections and concerns. It potentially provides a great picture of their buying preferences and allows brands to go back and revise the messaging and methodology in order to get the result.

- **Purchase**

If the sales team lacks capacity, telemarketers can step in to close deals, or accelerate leads and hand them back to sales in real-time. It's a commonly reported scenario that sales qualified opportunities are handed to the sales team from the marketing department. However, for leads that aren't fully qualified, telemarketers can align with sales to resurrect them. Rejected leads can also be qualified at this stage.

Other benefits of telemarketing

- **Ability to integrate with other programmes** – sales or marketing.
- **Disruptive nature** – ability to probe and gain insight.
- **Ability to handle highly complex products or services.**
- **Adaptablity/flexibility** – campaigns can be easily tweaked as more insight is gained or to give steady feed to pipeline.
- **Sales team freed up to focus on closing**, at the later stages of funnel.

Best practice tips for optimising telemarketing

In this age of real time interaction, where marketing campaigns are 'always on', it's often impossible to make assumptions about how the pipeline will convert at each stage of the funnel – it rarely works out as originally planned. The trick is to take empirical data, based on monitoring each stage of the sales process, and assess what is working and the strength of qualification taking place at each stage. A telemarketing agency's job is to help deliver that kind of insight to the marketer and make recommendations, but marketers need to be switched on too and adaptive to change, especially when telemarketing activity is being optimised with multiple channels.

As a general rule there are a few things that can be done to get the most from telemarketing activity:

1. Start the conversation across several touch points.
Make it easy for buyers to gather information from multiple touch points to maximise inbound leads.

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This could include anything from email marketing to thought leadership, video content, blogs, whitepapers or social media.

2. Determine what a qualified lead for your telemarketing team is.
Telemarketing is costly and therefore leads spoken to should be pre-qualified by your marketing team.

3. Determine a clear-cut outbound strategy.
Leads generated via outbound marketing methods, such as a company website, emails or content downloads should be designed to help facilitate

Mistakes to avoid

- **Failing to write a comprehensive brief**
  As the old saying goes, 'fail to plan, plan to fail' – all parties need a clear and explicit outline of what the campaign is aimed at achieving and in what timeframes. It's critical to encourage the agency to question the brief, in order to ensure it's fit for purpose.

- **Expecting results too soon**
  Too often marketers only use telemarketing at the very early stages of a campaign for lead generation, or they expect an immediate return. B2B sales cycles are long, and telemarketing cannot provide a quick way around this fact.

- **Failing to measure at each stage**
  Do not see telemarketing as a single process – measure conversion at each step of the funnel in order to optimise effectively at every stage of the sales cycle.

- **Breaking the lines of communication**
  A crucial piece of insight is that up to 50 per cent of qualified leads are then turned into sales leads, but without the sales team knowing precisely why they are qualified. It is crucial to talk to your buyers early to ascertain their individual concerns, in order to build a better picture of their buying preferences.

- **Using the 'pushy' approach**
  Buyers are much more resistant to pushy sales calls now than they were 10 years ago. If you are not achieving a consultative process by asking lots of questions, and then adding value by giving sensible, tailored answers and listing benefits and features, then you are not utilising the telemarketing channel to full effect. Buyers want to hear from vendors who add value, not those who are simply pushing for a sale.

a meaningful conversation with prospects. Ensuring the telemarketing team is aware of the target market, brand message, service offer and timeframe for lead generation will enable more effective outbound calls.

4. Address any sales obstacles early on.
Driving prospects toward the purchase end of the funnel is of upmost importance, but any mid-funnel challenges need to be monitored and addressed too. If sales people lose valuable talk time repeating basic information, look to provide guidance via low-cost/high-volume channels.

5. Ensure everyone sings from the same sheet.
The fundamentals of your company's business model should be understood fully by both sales and marketing to ensure that all teams understand how to maximise return on investment revenue.

Summary

On the whole, digital activity is great for gauging the warmth of leads, but at some point an actual conversation is needed and telemarketing can gain an in depth understanding of individuals' challenges and needs.

Telemarketing can be a costly channel to invest in, but optimised correctly it can be a powerful one. Far from fading against a backdrop of newer digital channels, telemarketing remains a highly effective component when it comes to driving prospects from an initial online search to purchase point.

Over the coming years, technology will undoubtedly continue to offer ways for marketers to achieve new insights into the purchase behaviour of buyers – in turn making telemarketing calls even more relevant to the recipient. The channel has a place in the marketing mix for a long time to come.

About B2B Marketing

B2B Marketing is the comprehensive information resource for B2B marketers. Its mission is to provide practitioners with the information they need to perform better and achieve more, whatever sector of the B2B space they are operating in.

Launched in 2004 as *B2B Marketing* magazine, it has since evolved into a multi-faceted resource, delivering a broad range of content in a variety of different forms and formats. Its key products are:

- Magazine
- Awards
- Research and reports
- Training
- Events
- Membership

For more information on any of these products or services go to b2bmarketing.net or call +44 (0) 20 7438 1370

About The Telemarketing Company

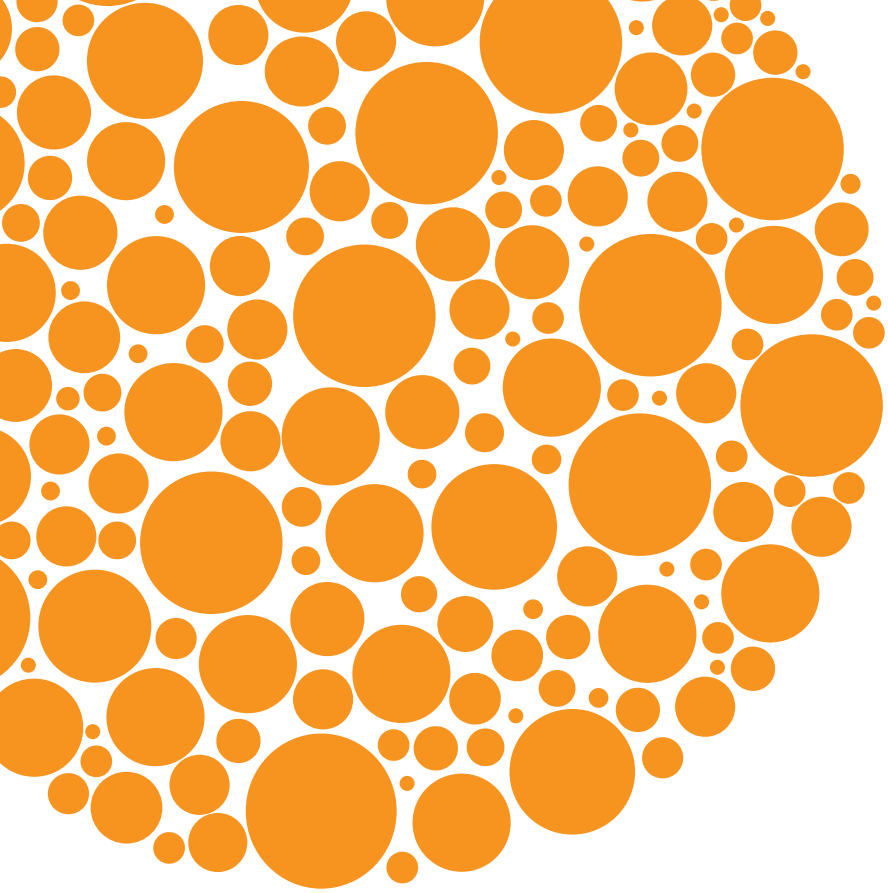
Established in 1990 and based in Brighton with 200 seats, The Telemarketing Company was rated as one of the UK's top five B2B agencies in 2013 by B2B Marketing. A voice specialist, it provides a rich range of services, in English and a full range of other languages including telephone research, appointment setting, lead generation, telesales and event attendee generation.

The company has a large and talented team with a unique profile. Agents have an average age of 38 and an average tenure of three years. They are trained using the ISMM framework (for telemarketing agents) and AITS (for research agents).

The company offers 100 per cent call recording and works for clients who range from global enterprises to successful SMEs, earning over 100 case studies across many verticals, which are published on the company website for review.

The Telemarketing Company is authorised by the FCA, holds Investors in People Accreditation and is a member of the DMA and is a Market Research Society company Partner with AITS accreditation and IQCS. We are also ISO 9001 accredited and an ISMM accredited training centre.

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