



## **Six Ways to Conduct Successful Telemarketing in a Do-Not-Call World**

The National Do-Not-Call Registry has been in force for a year. Tens of thousands of companies, like yours, have made adjustments to comply. They believe they're done. Are they? Are you?

In a do-not-call (DNC) world, how does your enterprise make pleasant and productive telephone contact with prospects and customers? After all, it's easier to acquire and retain customers if they readily will speak to you.

I've outlined several possible answers to this question. Some involve very different ways of doing business that, once tested, can boost profitability. Feel free to use and adapt what you think may be suitable for your company.

### **Dealing With Consumer Resistance**

Although it reduced employment in the telemarketing industry, the DNC list tapped into consumers' frustration and gave them a way to act on it. Was this frustration with highly professional calls for companies and products or services that were of real interest to the individual?

No.

Consumers liked such calls. In fact they bought or became qualified leads, sometimes in double-digit percents. Consumer frustration occurred with calls that were of little or no interest—calls that converted at 2 percent to 3 percent. These were gratuitous calls in the view of many receiving them.

The way to succeed at overcoming consumer resistance is for your calls to be the kind that interest the recipient. This means segmented, modeled and even individualized calls.

Here's another way to look at this: If your current average conversion rate is 3 percent, it is likely composed of segments that convert at 10 percent or higher and other segments that convert at less than 1 percent. If you use modeling to identify and eliminate the unprofitable, low-conversion segments and call only those most likely to convert, your cost/sale becomes much lower because you don't waste calls on those who don't buy.

Going further, a company can use segmentation, modeling and individualization to differentiate subgroups among those most likely to buy, as well as to craft offers and scripts that are of particular interest to each group. When I did this with a campaign for the AMA's American Medical Directory, varying the script based on the market segment, we produced sales far in excess of client projections.

The way to fail at overcoming consumer resistance is to take the shotgun approach: Spray great numbers of calls in all directions because someone on some list will buy. Your company will get a few sales this way, but at a cost. The shotgun approach drives up the cost-per-sale, reducing profits; it also reinforces and hardens consumer resistance to all calls.

Of course, there is one technique your enterprise can employ to outright avoid consumer resistance in a DNC world. Circumvent cold calling! Use direct mail, e-mail, advertising or the Web to get consumers to call you or to request a contact via a Web response form. Compare the cost-per-call, particularly the cost-per-sale or cost-per-\$1,000 sold. A softer sell to an inbound call (or requested outbound call) may generate a greater return for some businesses than pure outbound calling.

### **Who You May Call Affects How You Call**

Who companies are allowed to call affects how they should call, specifically their offers, scripts and sales goals. This is not a compliance review (for that, consult your attorney, compliance officer and/or consultant), but an outline of

who you may call to help structure how you call them. The general categories of phone numbers that companies may call are:

Companies also may call those on the DNC Registry who have given your corporation written permission to call. NOTE: Please remember that as of Jan. 1, 2005, the rules change. The minimum interval for scrubbing against the DNC registry changes from every 90 days to every 31 days.

Consider each of these three categories as three different calling campaigns. Each requires different communications and changes in the call guide/script and perhaps the offer. Each will have different sales goals, since customers usually convert at a higher rate than prospects, and prospects at a higher rate than cold calls.

For customers, craft your scripts and offers to acknowledge and reward their past patronage. For recent prospects, remind them of your relationship early in the call, so they understand your contact is not a cold call and treat it differently. If you are calling non-DNC registry numbers cold, you will need to introduce your company and product before you can introduce the offer, which might require the use of direct mail sent shortly before the call.

## **Six Keys to Successful Calls**

Here are some keys to calling in a DNC world.

### **1. Have a good reason for the call, from the customer's perspective.**

Many telemarketing calls begin to end within a few seconds. Why? The consumer does not perceive any value in the call due to a combination of the telemarketer's tone (often impersonal, sometimes overly familiar) and the content of the message. In style and substance, there must be high value to the prospect for a call to continue and have a successful outcome.

### **2. Construct a great offer, one that appeals to the individual consumer.**

If your firm is offering the same mortgage package as everyone else, you will make sales of opportunity—you simply called on the day at the time that a prospect was interested and got there first. This is an expensive way to call and sell.

However, if your offer is much better than what others present, you'll make more sales. For example, if your mortgage refinance package also includes a three-year home warranty on household appliances that eliminates repair bills, you have a superior offer that solves a second consumer need. Be creative, and try to develop offers that will convert at double-digit rates.

### **3. Introduce the company and offer before you call.**

It is nearly impossible to introduce a company, product or service, and offer—and close the sale—on a single call. These are just too many communication objectives for a single call. The telephone is an excellent medium for cultivating relationships, removing obstacles to buying and closing sales. So even if your company is well known, consider prefacing a call with direct mail to introduce the product and offer.

Today, the U.S. Postal Service can notify your company when Standard mail has arrived at the local post office for delivery, so you can time your calls to a consumer to occur within a day or two of receipt of your mailer.

### **4. Empower reps to engage in a meaningful dialogue.**

When receiving a call from a telemarketer who sounds as if he or she is reading a script, most consumers automatically identify the call as unwanted and impersonal. If you need to use a verbatim script, teach reps to read without sounding like they are reading. I learned this during my early career in radio—it can be taught.

Empower and train reps to engage in a meaningful dialogue. This will involve the use of call guides (bullet-point outlines), questions to guide the conversation and training on how to provide structure to the interaction.

### **5. Call the right person with the right offer.**

Consider segmenting or mass-customizing your offers based on data, so they really appeal to the individual. Put database overlays, modeling and data management tools to work for your enterprise to achieve better results.

### **6. Use the golden rule of sales.**

Before you finalize a list, call guide/script and representative selection for a campaign, think of the golden rule: Do unto others as you would like done unto you. If you were on the list, would you want to receive a call using that call guide or script from one of those reps? If not, adjust your program so that you can honestly answer yes. If you can answer yes, so will more of your prospects, resulting in more sales.

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