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# PROFESSIONAL TELEPHONE TECHNIQUES

## *Communication is a two way process Information is a one-way process*

The phone is probably the most used tool in modern business. 25 million business-to-business calls are made every day in the UK (Source: BT). Not everyone admits to being confident or totally proficient in their use of the phone so it is worth looking at why phone skills are vital for effective business communication. This is largely because it is a (relatively) cheap and efficient way of contacting many customers in a short period of time, giving information quickly and effectively and receiving instant answers and hopefully sales.

The modern telemarketer must remember that the phone communication is different from face-to-face communications and must adapt their communication to maximise on the potential the phone gives us.

### **As we deal with customers over the telephone, we need to remember that:**

1. It is a substitute for face-to-face conversations. Therefore we need to work at finding ways to compensate for what we are missing out on:
  - we cannot see facial expressions, manners, reactions
  - we cannot see what the other person is doing
  - we cannot lip-read what the other person is saying
  - we cannot use illustrations to help them understand

In fact, the only sense we can use is hearing - the one that requires the most concentration! We must speak clearly to ensure our communication is fully understood by the customer. The phone creates a temporary disability because the customer can't see what's happening on the other side; they are therefore more likely to be confused by poor communication and frustrated by calls that may be perceived as 'wasting their time'.

2. Many customers feel uncomfortable using the telephone. They may feel threatened by the speed and conclusiveness of a telephone call - it's over before they've finished collecting their thoughts. A phone call is on average 20% quicker than a face to face conversation because we don't have the visual element to slow down the conversation when, for example the salesperson is looking up some information on the computer. Many sales are lost because the customer felt pressured to make a decision without knowing the full facts.
3. **Four important factors of telephone Customer Service.** Customer service is essential in tele-selling. No one likes to be sold something by someone with the 'gift of the gab'. They may come across as flippant and uncaring. We like to feel that the sales person cares about our needs and is looking to satisfy them with their products. Our customers pay extra attention to the four factors below, to compensate for not being able to see what's going on:
  - **Promptness** - How quickly we can resolve the customer's current problem; managing the customer's expectations by giving deadlines of delivery and ease of service.
  - **Courtesy** - Being polite and making the customer feel valued; giving reasons for all actions/instructions and using courtesy language; please, thank you etc.
  - **Organisation** - Having sufficient product knowledge to deal effectively with the customer's questions, queries or complaints.
  - **Helpfulness** - Showing a willingness to deal with and resolve any issues the customer voices. To quickly produce actions that satisfy not confuse. A pleasant, helpful tone of voice is very important to let the customer know that you wish to help them.

These are not the only factors that create good Customer Service during the sales process. You must also remember that the customer is more likely to put the phone down if they feel dissatisfied by the service they received. The basic fact about telesales is **WHEN THE PHONE IS PUT DOWN - THE SALE IS OVER.**

### **Other factors affecting your phone effectiveness**

- Part of the message may be lost because visual communication is absent. You may be distracted, and then not give your whole attention directly to the customer. You therefore risk losing vital parts of information which make up the whole message.
- The fact that the connection may be poor means that it may be difficult to hear all that is said by yourself or the customer; this can cause distraction and irritation.
- Your environment can greatly affect the quality of your phone communication, especially if it is noisy or there are distractions.
- The subject matter (which may be private or sensitive) may be received in a situation where the recipient does not want to speak openly.
- If a call is taken from a customer when you are in the middle of something that can be continued during the call, e.g. typing, you may give more attention to that than to the customer. The customer may realise that your attention is not fully on them.
- The customer is annoyed at the inconvenience of the timing of the call. This is especially relevant if you are calling them on their mobile phone when they are driving or in a meeting.
- The recipient may feel hostility towards the caller which prevents the message getting through or there may be an unwillingness to accept what is being said.
- There may be unwillingness by the recipient to accept the speed at which he/she is being asked by the caller to make a decision.
- Jargon is used by the salesperson that may alienate potential customers who are not used to it.

People are very receptive to advertising messages but most would claim to be wary of telephone selling or telemarketing. If we were to look at the differences between phone marketing and television advertising we may be able to understand:

- the challenges which people face
- why there is a reluctance to buy over the telephone

### **COMMERCIALS**

The difference of our perception between T.V./radio advertising and direct sales

- We 'invite' adverts into our homes both the programmes and the advertising
- We are in control as we have the on/off switch
- Many ads are mini-programmes and have an appeal and entertainment value
- We appreciate the creativity in many ads
- We need no direct input
- The advertiser has a direct interest in trying to create demand for their products from the viewer
- Because of the cost of the ads, this infers that the product must be of good value
- Few adverts last that insult the intelligence of the viewer



## Session 5

	Opening the call and arousing interest	Action Required
5.1	<b>EXERCISE 6:</b> Discuss the importance of the first minute of the sales call; that gaining interest and maintaining control of the customer is vital to sales success. Refer to ‘ <i>Opening The Call And Arousing Interest</i> ’, Manual pg.24-25. Delegates to complete ‘ <i>Attention Grabbers</i> ’ exercise, manual pg.25 – allow 10 minutes.	<b>Manual pg. 24 - 29 / Slide 33-40</b>
5.2	<b>EXERCISE 7:</b> Explain that having a structure for the first minute helps with consistency of selling and helps to keep control of the customer’s reactions. Refer to ‘ <i>Stages Of An Effective Introduction</i> ’, Manual pg.26. Delegates to role-play ‘ <i>Opening your Sale</i> ’ exercise, Manual pg.26 – allow 10 minutes.	
5.3	<b>Optional:</b> if it is relevant to your group, you may wish to discuss the ‘ <i>Telesales Scripts</i> ’, Manual pg.27-28, with delegates completing the relevant exercises on these pages	
5.4	<b>EXERCISE 8: Qualifying the Customer -</b> Discuss with delegates the pitfalls of trying to sell to someone who cannot make decisions. Refer to ‘ <i>Qualifying the Client</i> ’, Manual pg.29. Delegates to complete ‘ <i>Qualifying the Client</i> ’ exercise, Manual pg.29 – allow 10 minutes.	
<i>Timings 45 minutes</i>		

SPECIAL INSTRUCTIONS FOR ROLE-PLAYING
<p>Role-plays are important for improving communication skills, however, not all delegates feel comfortable doing role-play. We find that splitting the delegates into smaller groups (2-3 people) and starting the role-plays at the same time removes some of the fear/awkwardness for delegates.</p> <p><b>TIP:</b> You may have to run the role-plays throughout your training course without the benefit of an actual phone system. We find that placing role-players back to back but within ear shot of each other is sufficient for an effective role-play.</p>

SAMPLE