



SOCIETY OF ACTUARIES

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A BRIGHTER FUTURE FOR TELEPHONE SALES CALLS

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In years past, telemarketing was fairly straightforward. Consumers were happy to be rid of door-to-door salesmen. And, when the physical boundaries disappeared, the potential efficiency and productivity of contacting multitudes of prospects right from their office was embraced with open arms by salespeople who no longer had to get their “foot in the door.” All they needed was a telephone to transport them directly into their prospects’ homes.

As the number of calls a consumer received during the dinner hour increased, consumers began to think that their best interests were no longer foremost in the minds of their vendors. Telemarketers, on the other hand, were understandably enamored of the medium which produced sales and profits at a reasonable cost. Predictably though, consumers became angry at an industry that seemed to have little regard for their privacy.

It is our job as responsible salespeople of the new millennium to change the consumer’s perceptions of the telephone sales call and to give them back their right to privacy and choice. This can be accomplished in a number of ways but, most importantly, marketers must remain in compliance with the legislation that has resulted directly from the cries of angry consumers. These regulations include the national and state and company-specific Do-Not-Call lists, as well as rules regarding when and how people may be contacted.

But while many consumers find their homes quieter, they are also realizing that there were some valid offers made to them over the phone—offers that they cannot find anywhere else. Others are realizing that there were some calls that they didn’t mind getting—and in fact may have even benefited from—but these calls are silent as well.

New technologies are now available to help recover these lost prospects.

Web-based solutions seem to be the most cost effective, requiring little setup costs, little-or-no systems



integration, and minimal if any ongoing maintenance. These systems allow the caller to be online with a service that maintains up-to-the-minute DNC information and to verify whether or not a specific number is on one of the three lists (national, state or company) prior to making the call and it is all done instantaneously.

Those people whose numbers are not on the files may be safely called. Those numbers that are on one or more of the DNC lists are flagged and another media, such as mail, may be used to contact these individuals. This is known as “Permission Marketing”—a system whereby individuals on a DNC list are contacted via another media that offers them something of value (an insurance quote for instance) in exchange for agreeing to take a sales call or two.

The FTC’s regulations regarding DNC lists include “Safe Harbor Provisions” that basically say that if a company can prove that it is in compliance, it will not receive a fine. But a firm DNC policy and evidence that it is being followed is the key and compliance as well as sound marketing practices should be of the utmost importance to companies who want to use telemarketing as an effective, productive and profitable marketing technique. ■



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