



HIGH-YIELD METHODS

for customer-aligning business strategy, process & technology

Just One “Touch” Over The Line

Several days ago, my car dealer—or more correctly, the dealer network’s contact center—called suggesting that I schedule an oil change and tire rotation. Courteous, on one hand, but irritating on the other. In fact, I’d just had that very work done 2,500 miles ago. When I told this gent that, he signed off by saying, “I’ll call back in a couple weeks.” Like I’m going to drive to California and back next week so I need an oil change? Very irritating. Plus, it was normal people’s dinner hour, and it was on our home phone.

However, I calmed down quickly because this dealer network just happens to be our client and is actually trying very hard to eliminate gaffes like this. But it did set me to thinking. How many customer (or prospect) touches like this one is one too many?

What’s “too many?”

The answer that immediately popped into my head is, “It depends.” It depends on the customer. Take me. I’m a bit extreme on this topic. I believe our government is granting First Amendment rights like they were lollipops in the dentist’s office. Hey, as far as I’m concerned, if we pay for our telephone, and we pay for our service, this stuff is ours. Meaning we get to say whether organizations can call our telephone over our phone service—and that means all of them, no exceptions. Politicians included.

Fortunately for organizations wishing to telemarket, I’ve over the top on this. In fact, I’d never advise a client to assume that call recipients even remotely resemble me. But who do they resemble? Can we build a composite model describing the median call recipient? Of course we can’t. And if we could, we’d still be overcalling half the population (minus 1) and under-calling the rest. To make matters worse, the range of recipient reactions to

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telemarketing calls is so broad that no matter what policy we decide to follow, we're going to whiz off heaps of people, at home and at work as well.

Two very different alternatives

So now what? Here's what most organizations do. They say "screw it" and call whoever they want whenever they want, unless you're on an applicable DNC (do not call) list. And even that doesn't stop some yo-yos. Of course, when they call me when they shouldn't, they wind up wishing they hadn't. Like the call I got the day after the auto service "touch." A financial service we have an account with called for my wife, who wasn't home at the time. The telemarketer introduced herself in a very self-assured tone, assuring me that it was "just a courtesy call." From a global financial institution with product to push? Not in my lifetime. But I suggested she not call back, because, "We don't need any courtesy today, and we won't need any next time you call." But they'll call again, regardless.

Fortunately, for companies that want to do it right, there's a better option than "screw it, we'll decide when to call."

Let customers decide. Go a step beyond black and white DNC lists and offer customers much more nuanced options. Certain people want calls. Others, like me, have a strong preference for e-mail. And don't bother me with postal mail. But each of us has our own preferences. Same applies for interest areas. And parsing call lists (and mail lists) using channel and subject preferences is a snap. But as with all good things, there's a catch.

Nothing's ever perfect

Two catches, actually. First, the marketing community continues to have a large population of managers determined to put their perceived company interests ahead of customer interests. Never mind that excess "touches" really turn off customers. Like the time when I deliberately did not check the DNC box on a Smith Micro web order form. Smith has good utility software several software developers embed in their apps, so I thought I'd investigate their customer-direct line. Dumb. I immediately started getting daily e-mail messages about this, that and the other product or upgrade or...whatever else because I stopped reading them after the first couple. Classic "attack marketing." You'd think e-marketers would be brighter than that. So guess what happens to all Smith Micro e-mail now? Spam filter. You betcha.

But let's be optimistic. If these dim light bulbs would wake up and realize the counter-productivity of their ways, maybe we'll finally clear this hurdle.

The second catch is the vast majority of companies regarding collecting and maintaining customer communication preference information a cost and a burden—rather than an opportunity to better customer relations. Hence, they won't invest in acquiring and maintaining these data. Too many other things to do to customers rather than with them. Who knows when they'll wake up.

But hey, not everyone has to get it. The companies that want to do it right will continue earning points with customers—in part, by the very act of asking customers for their preferences. Now that's real courtesy. And I haven't even mentioned the myriad ways accurately profiling customers adds value to the organization.

Does anyone have a big mutha alarm clock with a gong for a bell?

