

"Don't Call Me"

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By Charlie McCoy

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The March, 2004, issue of Psychology Today reports on an experiment involving identical business negotiations between test subjects. The only difference was that half started the transactions with a brief phone call and completed it with email. The other half used only email.

The transactions beginning with a phone call turned out much better.

So we should all foster our business relationships with more phone calls, right?

Well, maybe not.

See if this script sounds familiar. You're watching Jeopardy (or whatever your favorite TV show is) when the phone rings. You answer it and get tied up with a telemarketer, your sister, your business associate, or a wrong number. It's fairly easy to get away from wrong numbers and the telemarketers. Your sister and your partners, however, require your attention for more time. As Alex Trebek starts the Double Jeopardy round, you're stuck listening to your sister describe her latest drama or to your associate prattling on about some inconsequential matter.

If this happens once a night, you can handle it. If it happens twice a night, you can still handle it.

But what if this happens many times every single evening?

You can probably regulate how often your sister is allowed to bend your ear, but your business calls have to be handled as they come in. You become increasingly resentful of the intrusions, and your Pavlovian response to a ringing phone becomes a growl instead of a drool. You start screening calls. You feel besieged in your own home. You start to like email more and more.

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So other than being less intrusive why do I prefer email to telephone conversations? Let me count the ways.

For starters, I can handle a LOT more volume with email. Most of us can read about ten times faster than even a speedtalker can speak. With an email you can quickly reread questionable material that you didn't understand the first time through. Both you and your customer have a written record of what is discussed. And there's less unproductive chitchat. It might bring you closer, but do you really care what color they're painting their kitchen?

Have you ever finished a phone conversation with an impression of what was going to happen only to find out that the other party had a different impression? That's not uncommon.

It doesn't happen as often with email, does it?

Beyond the personal hassles of being constantly available to anyone with phone access, however, is

whether this is a system you can convince others to adopt. You're hoping that the people you recruit will handle business the same way you do. (Actually I hope they handle it BETTER than I do. Hey, I can dream, can't I?) So they see that you are getting hammered with calls all the time. Conversations with you are constantly broken by your taking cell phone calls and being interrupted by call-waiting. They figure out that, if they can call you any time, they too will have to take calls from people when THEY'RE trying to watch Jeopardy.

Does this make it likelier that they'll want to duplicate your system? Probably not.

Yes, I know that we could just let an answering machine take the calls and return them all during a period we choose. This doesn't work for me. Leaving a message on an answering machine is probably at least as offputting as leaving an email, and in these days of wide-ranging business activity, the time zones become problematic. Playing "telephone tag" is no fun, either. Perhaps your customer is also setting times when she will answer calls. If this isn't the same time you're answering, you can go for days just trading messages to respond.

Getting back to that Psychology Today article, probably making at least one telephone personal contact to start a business relationship will improve that relationship. You can make this call to your customer without necessarily inviting any calls coming in from her by giving her only your email address. Encourage her to stay in touch with you through this email contact. This is less likely to offend if you make it clear that you check your email many times a day and can give her a fast response every time she contacts you. (Of course then you'll have to actually do it!)

Eliminating telephone contact may cost you some very lonely business associates, but these needy folks are unlikely to be your best producers, anyway. Sticking with email for routine interactions may be the best way to go. Even (or maybe especially) with your sister.

So if Alex questions "the best way to handle business communications," I'd answer "what is email?!" Don't call me; I'm giving my ear a break.

Charlie McCoy markets the best line of health products in the world at

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telephone is out of order.

Call management

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Thousands of UK businesses are now protecting their employees and meeting legal requirements through intelligent use of call recording systems. Due to recent government legislation (coming in force by Dec 2004) it is now imperative to record all your business calls if you run a financial services organisation.

Even if you don't, call recording is an important business tool that your organisation should seriously consider using. Until now, call recording has always been an expensive luxury designed for large organisations. However, with Marcom's cost effective recording solutions, this is no longer the case.

Why do you need it?

Find out at http://www.marcom-news.com/Call_recording.htm

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