

## **Enhance Your Telephone Skills**

Reaching a customer or prospect by phone seems to be getting harder and harder. Meetings, busy schedules and voice mail make the need for effective telephone skills more necessary than ever. Here are some ideas you may want to consider to make your time on the phone more productive.

Make the most of your phone time by having an effective message. Consider your phone message to be like a business speech, only shorter. Develop your message so it has an opening, a concise message and a closing.

### **The Opening**

Whether it is your customer or just their voice mail, you have only a few seconds to get their attention. Make sure the first words the person hears conveys an important message. If you are returning a call, be sure to say so. If you are originating the call, start with an attention grabbing statement rather than the usual, "This is Joe Smith. How are you today?" Consider "If I could demonstrate how to close more sales, would you be interested?"

### **The Message**

After you have gotten the listener's attention, you have only a few seconds to get your message across. The three or four sentences that deliver your sales message should be as precise and informative as possible. Remember the old marketing rule that what you are selling are benefits, not features.

Your customers and prospects are interested in solutions to their problems. Your product or service is just a tool that addresses the problem. Therefore, make sure your message tells how your product can solve the problem. For instance, if you are offering consulting services, don't dwell on your qualifications or how you work with clients. Instead, tell how your services will help the customer.

"Our team of professionals would work closely with you to identify and prioritize the steps needed to reduce your costs of shipping. We often find that by simply changing the steps involved in the order-taking process, our clients can accumulate information to negotiate better rates from their carriers. We would be happy to perform a quick review of your system to see if this would make sense for your company."

### **The Closing**

As a result of your conversation, there are only a few possible outcomes you can wish for:

- You get a sale.
- You lay the groundwork for further conversations.
- You create a lasting impression so the prospect remembers you and your company.

Be sure to close with a request for action. If it is a sale, ask about shipping or terms. If it is a request for further conversations, ask for an appointment. If the conversation doesn't generate a sale or appointment, be sure to ask when the prospect would like another contact.

### **Summary**

It takes practice to make your phone skills productive. If you consider how important your phone contacts are, you will probably conclude that spending some time practicing is a good use of your time. Compose the three parts of your presentation carefully. Then practice, practice and practice some more. It is worth the effort.