

Making the call

Telemarketing might be annoying, but it works

BY SCOTT BULLOCK

I'm not sure which source of circulation is the most universally despised. Is it:

- Insert Cards which fall on the floor, thus making you bend over to clean up the mess.
- Direct mail ("junk mail") solicitations, which clutter your mailbox?
- E-mail solicitations ("spam"), which require urgent deleting each morning to restore order in your world?
- School Plan, which brings a doe-eyed, guilt-inducing kid knocking at your door just as you are about to take the first sip of your after-work martini?
- Telemarketing ("courtesy call"), which invariably interrupts the family dinner?

Clearly, the circulators tool-kit includes some annoying and invasive techniques. But, here's the thing: they work.

Nobody likes going to the dentist, but everybody wants to keep their teeth clean and healthy. Who is really happy when the phone rings and it's the dental office receptionist advising that it's time to come in for the inevitable probing, scraping and drilling? Yet we submit and take the next available appointment. We trust the dentist knows what's good for us.

As any publisher or editor will tell you, magazines are also good for people. Our products stimulate the brain, accelerate heart rates, put people in touch with their inner-child, educate, inform and enlighten. Magazines are cultural commodities.

Cavities must be filled. So must rate base holes. And telemarketing works.

These days, figuring out web-ways to attract and retain subscribers is top of mind. That's great. But remember, there's still nothing like talking to your customers.

Michael Brooke, publisher, editor, ad sales director, production director, and circulation director of *Concrete Wave* magazine (the skateboarding freak's bible) recently began to aggressively promote a 1-800 in-bound telemarketing number. He's also started calling his subscribers to renew. "The response was fantastic. Not only am I getting more new subs on file, and renewing more subs, but the dialogue I'm having with my readers is great. I'm forging relationships. Building a community. Getting valuable input."

Most major publishers in Canada do use telemarketing as part of their overall renewal scheme. Typically, the renewal effort is timed to happen at expiry or one-month post-expiry.

According to Indas Telemarketing Services

manager Dave Chowbay, "Experience demonstrates that consumers are more receptive when we call at expiry. The call is positioned as a service. It's friendly. After all, we don't want the reader to miss out on the great editorial line-up that is planned for the next issue and beyond."

Telemarketing has other virtues. Unlike direct mail, there are no sleepless nights waiting to see



if the investments in copy, design, list rental, merge/purge, lettershop, printing and postage will yield the necessary 1.5% net response required to avoid disaster. The costs to test telemarketing are minimal, and if it isn't working, you will know within a few nights. Then, you can simply stop calling.

It's easy to test. Timing tests, price tests, premium tests, incentives to stimulate cash with order...plus you get results back quickly and can act fast on those findings.

Many publishers are also getting good results using telemarketing for Christmas gift giving, often as a mop-up effort in late November and the first few weeks of December.

In addition, "orphan" campaigns aimed at gift recipients whose donors failed to renew them work well too (most effectively in January and February). Karen Benson, circulation assistant at *British Columbia* magazine says, "Our telemarketing campaign to orphans yielded 140 gross subscriptions, a 72.2% pay-up rate, and a 3.37% net response. These are subs that otherwise

would have slipped away."

But can telemarketing work for new business? Well, I get telemarketing calls from the daily newspapers all the time. I suspect it's because my postal code makes me a juicy target. Based on the frequency of attempts by the *Toronto Star* to sign me up, I have to assume it is relatively efficient. Granted, the price point on a newspaper subscription is considerably higher than the typical magazine, and the value proposition to advertisers is higher too. But that doesn't mean you can't test it.

Many list owners are a bit leery about renting lists for telemarketing purposes. However, they are not typically worried about renting to magazines to solicit subscriptions. And many, if asked, will also waive re-use fees to go after multi-buyers with a double postcard mop-up. After all, you've already paid for those names repeatedly, so why not try a telemarketing mop-up effort instead? It's still just a subscription we're soliciting. These days, everything is negotiable.

Publishers can also make custom swap arrangements or barter deals to get at lists that are otherwise not on the market—lists that are uniquely positioned to yield spectacular results.

Experience has proven to this circulator that direct mail, working in tandem with telemarketing, can yield impressive results. This is particularly true of multi-buyers—who by definition read lots of other magazine and are thus outstanding prospects—and to unique lists which aren't openly available on the commercial market.

Since newspapers clearly feel that telemarketing is a respectable way to communicate with prospects, when booking your next FSI campaign, why not negotiate for a test quantity of names to do a mop-up effort three weeks after the FSI has arrived in the Saturday paper? "Just a courtesy call to make sure you didn't miss out on our special offer for *Toronto Star* readers..."

Telemarketing has its challenges—some people despise it. But different folks respond to different methods. If handled in a smart, sensitive and responsible manner, this source will continue to produce cost-effective orders to keep our publishers smiling.

Next time the *Toronto Star* calls me, which will probably be tonight, I'll ask them for their phone numbers. Maybe you should too. **M**



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