

Alert for Marketers

Critical Checkpoints for your Consumer Calling Campaigns

The DMA Teleservices Ethics Committee is asking all those doing business by phone to avoid specific business practices that could further damage consumers' perception of the teleservices industry and profession. The Committee encourages all practitioners to review this list before launching any new calling campaign.

1) Handling Do Not Call Requests Promptly

If consumers ask to be put on your in-house do not call list, not only is it the right thing to do but you are required by law to do just that. It's important that you do so promptly and courteously and you don't ever try to talk them out of it or allow your reps to hang-up on the consumer.

Using The DMA as Your In-house Suppress Service

Some marketers train reps to refer to The DMA those consumers who ask to be placed on their in-house do not call list. Their thinking is that they religiously screen their prospecting lists against The DMA's list, and they will suppress the complaining consumer's name when it appears on the next DMA suppression file. This is bad for you, the industry and the teleservices profession. While it might seem easier for you in the short-term, the result of a referral to The DMA is that no marketer, including you, will be able to approach that person in the future.

2) Proper Use of an Established Business Relationship

Consumers decide whether or not they choose to have a relationship with your business. If a consumer doesn't perceive a relationship with you, the established business relationship (EBR) simply doesn't exist.

Calls from Affiliates/Partners/Subsidiaries

Be sure to take into consideration the consumers' perception. If you are a business partner, parent or subsidiary trying to convince consumers that you have a relationship with them they don't recognize you may alienate them and could damage their relationship with the original business.

Initiating Calls for Others

Your customers may be happy to receive calls from you, but by law, your EBR cannot be transferred to any other marketer. So don't use your EBR with your own customers to place a call for a marketer that does not have its own EBR with those customers unless you first remove any customers whose phone numbers are on the national do not call list. First, it would be illegal to call those numbers that are on the national do not call list since your EBR cannot be transferred to the other marketer. Second, you do not want to put your relationship with your own customers at risk.

Offering Gifts/Prizes in Exchange for an Agreement to Receive Calls

The consumer's acceptance of a gift does not create an EBR. Marketers may not call gift recipients who are on the national do not call list unless they have received those consumers' explicit permission in writing or via a digital signature.

Conspicuous Disclosures

The bottom line here is that consumers must understand your offer. Marketers routinely ask consumers to sign a receipt, order form or other document. It's not appropriate to fool consumers by inconspicuously including language that obligates them to receive your calls, particularly if they have put their names on the federal do not call list. Your claim that they've given you permission when they're unaware of it will get you nothing but a spike in consumer distress and complaints.

3) Use of Recorded Messages

Sending recorded messages to **customers** sometimes makes sense, but sending recorded marketing messages to **prospects** is just plain illegal. Be sure to pay careful attention to the number of recorded messages you send and don't play messages that are too long. Your customers may feel they are being treated impersonally or that you are not respectful of their time, and ultimately, that you are bothering them.

4) Targeted Calling

Calling fewer and better targeted prospects should cut down on your calling expenses and increase your response rates. Marketers should not use randomly or sequentially generated numbers in sales or marketing solicitations. You should have some reason to believe that the person you are calling may in fact be interested in the product that you are offering.

5) Importance of Hiring and Training Sales Representatives

Telephone representatives who do not speak clearly or are not well understood by call recipients need retraining and closer supervision. If response rates are decreasing and requests to be placed on your in-house do not call list are increasing, this could be part of the problem. A review of your hiring, training and coaching practices is probably in order.

6) Clearly Written Scripts

Are you using scripts or call guides that convey your offer clearly? A quick bump in sales today, based on consumer confusion or misunderstanding, is not worth the long-term cost of increased consumer dissatisfaction, complaints and the loss of trust that follows.

7) Selling/Up-Selling Sensitively

Do your scripting and training make clear when your reps should continue or does it subject the consumer to an experience that is detrimental to your long-term relationship with them? There may be circumstances in which you wish to make multiple offers to consumers. Or after a customer places an order with you, you might want to offer other merchandise based on the initial purchase. Either of these circumstances is fine as long as consumers stay receptive. Unfortunately, some companies insist that their reps make additional offers to every single customer, and do not allow their reps any discretion, even when it is clear that the offer is not relevant or the consumer is not interested. Other companies require that the reps must continue to make offers until the consumer refuses a certain number of items in a row. Avoid practices like these, which can cause consumer resentment and inhibit consumers' receptivity in the future.

8) Calling Frequency

As of January 29th 2004, marketers must identify themselves by sending a Caller ID signal each time they call. The Committee believes that many consumers who have Caller ID may be concerned when they see that one marketer attempted to call them multiple times a day. The Committee recommends that marketers pay careful attention to consumer feedback on this issue and work hard to determine what their customers view as appropriate. Otherwise, the likely result is a drop in response rates and more do not call requests for your in-house and Federal do not call lists.

And, of course, staffing and training a customer service representative to receive customer inquiries from the Caller ID number is imperative and will yield positive long-term results.

This alert is brought to you by
The DMA Department of Ethics and Consumer Affairs.
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