



Your **PEOPLE.**

Our **PROCESS.**

Stellar **PERFORMANCE.**

10 Tips for Improving Business-To-Consumer Telephone Sales Results

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The world of business-to-consumer sales has changed more than any other business, in the last 5 years, in my opinion. Today's consumer is sophisticated and skeptical. If you are selling to someone who has ever bought a computer, then you are dealing with a person who spent a lot of time researching and a lot of money buying a product that became obsolete almost before it became useful. This is a tough crowd.

Consumers receive sales approaches at least 20 times per day from telecallers, magazines, newspapers, and TV and radio advertising. We are accustomed to making a decision about an offer's value in a matter of seconds. Often before we have heard the offer. That's why we say we don't care if someone can save us time and money. We won't listen to someone who is giving away free services even if it's something we now pay for.

Clearly, telemarketing managers have learned to work around these realities by focusing on volume. There is no doubt that a certain percentage of consumers will buy a certain percentage of the time. So, if we make enough calls, the law of large numbers will allow us to be profitable. The problem is that the percentages are low and they are getting lower every day.

Repetition breeds contempt in consumer sales. If you are old enough to remember when most household products were "new and improved", you understand what I am saying. What was once a powerful way of making a product stand out, became a big joke. Eventually manufacturers stopped making the claim and product labels stopped carrying a "new and improved" banner. It's time this happened for outbound telemarketing initiatives, as well.

For businesses willing to re-channel their scripting methodology and maybe even their hiring practices, the opportunity to improve sales results is excellent. Just a few changes will allow the telephone sales approach to be heard above the din. And we know, being heard is a big part of the battle for consumer dollars.

The following 10 tips will help make your scripting more effective, your callers more influential and your hit-ratios better.

1. If it sounds like something a telemarketer would say, don't say it.

Take a look at your scripts and edit out anything that you have been saying for more than 5 years. Then, delete anything that you heard the last 3000 times you answered your home telephone.

The following phrases are so over-used that consumers have developed immunity to them. They either do not hear the words at all, do not believe them or tell a lie in order to get away from them. Any behaviors that cause your prospect to disengage only serve to reduce your results.

Here are a few examples of over-used “salesreptalk” that can lower your impact:

- *“How are you today?”* Unless you have a staff of medical professionals, no one really believes you are interested in their health or well-being. “How are you today” just alerts the prospect that a salesperson is on the line. And, it identifies that salesperson as not terribly sincere or trustworthy. Instead, try asking a question that enhances your image as a professional with a valuable message. *“May I tell you about a program for getting more TV channels for less money?”* Or, *“Do I understand correctly that you are a homeowner who might consider a program to reduce the interest on your mortgage?”*
- *“People like yourself”* At one time it was believed this phrase helped to connect caller and contact. Now, it’s just extraneous words and obviously bad grammar. Instead, be specific about “the people” and describe them in a way that will feel credible. For example, *“Consumers who find their electric bills skyrocketing in winter.”* Or, *“Parents who spend a lot of time in their cars with their children.”*
- *“I’m just calling to thank you for being our customer”* This is a funny one. Even if it’s true people don’t believe it. Recently a vendor of mine offered me free premium tickets to a basketball game “to thank me for being a customer” and it took her several minutes to convince me there was no sales pitch attached. If you are using this opening as a way to gain trust and get people to listen, then there are better options. Try, *“We know you have been a customer for some time now and we have another offer that we would like to give you the chance to learn about.”*

2. Even a simple offer must allow for the human buying process.

There is no point in trying to create action if you have never created interest. Yet so many scripts begin by saying “We’d like to come and talk with you about...” Human beings have a clear and visible process we go through to make a decision. Some people go through it more quickly than others because of their personalities and the genuine urgency they feel. Others are more cautious.

Many telemarketing scripts try to circumvent the “steps of the buy” and a lot of money is left on the proverbial table because of it.

Try re-organizing your scripts to move prospects gradually from:

- Fear – Where they hang up unless they are moved to the next step.
- Curiosity – Where the opportunity exists to tell a little bit in order to move to the next step.
- Interest – Where the mind starts to formulate questions and stops feeling annoyed by the interruption.
- Evaluation – Where the prospect compares changing to accept your offer or keeping things the way they are.
- Desire – Where the prospect wants what you recommend.
- Action – Where you secure your goal such as a credit card #, an appointment, etc.

3. Focus on your contact in order to create interest.

What does your targeted audience care about? What language do they speak? What issues or challenges do they have that your product or service can address? These are the subjects that you can include in your “reason for calling” that are most likely to move the prospect from curiosity to interest (see tip #2).

Rather than saying, *“I’m calling with a great new program that offers long distance at 5 cents per minute.”* That’s all about you.

Try talking about your contact and saying, *“I’m calling because we help people who are interested in making sure they are not paying more than they have to for telephone service. I don’t know if this program will be of value to you right now, but it will only take a few minutes to find out. May I ask you a few quick questions about the way you use long distance service?”*

4. Use statement/question pairs to make the conversation interactive.

We know that the person asking the questions is in control of the conversation. Human beings tend to respond to questions as long as they are not offended by them. That's why "How are you today?" became a popular way of creating some interaction early in the conversation. So why is it that so many telemarketing scripts don't ask any questions other than to gain agreement on the sale? Somehow there is a mistaken belief that if we let the prospect talk, s/he will say "No thanks." That could not be less true. "No thanks" happens when we fail to create interest. It has nothing to do with whether or not we give a prospect permission to talk.

The best telemarketing scripts do some telling and some asking in a format we call "statement/question pairs". This is the model for genuine conversation.

Here's how it works:

- Statements are used to explain some features of your offer, or to explain why you are about to ask a question, or to express interest and empathy so the contact will tell you more.
- Questions are used to find out where the prospect is in the process of buying (see tip #2), gather information needed to qualify, gain agreement on the value of your offer, close the sale.

5. "Overcome" objections, don't "Rebut" them.

I have been in many business-to-consumer call centers where the top producers don't bother overcoming objections at all. They play the numbers game and just move on to an easier prospect. This may be acceptable in your company. But, from my experience, this is pretty upsetting to the owner of the list who missed out on potential sales because a caller was not thorough. Calling someone who said "No thanks." a second time is significantly less productive than closing the deal on the first attempt.

Even the best sales conversations will run into some objections. Objections happen when prospects are not sold yet the caller has asked for the order, or when prospects hear something that moves them back to the "fear" step of the buy (see tip #2). Objections need not be deal breakers.

Successful telecallers must be prepared to overcome objections in the most convincing way possible. Too often, they rely upon what we call "rebuttal" which rarely succeeds. The rebuttal is an old-fashioned method which says "I understand how you feel, but... here's why you should reconsider."

In 2002 we know how damaging that "but" is to a relationship. Any good that was accomplished by the empathic and connecting behavior of "I understand how you feel" is completely obliterated by the "but". You may as well have saved time and said, "I don't care how you feel. You're wrong and need to do it my way."

Here are the steps to overcoming objections that will truly re-engage the contact and provide the solution needed to get the sale. Please notice the 4 steps are actually 2 statement/question pairs (see tip #4)

- **Empathize** – "I understand how you feel." Or some statement that makes the prospect feel listened to and understood. This disarms the contact.
- **Clarify** – "What feels wrong about this?" or "Is it the cost that you are concerned about, or do you have another issue?" This question is the key to making your sale. Ask a question that helps you to understand or proves you already understand. Then, be quiet and hear what the prospect tells you. That's the information you need to get your deal.
- **Present Solution** – "I see. Based on what you've told me, here's why this is right for you." Use the prospect's words and tailor this solution to address the concerns you just heard. That will make it highly effective.

- **Gain Agreement** – “What do you think about my idea now?” or “Can you see why this makes sense for you?” These are both examples of “trial closes” that will help to move the prospect back into the buying process so you can close your sale.

6. Take care of everyone’s name.

I grew up with the name Ronna Caras and I bet most of you reading this are pronouncing it incorrectly. Names are tough, especially in the United States where so many ethnicities are represented.

These techniques can help to make your callers more comfortable with the challenging names. They will also make the contact more inclined to cooperate.

- Pronounce the name to the best of your ability and ask for confirmation right away: “May I please speak with Ronna Caras? Am I pronouncing that correctly?”
- If you cannot even attempt the name, try this, “I am so sorry. I am looking for someone whose name begins with ‘R’ but I don’t want to say it incorrectly. Can you help me?”
- Listen closely when the contact says his/her name and say it again immediately to prove you can use the correct pronunciation.

7. Be a student of good diction.

In our society, the ability to speak clearly is equated with intelligence. Fair or not, people whose Ts and Ds and INGs sound crisp are treated as though their message has more value. People who use standard pronunciations for common words are perceived as more knowledgeable. Knowing this gives us an advantage.

Here are some ways to practice key sounds and words to improve the way you are treated on the telephone:

- Ts, Ds, INGs – these “dental” and “guttural” sounds may vary based on the neighborhood where you were raised but in the sales world, there are clear distinctions between right and wrong. Practice with a tape recorder to improve your clarity with the words below.
 - T wouldn’t; prospect; difficult; got; minute; must; consult; software; lighten
 - D sand; held; recommend; thousand; card; trend; field; build
 - ING catching; meeting; hoping; trying; working; planning; thinking
- The letter R poses a challenge for many. Practice with a tape recorder to improve your clarity with the words below.
 - R wear; consider; order; card; answer; prepare; secure; carton; market; corner
- STS at the end of a word is just plain tricky. Practice with a tape recorder to improve your clarity with the words below.
 - STS lists; specialists; forecasts; rests; tests; assists; suggests
- These words are often (the T in “often” should be silent) mispronounced and a simple correction can result in more sales. Practice with a tape recorder and the crazy sentences below.
 - Because it is preferable to the company, I basically express business strengths when asked.
 - Mischievous government regulators probably escaped using personal credit cards and avoided irreparable harm to their often-challenged reputations.
 - Disoriented representatives and supervisors gave accurate descriptions of their expertise, according to a federal government spokesperson.
 - It is often either nothing, something or everything, wouldn’t you know?

8. Express the right emotion so that your script works as written

It's amazing that some salespeople seem to get away with asking the most private questions. Yet, other reps get a loud "None of your business!" and then a dial tone. This reality has led many managers to conclude that scripts do not work. They could not be more wrong. It's rarely the "script" that is the problem. Usually, it's the emotions expressed in the delivery that drive the failure or the success.

Just like in a movie, pre-written dialog must be delivered in a convincing way, or the listeners won't feel engaged. The proper emotions are the key. There are 3 emotions that are appropriate in a business conversation. If a caller is not projecting 1 of these 3 emotions at all times, then s/he is projecting the opposite emotion, which almost always results in failure.

Here are the 3 emotions and a way to practice them:

- **Enthusiasm** – Perfect when describing your company or its offers, as well as when reacting to an explanation of your prospect's family or situation and goals. Enthusiastic delivery requires use of lots of highs and lows in the voice, variation of speed and the emphasis or "punch" of key words.
The opposite of enthusiasm is boredom. It is accomplished by keeping the voice monotone. Or, worse, the sing-songy delivery when someone is reading. There is no middle ground here. Boredom will shorten the call and reduce the results.
Learners can practice the two opposite emotions with this statement, "Based on the situation you describe, I'd like to recommend you take advantage of all 3 of our offers. This will allow you to meet with an expert in your home, already have approval on the first part of the investment and see pictures of the location on the Internet." You will see very quickly the impact that enthusiasm makes.
- **Curiosity** – Lets the salesperson sound "interested" instead of "intrusive". It uses the higher range of the voice, varied pitch and a lilt at the end to indicate the question mark.
The opposite of curiosity is doubt or disdain, which comes across as sarcastic or manipulative and is not an effective way to move a relationship to the next level.
Learners can practice the two opposite emotions with this question, "What process do you go through when evaluating this sort of change?"
- **Encouragement** – When you need to gain more information or cooperation, you must be able to make the contact feel comfortable and safe enough to go deeper. We encourage people by "dragging out" our words and using the lower more soothing range of our voice.
The opposite of encouraging is, of course, discouraging.
Learners can practice the two opposite emotions with this statement, "I see."

9. Don't just listen, pay attention.

Listening is the great equalizer for salespeople. Prospects talk in order to communicate with you. When people talk to you it is because they want you to know how they feel, what they believe or what they want. This information is exactly what you need to know so that you can re-position your offer to satisfy this person. The more they talk, the better chance you have of making a sale. So, getting people to talk and hearing what they say, actually makes the job of a salesperson easier. I had a great Sales Manager years ago that said, "Give them enough rope and they'll hang themselves."

Monitor 10 calls or monitor 1000 calls. It is obvious that many salespeople do not bother to listen. While the prospect is talking, many callers are busy thinking about how they can interrupt and what they are going to say next. Still other callers believe they can listen and be thinking about their next question at the same time. They are sadly mistaken. Listening is only useful if you pay attention. It is only helpful if you can take the information the prospect just provided and use it to decide how to respond.

Here are the 'rules' for listening to increase your results:

- Anytime a prospect speaks, you must be prepared to write down what s/he says. By stopping to do this, you force yourself to pay attention.
- After a prospect speaks, you must respond with some sort of empathy statement. This makes your prospect believe you were listening and that you heard and that you understand. "I see what you mean" and "How interesting" are 2 examples.
- If you do not understand what a prospect means, try "Can you tell me more about that?" or "Can you help me to understand why that is important?" Nothing could be more flattering to a prospect.
- Once you understand the information the prospect has provided, use an appropriate part of your script to get back to the sales conversation. You'll know its appropriate because it will address just the issues your prospect brought up.
- Don't be surprised if your script helps you in this way. Well-written ones are amazingly useful. If, however, you find that your script does not contain the words or explanations you need, be sure to make a note of what the prospect said so that your Manager can work with you for the next time.

10. Engage a side-by-side coach.

Live coaching will improve performance in 30-60 minutes. It's a small investment to make for a lot of results. Here's how the best coaching sessions work:

- Choose 1 behavior or subject to work on and discuss this with the coach in advance. The coach will explain what s/he is looking for you to do on every call during the session.
- You make calls while the coach listens to at least 2 with no interruptions. The coach is looking for patterns in your behavior that are reducing your results.
- After the Coach finds the patterns s/he will make recommendations of what to do differently. The recommendations will be made using explanations and demonstrations until you truly understand what to do.
- After each new call, the Coach will let you know if your performance showed the desired improvement or not. If not, the Coach will help you to understand what was wrong, again.
- The session will end when you demonstrate mastery of the subject you began working on at least 5 times. This usually takes less than 1 hour because of the high volume of calls you make.
- In the next session, you will work on another behavior.

These 10 tips are just a few of many that we have taught to thousands of successful salespeople during the last 12 years. We are happy to share them with you so that you can continue to improve your results and develop the skills of your staff. Please let us know if we can be of even greater service to you in the pursuit of success in 2002.