

10 things you must know before employing a Telemarketing Agency

Produced jointly by

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SPECIALIST DIRECT MARKETING AGENCY

Quality v Quantity

Many telemarketing agencies have quantity as their main business driver. They may measure results primarily by Number of Dials, for example. For some propositions this is fine provided due quality control exists, however, it can impact negatively on the callers mindset and cause an unnatural effect on their approach. You must assess whether your proposition and organisation will be best represented by this culture. Typically, high value propositions with a requirement to contact a senior professional are NOT best suited to this style. You may be best suited to an environment where the quality of result is paramount and your conversion-to-business rate is top priority.

Type of Agency

Does the agency specialise in a particular area?

Do they operate just in the B2B Market or mix in some B2C calling?

Do they conduct a good deal of Charity or Subscription work?

Skill sets vary in regard to each of the above - beware of those that handle a large amount of 'Inbound' calls as this directly conflicts in terms of skill sets.

Do they employ people who have previous experience in industry sectors relevant to your own?

Scripted Calls/ Script

Scripts do not work well in today's B2B market. No-one will receive a scripted call positively; in fact, it is what defines the dreaded 'sales call'. Importantly, your caller reading the script will not easily have the ability to listen to replies and pick up interest levels, buying signals, feedback or intelligence. It is almost impossible to truly establish needs on a scripted call.

A Script is typically an ordered sequence of statements and questions which uses a style that is often not that of the caller and propels them into an unnatural approach that will likely limit the positive results desired.

Engagement/ Pilot Projects

Your agency should have a defined process of project implementation. This will include planning all procedures and the campaign criteria, in detail. Should your required campaign Set Up be extensive, you should expect to pay a sensible fee for this activity. It is important, and will directly impact the results of your project.

Beware of a lengthy 'pilot' period of activity that commits you to a long period of guaranteed activity without a 'get out' clause. This could commit you to a significant minimum cost. A good Agency will relish the opportunity to show you what they can do over a reasonable window of time.

References

You should be offered some references - past or current clients that the Agency has worked with. These will obviously be those of which they are (probably quite rightly) most proud. Ask for other points of reference. Ask if they would mind if you spoke to a couple of your choice.

As well as their good clients, they will have projects that have not progressed or been terribly successful - you wouldn't believe it if they said they hadn't. Gauge the honesty of information provided and how comfortable they are with your request.

Technology and Security

Do not be blinded by an Agency's apparent 'cutting edge' technological capability. This is unlikely to help the marketer during the conversation in promoting your business. There is a need for reasonable systems capability and certain benefits in good CTI, Reporting, Data Manipulation, etc. Certain other capabilities will be of limited advantage.

It is important that your Data is secure, handled appropriately, and returned to you at project end (or at any other time you want it). Your Data should not be used for any other purpose than that of your agreed activity. Your agency should be prepared to sign a Non Disclosure Agreement if appropriate.

Visit their premises & Listen

You know it makes sense! See the staff. Feel the atmosphere. Is it in common with your culture, image and brand? Listen to the calling. If you are invited to listen to a particular individual on a particular project, then do, but also listen to the others. You will get a gut feel as to whether the style is appropriate for your business?

Beware if you hear the following...

Over familiarity on first call

'Hi, how are you today Sandra?'

Inappropriate casual statements

'Mate', 'Cool', 'Cheers'

Agents only using their first name

'Hi, I'm Bob calling from...'

If you were calling someone for the first time in business you would certainly offer your Surname.

The Call Centre special!

'...today I'm calling from...'

(Who were you yesterday? Who will you be tomorrow?)

Staff

Would you employ these individuals if you were conducting this activity in-house?

Are they mature in outlook, commercially aware, intelligent, decent, honest people?

Do you have confidence that they will do you justice in representing your brand?

Beware of temporary staff and students – is there the commitment?

Beware of sub-contracted and offshore callers where no relationship/ partnership and integration can evolve.

Many organisations have part-time callers who work around family and lifestyle commitments. This could be fine provided they suit the above character profiles and their hours suit your needs. What's more, semi-retired ex-professionals could provide a superb wealth of knowledge and experience suiting your needs perfectly.

Home-worker telemarketers are rarely suitable due to issues around motivation, possible distractions and the trust levels required – there are exceptions.

Are staff salaried? Beware organisations that pay incentives/ commission based on quantity alone. Bonuses paid based on client satisfaction and feedback is a good sign.

Will the people and agency integrate?

Will you have open and direct access to your Marketers and will they be assigned to you or will you possibly have different individuals on your project day by day? The latter will cause problems around knowledge build-up, and skill development, in terms of your specific offering.

Having direct access to your Marketer and being able to visit and sit alongside, listening to your calls, will give you the opportunity to fine train and develop the message whilst understanding the challenges your Marketer may be facing. This could directly impact the results achieved over the project duration. It will also assist the Marketer in taking ownership of the project and feeling a part of your organisation.

Support Services

You might ultimately want to establish an in-house operation. Your chosen agency should be able to assist in migrating from the use of their services to a fully established in-house set up. They could assist with recruitment, training, management and staff development.

Your agency should also be able to assist with other related functions such as: Data Acquisition, Direct Mail, Email Marketing, Marketing Literature (Collateral) Design and Production, Web Design and Functionality, PR, Copy Writing, or make dependable recommendations to partner organisations and other known and trusted professionals who can assist you.