the telemarketing company

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White Paper: Preparing for B2B Telemarketing

White paper date: October 2009
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table of contents

introduction 3
- Why should you use telemarketing? 3

Ten points of preparation 4
- Identify your prospects 4
- Data 4
- Approach 5
- Open questions 5
- Benefits vs. features 5
- Criteria 6
- The callers 6
- Call Recording 7
- Collateral 7
- Close the loop! 7

introduction

Why should you use telemarketing?

You almost certainly already are - most organisations use the phone to generate business. However, the vast majority of telemarketing within businesses is ad-hoc, fitting in around day to day tasks carried out by staff with numerous other responsibilities and the results are rarely measured or managed. As a result, it's often highly inefficient. Even organisations which employ (through an agency or directly) a team of dedicated telemarketers often see poor results because of basic mistakes which can easily be addressed.

Just like any other kind of marketing, badly executed telemarketing generates poor results. However, when done well it's been repeatedly shown to have amongst the highest ROI of any channel. It's "direct", measurable and flexible; important considerations. In addition to producing a stream of sales appointments and leads for your sales team to close, telemarketing should also deliver brand awareness, market insight and competitor and brand intelligence.

Your best competitors will be successfully using telemarketing as part of their marketing mix and you should too.

Avoid the most common mistakes…

With over 20 years track record, The Telemarketing Company is the UK's biggest B2B specialist. We have helped to grow hundreds of the world's leading organisations. We've also had to pick up the pieces of campaigns which have failed to produce, and many of them have features in common.

Whether conducted in house, or using a specialist agency, there are many pre-requisites for B2B telemarketing success.

This document is not intended to be an exhaustive guide to preparing a campaign. Instead it highlights the top ten key areas that any organisation should consider before starting any kind of B2B demand generation telemarketing…

Ten points of preparation...

Identify your prospects

Having a clear understanding of the type of organisation and the individual contacts within them that will have a propensity to buy from you is critical. If you have no idea, Telemarketing will probably just be an expensive way of confirming your lack of knowledge and you should conduct research before you consider a campaign.

Most organisations have a reasonable idea of the profile of client that they work best with and understand the principle of profiling their best customers and trying to find more potential clients which “look” similar.

Just as importantly, knowledge of the specific decision making contact for your product or service within your target organisations is crucial. Many B2B sales involve a complex decision making matrix of specifiers, influencers and budget holders, involving numerous individuals. Nonetheless, there should be a logical starting point for the dialogue; this is usually the business contact who will see the benefit of the product or service that you are trying to sell.

A common mistake is to target the contact who best understands how your offer works rather than the contact who will benefit directly from it. For example, if you are marketing finance software which provides business benefits FD’s, don’t call IT managers just because “it’s software…”

Data

Data is the foundation of all direct marketing and you should give a lot of consideration to the dataset that you plan to ask your telemarketers to use. The mathematics of telemarketing are straightforward, it’s a high cost, but high value exercise and data typically accounts for no more than 5% of the total cost of a project. Therefore it makes sense to use the best quality data you can find.

If you ask good telemarketers to call through a really lousy, out of date or inaccurate database you’re likely to spend the first few weeks of calling simply tidying up the data at enormous expense.

There are times when this is unavoidable, such as a campaign calling into an existing customer database which hasn’t been updated properly with a customer specific offer. However, the vast majority of the time, it’s better to find the best quality provider in the market for your given sector and spend what it takes to get the best data available – it’s an utterly false economy to shave a few hundred pounds as the costs this incurs multiply rapidly.

Finally, all data needs to be screened against the CTPS and any other relevant suppressions (like your current customers).

Approach

Do not make the mistake of using a "script" in B2B telemarketing. Amongst some sales and marketing professionals there is still a firm belief that using a script ensures that each call is conducted in the best way possible. In 99% of cases this is complete nonsense.

There needs to be an approach and a structure to the call, but this is very different to a script, which usually flies in the face of everything we know as marketers or salespeople about the reasons that people buy. Quality sales are achieved through a consultative, diagnostic conversation, not by mindlessly droning through a script. Scripts will produce some sales opportunities, but experience indicates that there will be fewer of them and the quality might well be poor, when compared to a natural, conversational approach.

Worse still, scripted calls often *damage* the brand that they are supposed to be promoting. Senior business decision makers don't respond well to a situation where there time is taken up by someone reading out marketing messages to them. It gets even worse when agents try to desperately to get the prospect to "stick to the script" if they are asked a question.

Some guidance on how to prepare the approach is given in the next two points. Business prospects are people and they will engage in a natural dialogue with a telemarketing agent who has gained their respect. If you are using agents who need a script, you are not using the right team....

Open questions

A key part of the approach to the call should be the questioning. Telemarketing, just like any other kind of sales process, must include intelligent, open questions. The questions your team ask serve two key purposes. They will build rapport and trust with the decision maker, quickly establishing your agents as credible interlocutors who are worth speaking to. More importantly, they should lead your prospects to start thinking about and discussing the pain points which your offer addresses, enabling you to talk about the relevant benefits of your solution and generate true interest.

Closed questions, such as "would you be interested in saving 10% off your maintenance bill", can be highly damaging. The very worst are like "Barnum" statements – questions where there is only one sensible answer; they actually alienate the prospect because they feel that their intelligence is being insulted. Moreover they provide a perfect platform for your prospects to simply answer "no" – which is a very good way to end a conversation and lose a potential sale. Even if you get the response you want, one word answers don't make a dialogue.

Benefits vs. features

Business contacts are people and people tend to buy benefits, not features. Many telemarketing campaigns (and indeed much selling) focusses on the features of a solution. Talking about benefits fires the imagination of prospects, helping them to picture their improved situation once they have bought from you. Benefits also better address the pain points that the telemarketer will have hopefully uncovered during the questioning.

Many organisations are great at promoting the features of their services – they understand them well and often find it hard to appreciate that they don't mean that much to their prospective customers. Don't make this mistake – make sure you have a clearly defined set of benefits to discuss before the calling starts.

Criteria

Many salespeople claim that they simply need a "foot in the door" to make a sale. This is rarely the case and telemarketing with this type of appointment as the objective will often fail. The same sales team who were happy to attend any kind of appointment before the campaign started will quickly start complaining about quality if there are no clear and relevant criteria applied before an appointment is generated.

Always make sure that there are criteria in place before the campaign starts so that you're sure you are generating proper opportunities to sell, not just costly trips out of the office. Using BANT (checking for **B**udget, **A**uthority, **N**eed and **T**imescale) as a basic framework is sensible. To properly qualify in each area you will first need a consensus on which criteria to apply. It's simple enough to find a way of asking your prospects the required information, either through open questioning or by asking a few closed questions ("how many servers do you have?", "do you have budget available in the next six months") once interest has been generated.

The callers

The biggest mistake made by in-house teams is to allocate responsibility to staff who also have other responsibilities. In almost every case, people who have other aspects to their role will rapidly find ways of not spending time on the phone. To be effective, Telemarketing needs to be carried out by agents who are exclusively dedicated to this role. Generally speaking, field sales people and marketing assistants do not make good telemarketers. Your callers should be picking up the phone around 20 times an hour, for seven hours per day, every day. It's not uncommon for in-house staff to make as few as five or six calls per hour, with a proportional impact on success rates.

The profile of the people you use to call is important too. This is too complex an area to go into detail, but in essence they will need to be able to get past gatekeepers to speak to DMC's, they will also need the gravitas and fluency to hold a proper conversation with a senior level contact, in some cases right up the board level of enterprise scale organisations. These skills are very hard to find and to retain, but they are available. A poor telemarketer will generate few results whilst alienating and upsetting your precious prospects. If you are not comfortable with the callers you are planning to use, don't think about starting a campaign.

Call Recording

Recordings of all the calls made during a campaign underpin quality control, enable improvement through feedback and coaching and provide an irrefutable audit of what was said by both parties during the call. Conversely, if calls are not recorded, you have no way of gauging or improving quality.

There are numerous call recording solutions available if you're running a campaign in-house and any specialist agency should offer you free access to call recordings for any work they do for you. Don't even consider running telemarketing without call recording in place.

Collateral

Like all DM, Telemarketing works best as part of a marketing mix. If you have no website and no electronic or hardcopy literature to send interested contacts, you will find it exceptionally difficult to produce results. Most telemarketing contacts will need to be spoken several times to warm them up before committing to a call or appointment and exposing them to some kind of marketing collateral is a crucial part of the process.

Make sure that you have relevant, punchy marketing materials to help your telemarketers to drive results.

Close the loop!

Before you start a campaign, make sure you have the time and mechanisms in place to provide clear, structured feedback to your calling team. A full closed loop tracking system is easy to set up and will deliver two key benefits. Firstly, it enables you to properly track the results of your efforts. This obvious requirement is often overlooked – particularly in sectors with long sales cycles. There are numerous lead tracking and CRM platforms available which will help, but even if you're just using a spreadsheet, measuring overall program ROI is imperative.

Just as importantly, feedback, provided directly to the callers, is the basis of the continual improvement which is required to keep driving results. If your sales team are attending appointments set by telemarketers, make it part of their role to provide structured feedback on each opportunity. This can be as simple as a three level grading of quality, but the more actionable information the sales team can provide the better.

Finally, you need to be prepared to put time into analysing the results, listening to call samples and driving feedback to the team. Good campaigns evolve and develop, sometimes needing daily refinement before optimum performance is reached. Be sure that you are in a position to give the time and energy required by your agents or your agency and you should see great success.