marketmakers

white paper

Establishing the right 'voice' for your company to maximise opportunities

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What kind of relationship does your company have with its prospects? If it's like many B2B organisations, your interactions are probably somewhat diverse. At one end, there's the "low touch, high volume" variety, where the prospect's journey follows a breadcrumb-trail of content, increasingly fulfilled by marketing automation. At the other is the "high touch, low volume" kind, generally undertaken by the sales force, often in the context of face-to-face meetings.

There is, however, a middle way – a channel that effectively balances volume, frequency, cost and quality of contact with the prospect: telemarketing. We are starting to see a concerted move away from packaged marketing propaganda, in favour of "talking" and "listening" to our prospects in an attempt to uncover their wants and needs, and to encourage them to share their thoughts. While the internet may have revolutionised the concept of the "marketing conversation", the phone arguably remains the best tool for supporting a real conversation that involves actual talking and listening – without the speech marks! As your website and marketing collateral reflect your brand's look and feel, telemarketing fulfils the part of your corporate "voice".

With this in mind, why is telemarketing not a core component of every savvy marketer's lead generation activities?

Even in more buoyant times, many organisations have struggled to justify the substantial overheads of a permanent in-house telemarketing operation. This is particularly evident in small to mid-sized businesses where the workload may be sporadic, with insufficient campaigns to maintain a constant stream of year-round activity. Many businesses have opted to focus solely on manning inbound contact centres, rather than taking a proactive approach to contacting prospects.

Some organisations have attempted to plug the gap by using whatever flexible labour is at their disposal to carry out some form of telemarketing. This can result in under-skilled or inexperienced personnel, such as temporary workers or students – who understandably have little immersion in the company's brand values, let alone training in how to conduct themselves on the phone – being tasked with cold-calling valuable contacts. In a B2B context, where the prospect is likely to be a time-pressed and often relatively senior business decision maker, this rarely conveys a favourable impression.

For those organisations that don't have their own telemarketing department, outsourced telemarketing offers an elegant solution. It's highly scalable – activity can be turned on and off, or up and down, as needed. It's financially agile, too, offering marketing budget-holders "pay-as-you-go" flexibility in running campaigns, rather than the unwieldy capital burden of resourcing an in-house team.

But perhaps most crucially, professional telemarketing, whether internal or external, gives your brand an appropriate and consistent voice that can help to engage prospects long before sales gets involved. The opportunities that affords your business can be substantial.

Using your corporate voice to...

...increase the credibility of your approach

Internal telemarketing departments have to demonstrate their value to justify their existence, while dedicated agencies have to deliver on the promise of telemarketing in order to sustain repeat business. This means being well-versed in industry best practice and adhering to the relevant codes of conduct as well as proper telemarketing etiquette. The processes used in formal telemarketing are structured and replicable to ensure consistency, and script pointers are professionally written to steer rather than straitjacket the conversation.

A good telemarketing operation is staffed by people who excel on the phone – who are neither intimidated by talking to complete strangers nor inappropriately pushy – and who are able to adapt their verbal register to a wide variety of business contacts, from administrative gatekeepers to senior managers. Telemarketing agents are extensively trained in techniques and tactics such as overcoming objections, closing conversations and maximising appointments, in order to be able to handle a variety of responses in a prepared and helpful manner.

But in addition to the art of telemarketing itself, an external provider should ensure its agents get completely under the skin of your business, brand, proposition and campaign objectives, preferably in close co-operation with your sales force to whom all qualified leads will ultimately be passed, to ensure a flawless handover.

This process of deep immersion means that, while not on your payroll, the telemarketing team effectively becomes an extension of your own sales and marketing operation. This seamlessness inspires confidence in your prospects that you value their potential business by showing that you are "investing" in high quality personnel to manage the early stages of the relationship.

...create a deeper, more meaningful relationship

Establishing rapport on the phone is absolutely crucial – after all, it's easier to hang up on a call than it is to physically shut a door in someone's face! Many people baulk at the thought of cold-calling because they don't have the fundamental temperament or confidence to succeed.

Some may be introverted while others may simply not have the patience, tenacity or interpersonal skills to win over a complete stranger, especially one who may not be in the frame of mind to deal with the interruption of an unsolicited call.

Telemarketers are not only hired for their skills but for their personal qualities, too. This might include being resilient in the face of apathy or negativity; being sufficiently outgoing and personable to carry a natural, fluid conversation; understanding how and when to apply initiative to a structured process; knowing when to speak and when to listen, when to press and when to exercise tact.

A good telemarketer additionally knows how to pose the right questions to extract valuable information, use that insight appropriately and adapt their approach if necessary, rather than doggedly following a stilted script that will frustrate or alienate the prospect. Additionally, the agent can allow the prospect to vent their frustrations around a particular pain-point and demonstrate empathy in response to his business challenges.

Between nature and nurture, good telemarketers are experts at laying the foundations for a lasting, favourable relationship that elevates your brand in the eyes (or ears) of the prospect.

…gather valuable intelligence about your target

Contrary to outdated ideas about telemarketing involving a hard sell, a well-timed and well-executed call, is more typically a voyage of discovery. The two-way interaction enables the agent to confirm the prospect's existing contact details to ensure they are complete, error-free and up to date.

This in itself is a highly worthwhile exercise, as it contributes to a culture of good data governance and avoids irritating the prospect in future with inaccuracies that suggest carelessness or low regard for his business.

It's also an opportune moment to establish or confirm the 'BANT' qualifying criteria of the prospect's budget, authority, need and timescale to purchase. Throughout the call, the agent can ask increasingly in-depth questions to determine any obstacles, restrictions or issues affecting the prospect, the intended direction of his business or his interactions with your competitors, which helps flesh out the prospect's profile in a way that data capture on a website registration page can't hope to achieve. This qualitative insight can help you to avoid common pitfalls such as deploying the right effort to convert the right prospect at the wrong time, or downgrading a prospect who was actually very keen to engage with your organisation simply because he fails to meet one of your binary criteria.

In wrapping up the conversation, supplementary information can be harvested, such as the prospect's availability to attend future events, or when and under what circumstances it would be convenient to call back.

…raise the profile of your brand

Employing or appointing a professional telemarketing team tells your prospects that you're taking a considered, proactive approach to initiating contact instead of waiting for them to find you.

It's an expression of your interest in their business. Recency and frequency of contact can position your brand favourably in a buyer's consciousness, and help to ensure your company is front of mind when drawing up a shortlist of potential vendors. With a good quality data list as its foundation, telemarketing also has the added advantage of not being reliant on the prospect having read, heard or watched PR or promotional activity and feeling sufficiently galvanised to follow the call to action.

Many business decision-makers today take the path of least resistance in researching a potential vendor by resorting to the web rather than picking up the phone, but would genuinely welcome a timely call from someone who can resolve his business problems.

The conversation also affords the chance to demonstrate the broader benefits of working with your company, such as your ethos, heritage, culture or any other intangible qualities that make you an attractive business partner.

Don't underestimate how using UK-based telemarketing can also be exploited as a positive brand attribute, reassuring prospects who have an aversion to the principle of off-shoring. Many retail banks and insurers now actively boast of having UK call centres, not only suggesting that as a brand, they have a noble interest in preserving jobs within the domestic economy, but also implying that the quality of the customer interaction will be linguistically and culturally more sympathetic by employing native speakers.

Whether or not this is strictly true, there is certainly something to be gained by fostering positive perceptions around your brand.

…position and promote your offering

Telemarketing can be used to great effect to create or increase awareness of your products and services, once a basic level of interest has been established.

A well-briefed agent can steer the conversation to determine how the offering can directly help to overcome the prospect's day-to-day operational or economic challenges, give his business a competitive edge or even enable him to further his own interests in terms of status promotion, financial reward or increased job security by achieving his professional objectives.

Similarly, the telemarketer can dispel any concerns or counter any objections at source, rather than allowing negative reactions to percolate in the mind of the prospect. Their argument is also likely to be more authentic and persuasive because it is voiced by a human being, rather than written in a piece of marketing literature.

Telemarketing is also an ideal vehicle for positioning your offering relative to that of your competitors and explaining clearly and unambiguously how your proposition is differentiated from others.

This can be particularly powerful if a rival organisation happens to have a more generous marketing budget than you that allows it to communicate with prospects more often or through channels that you can't afford to exploit. Sometimes it's not about shouting louder but about whispering the right message in the right ear at the right time.

Don't wait to speak until you're spoken to

While stories of cutbacks dominate the media, it's easy to fall into the trap of curbing campaign activity, but inertia can prove to be a false economy if failure to initiate a conversation with your prospects gives your competitors the first and last word.

Telemarketing carries low risk and yields immediate results, and with ROI directly attributable to activity, it's a straightforward matter to put forward a compelling business case for its deployment.

If you don't have the luxury of a telemarketing department at your fingertips, outsourcing carries the added benefit that campaign activity is kept off the balance sheet, much to your Finance Director's approval.

Appointing a dedicated agency also allows you to tap into a rich vein of expertise in areas such as market analysis, target profiling, data sourcing, assessment and campaign enhancement.

Many B2B companies have spent substantial sums of money on their visual identity – from logos, stationery, collateral and websites to signage, uniforms and liveried vehicles. An entire industry exists to create the right "look", which then spawns the need for brand guardianship to ensure consistent representation.

But how many organisations pay enough attention to their "voice"?

You may consider your sales force to be the voice of your company, but only warm, qualified leads should be favoured with their attention – the focus of sales should remain unswervingly on closing deals. So it pays to think of telemarketing as an additional pillar that supports your brand identity, one that communicates a distinctive, professional tone and a personality on behalf of your business much, much earlier on in the courtship process.

The results will speak for themselves.

For more information on intelligence led telemarketing, please contact Market Makers

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About marketmakers

As a Multi award winning telemarketing agency, Market Makers build industry-leading, bespoke campaigns for appointment, sales and lead generation requirements. With a fully results-orientated approach,

Market Makers guarantee the highest quality, most targeted business opportunities, to support the long term strategic growth of our clients.

As an agency built with direct marketers at the heart, we believe that telemarketing is not a job that simply starts and finishes with someone talking on the phone.

High return telemarketing involves market analysis and target profiling, expert data sourcing, results-focused analysis and reporting and, most importantly, continual assessment and enhancing.