



Direct Marketing's Missing Link: The Elusive First-Time Caller

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Your most valuable assets are your customers, so you've probably invested heavily in a CRM system that helps you increase repeat conversions. But what about calls from people who have never spoken to you before?

When prospects call you for the first time, you're *blind*.

It's a vulnerability that often goes grossly overlooked, despite all the agonizing in recent years over the selection of CRM technologies, processes, systems and frameworks for orchestrating superior consumer interactions. For all the billions spent on these systems that maximize existing relationships, they still can't help you convert the first-time customer whose name, address and number have yet to be captured.

If you fail to gather a caller's contact information, then you're throwing your marketing investments out the window, too. For all the effort that it takes to get the phone to ring, don't you want to know who's calling?

What if you could bring these unknown callers to life?

By capturing name, address and phone data for every caller, you can treat even unknown prospects like longtime customers. The right knowledge at the right moment makes all the difference.

This information is especially crucial in a climate where consumers have access to never-before-available information about your products and services. Thanks to the Internet and other media, consumers are coming to your call center armed with price comparisons and feature evaluations. But they are not met with the same level of knowledge by your customer service rep, and it's frustrating.

In these situations, the balance of power in the interaction is with the consumer, but there are opportunities to swing the balance back your way.

Consider:

- A CFO of a big business intending to switch banks calls your bank to explore options and potentially become your customer. However, he waits on hold while low-end customers monopolize your customer service associate's time ordering new checks. He decides it's too much trouble to switch to this bank and hangs up. Imagine if you had the demographic profile of this new potential caller to understand his value the instant he called.
- A party planner in Manhattan calls your credit card company's 800-number to ask about your basic personal card services. She wants to clarify the difference between your rates and the competition, but has no idea that you offer a specialized card that offers premium access to New York events. Your sales representative answers her question about interest rates but then the party planner quickly ends the call. If only her Manhattan address had prompted a script for your representative to offer her your specialty New York card at the start of the conversation.
- Let's say you are a real estate brokerage. A potential homebuyer calls into the call center to ask about a property but demurs when offered a showing. If your phone system captured the name and address of these callers, then you could automatically send a "thank you for getting in touch" postcard advertising more homes they might like — while their interest is still warm. Without a current name and address, you pass up an exponential increase in your chances of landing the customer.

In all of these cases the call center has little or no clue about the individuals it is dealing with and loses significant revenue as a result. Such instances of poor-quality customer data cost U.S.

businesses an estimated \$611 billion a year, according to The Data Warehousing Institute. The pain reveals itself in customer-acquisition problems, failed CRM initiatives, lost sales, lost customers, inefficient call centers, missed upsell/cross-sell opportunities, undelivered mail, logistical nightmares and more.

Much of this waste traces back to a single root cause. Companies have yet to grasp that their best asset in a transaction is knowing the consumer they're dealing with — starting with phone number, name and address at the point of contact.

They also fail to appreciate how dynamic this data is. It constantly shifts underneath organizations and threatens to swallow profits like quicksand. People commonly have three or four phone numbers these days — office, home and mobile — and switch services when better offers come along. A marriage, divorce, death, adoption or whim may have changed a person's name yesterday. Address? More than 18 million U.S. households and businesses move every year.

Data about consumers simply *never* stops changing. A quarterly data cleansing is like waxing a rusty car.

As they begin to understand the value of superior data about consumers, successful companies are beginning to treat consumers as a strategic business asset. They understand that a profitable interaction starts with accurate, relevant, refined and actionable data *at the moment of impact*, whether that is an inbound call, a web store visit, a lead submitted online, or an appearance at the

How do you get this kind of data? Here are some places to start:

Make sure your data is available on demand. If you're in a call center, find a source that can serve up full name and full address of first-time inbound callers on the fly — not just appended at the end of the month in one batch or pulled from stale records in the customer database.

Make sure your data is constantly refreshed — daily or better. Phone numbers, addresses and even names change constantly.

Understand the source. Many marketers think there's nothing better for identifying consumers than linking to the Directory Assistance database. This data isn't as current or complete as you think.

Make sure your information is verified. Whether you're buying sales leads from another business or identifying consumers on the fly, you want a *guarantee* that that phone, name and address data have been verified against one another and are accurate when you act on them.

Ignore these, and your problems will only grow. Consumers will continue to accumulate power and you will see profits slip away as you lose sight of your target customers. But with the best systems in place, fueled by the best data, you're now in prime position to maximize the value of your CRM, ERP and call center systems — and to restore the balance of power.



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