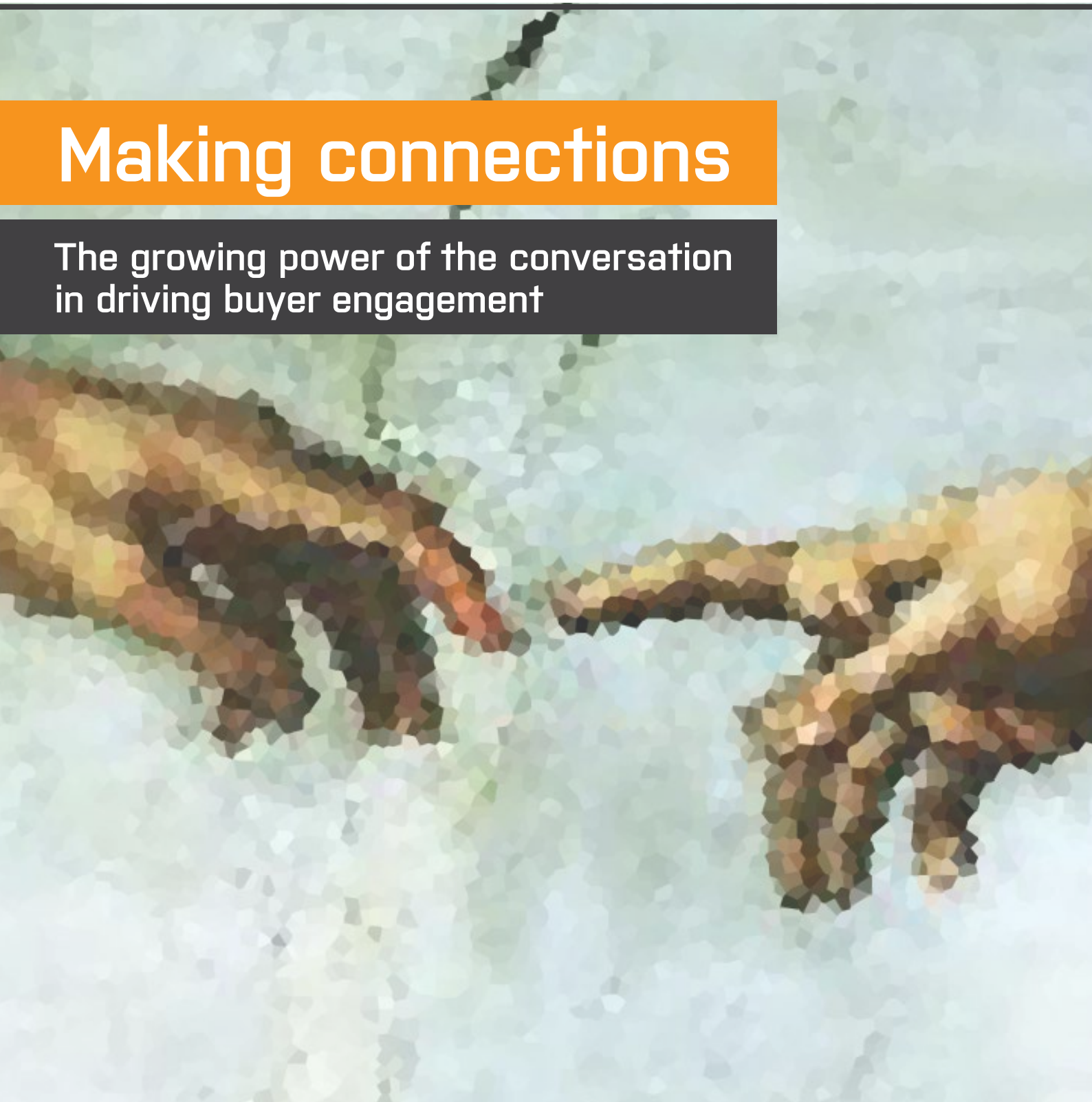
WHITEPAPER

B2B Marketing

Making connections

The growing power of the conversation in driving buyer engagement



In association with: the telemarketing company

CONTENTS

Introduction 4
The human element 5
Knowledge building and data 5
The value of feedback 6
Transparent measurement 7
Targeted messages 8
Sales and marketing alignment 9
A look to the future 11
About B2B Marketing 12
About The Telemarketing Company 12

The power of conversation – adding value through telemarketing

The complex sale, or considered purchase, is where B2B marketing truly becomes distinct from B2C – so-called 'big ticket' products or services have long lead times and complex decision making units touching numerous individuals in various different roles and functions. No surprise, then, that conversation, dialogue and engagement are critical to turning a awareness or interest into action – this is why the role of the salesman or woman remains critical in B2B.

But it's not just in sales where conversation has long been recognised as important in B2B – it can also have dramatic benefits for marketing. And the chief (and arguably only) means by which brands engage prospects in dialogue has, until very recently, been through telemarketing. In the pre-digital age, from the 1970s to the 1990s, other forms of marketing were almost entirely one-way traffic.

However, telemarketing got a bad name, largely on the back of abuses by consumer brands; cold calling, auto-dialling, etc. B2B brands were less guilty, but the channel as a whole was tarred with the same brush. At the same time the new wave of digital technologies and channels, which have arrived since the millennium, started to make telemarketing look jaded.

However, while there's no doubt digital channels are enriching engagement experiences and offer their own advantages, they are also contributing to a communication overload. Niall Habba, managing director at The Telemarketing Company, elaborates: "There's so much digital marketing going on that contacts are saturated. A well-timed and relevant call has a greater chance of reaching the prospect than an email, and it delivers valuable insight. It's hard to think of a digital channel that provides the same level of granular feedback on why prospects may not be buying from you – which is incredibly useful information."

It is for reasons such as this that non-digital channels, such as telemarketing, are facing a renaissance – proving themselves highly effective at cutting through online noise while nurturing customers into better qualified leads. But this isn't being achieved through old-school telemarketing tactics; rather the channel has had to evolve into a far more sophisticated and integrated medium. Pete Jakob, managing director at Purple Salix and part-time marketing director at The Marketing Centre, elaborates: "The role of telemarketing can be broad and continues to evolve. Where it was originally about cold calling a list, increasingly we see telemarketing being used for higher value activities that require more in-depth domain skills – for example, appointment setting, project



NIALL HABBA
MD
THE TELEMARKETING COMPANY

"There's so much digital marketing going on that contacts are saturated. A well-timed and relevant call has a greater chance of reaching the prospect than an email, and it delivers valuable insight"

exploration, and most critically for nurturing early stage leads until they are truly ready to pass to sales."

Here are six key ways telemarketing can continue to add value to the B2B marketing mix.

1. The human element

Against a digital backdrop, the B2B buying cycle – particularly high value, complex sales – remains lengthy and multifaceted. Digital is brilliant at creating an abundance of touchpoint opportunities but central to gaining trust and nurturing a prospect through the purchasing funnel is building a meaningful relationship; many argue this can only really happen through human contact. Telemarketing acts as the most effective hand-off method between a brand's digital tactics and the point in which its sales team step in. It is the need for human touch during various stages of the B2B buying cycle that plays to the strengths of telemarketing in the digital age. Habba believes high quality human interaction makes a big difference in the B2B arena. He champions the power of conversation when he comments: "Telemarketing is a highly effective way of identifying prospects because you need to get 'under the skin' of an organisation to really understand the complex matrix of decision makers, influencers and budget holders."

Unlike many other marketing channels, telemarketing offers real-time, two-way and dynamic dialogue. While digital mediums such as social media may also boast these advantages (to a certain level at least), they do not allow for tone, innuendo and interpretation as much as a vocal exchange. "An online exchange isn't the same as a verbal conversation," explains Habba. "Anyone who has received an email in block capitals and wondered if the sender was angry or had forgotten to turn of caps lock will tell you that written communication, no matter how dynamic, is not the same as speaking to someone. Tone, inflection and mood are all important considerations that are difficult to pick up in an online chat, and building any kind of rapport can be tricky. This means that good quality telemarketing delivers different results to a skilled operator working an online exchange."

It is factors such as tone-of-voice – unique to human conversation – that better identify a prospect's state of mind and their propensity to buy at any given stage of the purchasing cycle. Leveraging these underlying qualities of human conversation enables the lead process to become much more efficient; warmer leads can be fast-tracked to a sales colleague, while non-targeted leads can be more quickly identified and disqualified.

2. Knowledge building and data

The ability for telemarketers to quickly react and respond to dialogue as it occurs means new opportunities can be exploited much more seamlessly. Not only does this improve the customer experience but it can also prove to be a highly lucrative method of boosting ROI. A scripted approach to a



PETE JAKOB
TITLE
PURPLE SALIX

"Where it was originally about cold calling a list, increasingly we see telemarketing being used for higher value activities – e.g. appointment setting, project exploration, and for nurturing early stage leads until they are ready to pass to sales"

telephone call therefore throws up clear disadvantages. It places significant limitations on being able to adapt the conversation when a prospect deviates from obvious responses or asks unexpected questions, and the knock-on effect is loss of resonance. Scripts were once the mainstream approach, and while there are still many telemarketing teams that see value in them, the brands seeing a bigger return on their telemarketing activity are the ones who invest the time to train and empower their front-line staff or agency to conduct intelligent conversations.

Fiona Stevens, partner and group account director at The Crocodile, suggests scripts still have their place but they should play a far more subtle role. "There is still a misconception about the skills of telemarketing and about things like scripting. Scripts as a baseline are helpful – but if the telemarketing team is good the call recipient will never hear or feel the script in the background."



FIONA STEVENS
PARTNER
THE CROCODILE

"There is still a misconception about things like scripting. Scripts as a baseline are helpful – but if the telemarketing team is good the call recipient will never hear or feel the script in the background"

This shift towards knowledge-building and better understanding the painpoints of customers, rather than relying on prescribed conversation is how telemarketers are differentiating themselves from peers back in the cold-calling era.

Facilitating this knowledge-building is the vast amount of customer data now available. Brands know far more about their target audience than ever before and they can use this intellect in order to drive higher engagement levels across all of their marketing activity. Nowhere is this more effective than in telemarketing where creating the 'personal appeal' plays an important part in its success. By leveraging both explicit and implicit data, it means telephone conversations can be expertly tailored to the individual in order to build rapport and trust. As Shane Redding, director at Cyance, articulates: "The wealth of data we have today means cold calling is no longer the only option available to B2B brands."

3. The value of feedback

The two-way flow of a telephone conversation facilitates an open and honest exchange, which allows prospects and customers to give feedback quickly and hassle-free. It also allows them to provide their opinions more discretely or 'off the record' unlike on social media platforms, for example, which presents it in the public domain. This may be of value when discussing price points or return on investment. Dynamic telemarketing can create more of an intimate conversation than would otherwise take place using digital channels, and this again can help foster trust in a brand.

Feedback generation gathered through meaningful conversations has clear advantages to businesses. Surveys and research are lengthy processes whereas a telephone conversation enables a business to find out immediately what prospects and customers think about the brand or its products. Crucially, collecting this insight in real-time allows brands to act on it much more promptly. Where buyer resistance and objections to propositions are revealed, feedback can be used to create

new campaigns that specifically address these issues, or even more immediate to that, other ongoing marketing activity can be leveraged to help strengthen the proposition. For example, if a buyer is having trouble understanding a particular benefit of a product, or they're unsure it's the right choice for their business, the telemarketer can quickly signpost to existing brand content (e.g. online case studies) to help educate the buyer and in doing so help support wider content marketing activity.

Customer feedback also plays a vital role in product development. Insight gathered through conversations can help brands decide on how and when an existing product may need upgrading, as well as identify any new market trends that could be exploited with a new offering. Leveraging the conversation for the purpose of research and development can help a business maintain relevance in the marketplace, while at the same time provide it with the opportunity to come up with new solutions to differentiate itself from competitors.

Customer satisfaction is another important element of feedback. Online forms and traditional questionnaires can be useful tools for discovering propensity to renew or maintain a business relationship. However, unlike real conversations they do not allow for anecdotal feedback or emotional rather than functional satisfaction, which may otherwise more accurately show the level of commitment to a brand. The role of emotion in B2B is increasingly being recognised and it's clear to see how this fits within a telemarketing environment that is led by human interaction. By better understanding customer satisfaction through these factors, strategies can be put in place in order to boost customer retention and reduce churn.

"The role of emotion in B2B is increasingly being recognised and it's clear to see how this fits within a telemarketing environment that is led by human interaction"

4. Transparent measurement

At a time when marketing investment and revenue is being scrutinised, the fact that conversational feedback is easily measurable should not be overlooked. Metrics from some digital channels such as social media are often challenging to obtain, whereas telemarketing activity is a lot easier to track due to its transparent nature. This can prove useful in the early

Top tips to maximise the conversation

As more B2B brands recognise the power of conversation, they will undoubtedly want to examine their telemarketing techniques and tactics to establish best practice and crucially boost ROI. So what should brands be doing in order to maximise the opportunities presented by telemarketing?

"Telemarketers need to earn the right to engage prospects/customers once they're ready to talk"

- **Create buyer-centred conversations**. Instigate intelligent discussions that see the prospect do most of the talking. Telemarketers need to earn the right to engage with prospects/customers once they're ready to talk. One way to do this is by staying abreast of topical issues and current affairs (e.g. budgets, economy, legislation, etc). Ask questions about these hot topics in order to establish a need for a product or service.

stages of a campaign if metrics reveal the need to adapt messaging. Changes can be made quickly and this increases campaign efficiency.

Habba suggests there are metrics, however, that many marketers overlook or else focus on unnecessarily. He explains: "There are a huge number of metrics that can be measured in telemarketing. In fact there are so many that marketers are often confused about the way that they behave and cascade into each other, and they consequently monitor metrics that don't really drive ROI. By way of example, telemarketing is very rarely a 'one hit' channel – most sales opportunities are realised through numerous calls and interactions. Despite this, marketers focus on the most immediate metrics, such as dial rate or DMC rate, with no view of how much pipeline is being generated or how much of that pipeline eventually converts into results. This kind of KPI myopia is damaging for campaigns."

Habba adds that conversely there are other metrics that are rarely measured and often overlooked, which could prove extremely valuable in terms of customer insight. These include how many decision makers the telemarketer is confirming/replacing or adding to the database through calling, how many email addresses they're capturing and how many contract review dates or incumbent supplier info they're pulling together.

"Telemarketing activity can promote greater representation of a brand because the brand can be defined in a way that best resonates with an individual prospect or customer"

5. Targeted messages

Brand positioning is critical to helping businesses occupy a distinct position within the marketplace. Telemarketing activity can promote greater representation of a brand because the brand can be defined in a way that best resonates with an individual prospect or customer. This is particularly important because buyers are increasingly faced with a barrage of solutions all claiming to address their business needs. Using the power of conversation, telemarketers can position a brand in such a way as to create a more positive overall impression of an organisation's vision and values and set it apart from its competitors.

- **Make the content drive the conversation.** It's both the reason for the call and the offer for buyers taking the next step so it needs to be high value content that gives the telemarketer something to talk about and to offer. In addition, ensure all marketing collateral, content and your online presence reflects the same message your telemarketing team are promoting.
- **Split test conversational techniques** just as you would email activity. The same principles can be used in telemarketing to determine what type and tone of conversation achieves most resonance.
- **Use dummy calls and practicing scenarios** with the telemarketing team before the campaign goes live, suggest Stevens. This, she says, will make the difference between a good campaign and a slow start.

"Ensure all marketing collateral, content and your online presence reflects the same message your telemarketing team are promoting"

As well as brand positioning, verbal conversations are also well suited to conveying specific product or service messaging. One-to-one conversations are particularly valuable for elaborating on a specific USP the telemarketer identifies as being pertinent to an individual buyer. This kind of highly targeted messaging can also help a buyer better understand a complex offering or it can highlight a topical issue that helps demonstrate the relevance of a product or service, which in turn creates a stronger sense of need or desire for it. It is yet another example of how telemarketing allows for an adaptable and personalised conversation, which is why cross-selling and upselling also play to the channel's strengths. Although these tactics are achievable through digital channels, it may not always be clear to the buyer why an alternative or additional product is of value to them when it is recommended with a generic message. A discussion tailored to the individual that allows for Q&A opportunities on-the-fly can prove extremely effective at suggesting and securing additional spend. It is also well documented that despite the growth of ecommerce, higher order value in a B2B context is achieved when human interaction is part of the marketing mix.

"It is also well documented that despite the growth of ecommerce, higher order value in a B2B context is achieved when human interaction is part of the marketing mix"

6. Sales and marketing alignment

One of the most significant ways telemarketing has evolved is how it can play a central role in helping sales and marketing activity to align. It is one of the few channels that can offer this advantage and is particularly relevant in 2014 because of the issue of sales and marketing alignment moving higher up the business agenda. The best way to capture this shift is by highlighting the growing emphasis of the term 'telenurturing' and how telemarketing has become part of a much wider lead nurturing programme in many organisations. As conversations foster more meaningful relationships, the emphasis becomes on using these discussions to grow and develop leads throughout the different stages of the sales funnel. Prospects are more effectively moved through the funnel and leads end up better qualified at the point they are eventually passed to sales. Alternatively, disqualified leads can be removed altogether if there is no propensity to buy.

- **Good briefing** is essential to creating an integrated approach to telemarketing, according to Stevens. She also advises ongoing management, monitoring and reporting are other key ingredients to achieving a consistent brand message.
- **Seek out intelligent and conscientiousness, agents** suggests Habba. He says: "Telemarketers shouldn't need many hard skills – if they do you should change the technical environment so that the least IT savvy people can operate successfully. Often a 50 year old with lots of life experience, intelligence and good listening abilities can beat the output of the brightest graduate with strong office skills, but if you make the technology hard then you will never be able to get the best out of them."

"A 50 year old with lots of life experience, intelligence and good listening abilities can beat the output of the brightest graduate, but if you make the technology hard then you will never be able to get the best out of them"

Habba summarises: "Telemarketing remains the best way of generating marketing qualified leads. It produces high-quality, top-of-funnel leads with contacts with confirmed areas of business responsibility, to feed into marketing processes and systems.

Stevens is another advocate of leveraging the power of conversation within a wider prospect nurturing programme. She highlights how telemarketing allows brands to better pre/re-qualify leads before they are passed on to often expensive field sales personnel. At the heart of the matter, she alludes, it's about prioritising how sales can best use their time. She adds: "If you are fully connecting your marketing and sales functions to work as a proper unit then it makes sense for marketing to own the initial contact in the campaign phases of lead nurturing – which then feeds sales. As an aside, having a phone-based team should give you resource to keep your data clean along the way – vital when using outbound techniques within an automation-based nurture programme."

Jakob, meanwhile, points out the risk of there being no human element in the B2B buying cycle and the impact this can have on lead nurturing. He explains: "At some stage we need our sales colleagues to take over lead ownership. To let that be the first human contact with a prospect is risky. Unless we've already used a tele-function to at least pre-qualify the lead, we are in danger of passing over a lead that is not a good use of the salesperson's time. And before we know it, all leads from marketing are declared to be 'rubbish' and not worth following up on."

The way in which telemarketing has matured into a more strategy-led channel that supports both sales and marketing activity is proving to have a positive effect on a sales pipeline and crucially helping to bring cohesion between the two business functions. It is in this area that we also find marketing automation and telemarketing becoming more intertwined with some arguing the latter provides the linchpin for the former. Redding points out: "Intelligent telemarketing is being adopted by those companies who have invested in the marketing automation tools that allow you to understand when a call benefits the customer or prospect, replacing the volume 'push' contacts of the past. Technology has reinvigorated telemarketing, with website visitor identification tools enabling follow up of outbound calls."

"Having a phone-based team should give you resource to keep your data clean along the way – vital when using outbound techniques within an automation-based nurture programme"

- **Allow significant time for training.** Be hands-on and in touch with telemarketers daily until they are fully established.
- **Form a genuine partnership** with your telemarketing agency. When it comes to working with a telemarketing agency, Stevens advises organisations interview individuals in the telemarketing team not just the management.

A look to the future

Telemarketing has evolved to become a hugely dynamic marketing channel, capable of achieving maximum resonance and establishing itself as a valuable part of the marketing mix within a digital landscape. But how might we expect the channel to continue to evolve?

"The future looks rather like the present, with telemarketing remaining one of the 'top three' channels for generating sales leads and new business appointments (this is backed up by the B2B barometer survey and B2B marketing's own lead gen survey last year)," reveals Habba. "Businesses making important investment decisions are unlikely to do so without conversations taking place with prospective suppliers, so telemarketing will remain a key enabler of many sales. Other channels and methodologies will doubtless emerge, but over the last 30 years each development (social, email, automation etc) has been strongly complemented by telemarketing, rather than replace it."

One important factor to mention with regards to how telemarketing is likely to change is with regards to the proposed new EU Data Protection Regulation. Under the proposals, all communication will need to be based on an 'opt-in' basis, which could prove detrimental for calling prospects. Habba offers the following advice: "Make sure you're 100 per cent compliant with the current data protection rules. Being compliant with current rules will make you much better placed to manage whatever form of 'tightening up' eventually results from the current regulatory discussions. Businesses should plan for opt-in consent, which means they should really be thinking about ensuring they are building a prospect 'community'. This needs to be viewed as an ongoing exercise based on the value they deliver to their prospects during the sales process, even if they don't end up becoming customers."

No matter how the face of communication evolves, as the old adage goes, people buy from people, and as long as prospects and customers are human beings and not robots, the power of human interaction should not be underestimated. By connecting with buyers as people and not just data, brands can help prospects and customer feel valued, and this in turn will create trusted businesses and long-term profits.

"No matter how the face of communication evolves, as the old adage goes, people buy from people, and as long as prospects and customers are human beings, the power of human interaction should not be underestimated in the B2B arena"

- **Create good synergy** between the telemarketing team and the marketing department before campaign activity commences. Jakob advises bringing the telemarketing and marketing teams as close to one another as possible and finding ways to create opportunities for open dialogue. This will ensure objections can be overcome in real-time and the campaign can be adapted/tweaked as it goes along.

- **Consider a balanced portfolio** of inhouse and outsourced telemarketing, suggests Redding. This allows for skills swaps and benchmarking to continually improve results. She points out that outsourcing also gives brands access to scalability and skills such as different languages, which are often difficult to recruit.

"Outsourcing also gives brands access to scalability and skills such as different languages, which are often dificult to recruit"

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:

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

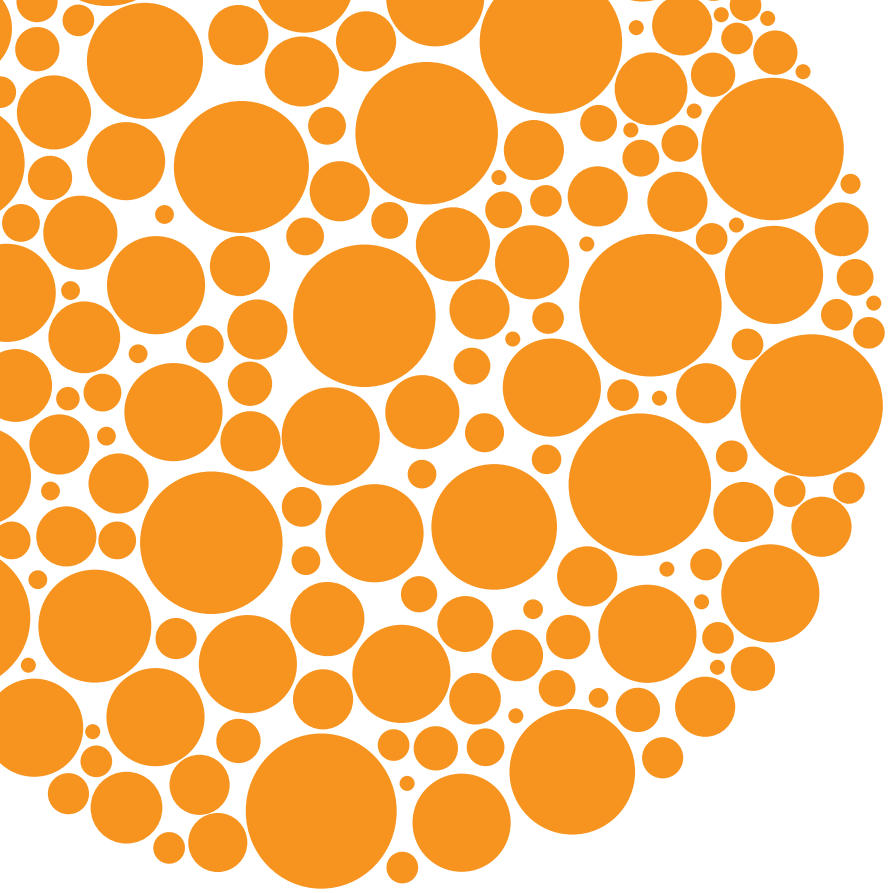
For more information on any of these products or services go to b2bmarketing.net or call +44 (0) 20 7438 1370

About The Telemarketing Company

Over 23 years, The Telemarketing Company has helped the world's leading organisations to understand their markets and to grow. It provides 'best of breed', high quality demand generation services and market research services in English and foreign languages, working on the basis of complete transparency, minimal setup costs and highly flexible, low risk contracts. The Telemarketing company is used by its clients, month in, month out, for one reason – delivering measurable and powerful results.

The Telemarketing Company offers a unique combination of voice services because it spans the entire sales cycle: MRS quality research, data capture and cleaning, marketing and sales qualified leads and appointments, telesales and customer satisfaction surveys.

For more information, visit ttmc.co.uk, email: info@ttmc.co.uk or call 01273 765 000



B2B Marketing
Clover House
147-149 Farringdon Road
London
EC1R 3HN

Tel. +44 (0) 20 7438 1370
Fax +44 (0) 20 7438 1377

info@b2bmarketing.net
b2bmarketing.net