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Best Practice Guide
Contact Centres & Telemarketing
Business to Business

First edition

Acknowledgements

Note; This document was prepared by many different contributors and consequently the nomenclature can vary. For example we refer variously to the reader/practitioner of Best Practice as 'telemarketer', 'contact centre', 'practitioner' and 'you'. Please refer to the Glossary for a full explanation of terms.

Contents

1. Introduction

In 2009 The Direct Marketing Association (UK) Limited (DMA) Contact Centres & Telemarketing Council published 'Business to Consumer telemarketing best practice' guidance. The council is now delighted to be able to publish this 'Best Practice for telemarketing in the Business to Business sector' to support the many B2B organisations using the telephone in their marketing activities.

I would like to thank all the members of the DMA Contact Centres & Telemarketing Council who have given their time and invaluable experience in the writing and the refinement of this guidance. Particular thanks go to Peter Gale of the Database Factory who led a dedicated team which included Sureya Landini of Blue Donkey, Gary Kemp of Connections2 and Christine Bryant of Wunderman.

We trust this document will provide clear and effective guidance to support telemarketing activity for B2B organisations.

Elaine Lee
Chair, Contact Centres & Telemarketing Council
June 2011

2. Agents

This section outlines the importance of agents or front line staff to the future health of the industry. The following areas are covered to enable organisations to understand the minimum obligations to their staff in order to meet best practice:

- Recruitment   - Training
- Contracts   - Remuneration

2.1 Recruitment

The number of agent places in the UK rose to over 586,000 in 2007*, with the number of outsourced agents accounting for 12% of this total. These numbers are growing and a career in the contact centre industry is no longer a stepping-stone between alternative careers. With a further 16% growth forecast by 2012 it is important for employers to create a positive vision of the industry, their workplace and the different careers within contact centres.

When recruiting for B2B outbound telemarketing positions, it is important to consider the way in which roles are presented in order to best reflect the actual work that will be undertaken. For the purposes of this best practice document, the following roles are considered in scope: (the list is not exhaustive)

- Telemarketing Executive
- Telemarketer
- Tele-Sales Executive
- Telephone Sales Canvasser

In order to attract and retain the best people, your recruitment process should be fair, open and honest about the nature of the role from initial advertising through to recruitment days or interviews and job offer (see contract). You should also ensure that your recruitment policy complies with current employment and immigration law. It usually makes sense to include a telephone interview, as a clear and professional telephone manner will be integral to the success of any candidate in an outbound telemarketing role.

By their very nature, telemarketing campaigns can often be tactical and therefore you may also be recruiting people on a temporary basis on occasion. You should attempt to follow the same recruitment methodology whether for a permanent or temporary role. In the event that you are utilising temporary staff, there are many reputable agencies from which to draw agents.

In order to ensure compliance with legal requirements regarding security of customer data, full references should always be sought and checked. Telemarketers will have access to personal data even in a commercial context and will be working in a privileged position every time they conduct a telemarketing conversation. Your organisation's reputation (and that of your client, if you provide outsourced facilities) is in their hands.

*UK Call Centres Research MBD Research January 2008

2.2 Training

Once you have recruited the staff required for your telemarketing needs, it is paramount that a structured training programme is offered relevant to the needs of the individual and not just the specifics of the product or business services being promoted.

Any training programme should also be combined with an appreciation of how to get the best out of a telephone call with a business prospect or customer. The aim of at least part of the training, as is the case with this document, should be to give the staff member a sense of perspective as to their role in the sales process alongside other promotional materials and the position of the organisation in the market place for those goods or services being promoted.

Typical Training Programme

Hard skills
• Product knowledge including any Ts and Cs
• Objectives of project or campaign
• Demographics of business customers / prospects
• Briefing on previous / current promotions including telemarketing
• Escalations
• Industry guidelines including data protection / TPS / CTPS

Soft skills
• Listening techniques
• Call structure
• Strategies for dealing with different customer types
• Handling complaints (see Section 6-Complaints Procedure)
• Updating customer records

The key is to empower front line staff to understand and respond to any query from a prospect or customer including how to handle a complaint – see Section 6-Complaints Procedure. This in turn should reassure customers and help to positively change the perception of the industry as a whole.

The level of training you need to undertake will be proportionate to the amount of information appropriate to the product or service being promoted. Your location may also dictate the labour pool from which you recruit. There are a number of schemes to consider for the development of your staff at all levels, such as:

• Train to Gain – Learning and Skills Agency funded basic literacy and maths programme
• NVQs – Institute of Customer Service

Both the above provide portable qualifications that staff can take with them as their career progresses. Best practice dictates that you safeguard the future of the industry by providing the highest level and quality of training that your organisation's resources will allow.

2.3 Contracts

The contract of employment should include a full job specification, and this should be reviewed annually as part of an individual's annual performance review to ensure it reflects the activities being undertaken on the organisation's behalf. The contract should clearly state job role, place of work, hours of work, holiday entitlement, sickness entitlement if applicable, disciplinary and grievance procedure and remuneration including any benefits, both financial and non-financial.

For agents working via an agency, the contract of employment is with the agency itself.

Due attention should be given to providing information as to any incentive structure, if this is an integral part of the job being offered and will be the case in many B2B campaigns.

2.4 Remuneration

A proper remuneration structure provides employers with the best opportunity to encourage the right sort of behaviour among staff working on outbound telemarketing campaigns.

This means paying a basic rate of pay, whether that is an hourly rate or salary, that allows individuals to focus on the best interests of each and every business they contact in the course of their work. You should ensure that the rate of pay complies with the current national minimum wage and for B2B projects this would normally be significantly above the national minimum wage.

Incentives should therefore be set to achievable levels and reflect the ability to convert (see Section 7 Campaign Objectives). If possible you should try and set team goals and weight individual rewards to minimise poor conduct and maximise positive outcomes.

Attention should also be paid to thinking about exactly what is incentivised within the scope of the role. For example, attention should be given to the quality of customer interaction rather than focusing exclusively on the outcome (sale). Influencing agents to focus on quality and allow the natural conversion rate for a campaign to rise is a key factor. Forced conversions can often lead to cancellations and or complaints, which in turn take business time and effort to resolve.

The payments structure should also encompass all levels of management included in the project to ensure that there are no internal targets not aligned with the above approach. Ideally this will be reflected in the contractually agreed SLA's with the end business customer.

Things to avoid when setting up sales projects:

• Commission only deals between the telemarketing agencies and clients
• A high proportion of the remuneration for telesales agents to be paid in the form of commission
• Low levels of accountability

In summary, we recommend that all telemarketing agencies should guarantee their agents a pay rate of no less than the local average for similar roles irrespective of their actual employment status or the number of sales that they make.

We further advise that it is best practice for clients to enforce this on the telemarketing agencies that they use in their contracts by actively supervising their telemarketing agencies' recruitment of staff.

Further resources – Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (CIPD) member access only http://www.cipd. co.uk/search/results/bookrow.asp?ID=205336&IsSrchRes=1

Note for Agents
This document is a summary of what it is reasonable for you to expect from an employer who is asking you to undertake telemarketing activities. As a member of the industry you are within your rights to challenge practices which fall short of the standards being set in this document. The emphasis is on doing what's right by the industry in order that we may retain the freedom to make contact with the business community in the future by telephone and indeed other channels.

3. Environment

The DMA developed in conjunction with the British Standards Institute (BSI) the PAS 2020 guidelines for an environmental standard of operation whilst conducting direct marketing. Telemarketing operations and call centres are in almost all respects no different from any normal office; the environmental impact of normal office situations would be considered in terms of waste and energy. Staff travel may be a specific consideration when locating a call centre in order to avoid lengthy travel times and car journeys if public transport is not readily available.

4. Supplier/client relationship & responsibilities

When working with an outsourced contact centre, the client remains ultimately responsible for ensuring the activity is both compliant and legal. The client cannot simply handover responsibility or accountability to their outsourced contact centre supplier.

The relationship should be seen as a partnership with both parties working together to ensure compliance and best practice is being delivered. These guidelines outline all the key areas that need to be considered for a successful partnership, but it is also worth referencing the DMA 'Client Guide to Outsourcing' for further information.

5. Quality assurance

Quality assurance underlies all sections of this best practice guide. It is the responsibility of every campaign owner and contact centre to consider and deliver quality to clients. Without this, it is likely that outbound telemarketing and teleservice will fall into disrepute, making it no longer effective as a business practice, and possibly attracting direct government regulation.

This section highlights areas of quality assurance, which it is best practice to implement. There are also other suggestions, which will enhance quality and will become practical in the future.

Quality standards have particular importance in business to business telemarketing because not only can it be said that business buyers are more perceptive of a message being 'on brand', they are in most cases 'professional buyers' and such will have higher expectations of the calls they receive in a business context. Conversely the tolerance threshold for poor calls will be low.

5.1 Business Procedures

Regulation, Compliance and Standards

There are many regulations and standards available to contact centres. They can be split into four groups:

1. Legislative requirements under the Data Protection Act 1998, the Privacy and Electronic Communications Regulations 2003 as amended by the Privacy and Electronic Communications (Amendment) Regulations 2011 and the Regulation of Investigatory Powers (Lawful Business Practice) Regulations 2000.
2. Regulatory requirements, such as those imposed by Ofcom and the Financial Services Authority. Not to implement these can in, certain circumstance, result in a criminal offence.
3. Industry standards provided by professional bodies such as The Direct Marketing Association (UK) Limited. Although these are not law, contact centres are required to comply with them if they are members of these organisations. Industry bodies monitor compliance with their codes of practice and can impose sanctions if they are not met.
4. Best practice guidelines and 'kite marks' such as those contained in this document aim to raise standards and retain confidence in the medium. They aim to ensure the long-term sustainability of the industry.

Contact centres need to decide the standards with which they will comply, (in addition to those that are a legal requirement) and put in place quality assurance processes that verify they are being met. Regulatory requirements and industry standards usually require verification to those bodies responsible for them. A level of transparency is necessary to comply. It is also worth considering transparency internally for management and agents. This will drive standards as objectives are set and improvements are considered by all involved.

5.2 Verification

As part of the processes around regulation, compliance and standards, a verification process should be included. An employee should be appointed to manage this process and 'own' regulation, compliance and standards verification for the organisation. The employee appointed to fulfil this task will need to liaise with outside regulatory bodies. In larger organisations, there is often a Compliance Officer appointed and their responsibility should be communicated across the organisation.

The verification process should include an understanding of the regulation, compliance and standards to which the contact centre adheres, the processes that are necessary for compliance. The person responsible should keep relevant records to demonstrate compliance.

The person responsible will also need to understand the verification processes of the regulatory bodies. Quality assurance procedures and measures must be created to monitor compliance at the start of each campaign. The records kept should include:

* Agent / team objectives
* Dialler compliance reports if diallers are in use

- Copy of agent script for campaign; prompts or process tools where there is no prescribed script
- Agent training manual for campaign
- Campaign results
- Campaign execution rules, e.g. dialling times; retry counts; abandoned call message handling etc
- DNC list management processes
- Data management process
- Details of other front office and back office processes
- Complaints

Lastly, the person responsible must be the subject matter experts in this area and advise the organisation on future regulatory development.

Verifiers

In a number of processes, verifiers are also used. The purpose of the verifier is to check a call, transaction and data on an individual basis to ensure it is correct. This is a belt and braces approach that can be adopted for sensitive sales and regulated products such as financial services. This approach minimises product cancellations, poor agent selling techniques and incorrect data.

5.3 Customer Satisfaction

Customer satisfaction and customer acceptance of industry telemarketing practice are vital for the sustainability of the industry. Techniques are required to ensure this is at least maintained at a minimum level and improved over time. This will be different for different customer segments, applications and campaigns. Two techniques for assessment are noted below.

Pre-Campaign Testing and Benchmarks

All campaigns require testing against a set of measures and benchmarks. This is not just a question of campaign profitability. Campaigns can be profitable but may not necessarily deliver quality. For example, the conversion rate might fall below a certain level where a high number of campaign targets do not find the offer or service relevant. In these cases, the campaign should be modified or withdrawn. At the outset, campaign testing should also include testing against content of this best practice guide to ensure compliance with the highest industry standards.

Post Call Surveys

Another method to ensure that customer satisfaction does not fall below acceptable standards is post call surveys. These can be in several different forms such as asking customers if they would complete a post call survey at the end of a call, a later call to a sample of those telephoned or a survey via another medium such as post. Over a period of time, benchmarks should be established for minimum standards to ensure quality is maintained.

5.4 Tools

There are a number of technological tools that provide an aid to quality assurance. Some of these such as call recording are fundamental to quality assurance. Others like speech analytics are ones for the future.

Call Recording and Quality Monitoring

Call recording is a requirement of a number of regulatory bodies and is legally allowed provided the requirements of the Regulation of Investigatory Powers (Lawful Business Practice) Regulations 2000 are met. Recordings can be accessed and examined in any customer disputes. However, it is recommended that quality monitoring be used where supervisors proactively assess a sample of calls against objective criteria. Once assessed, agents should be targeted with specific training objectives against their known weaknesses. This will ensure any slippage in quality is spotted quickly and addressed.

Recording can also be extended to screen capture and the screens played at the same time as the call is replayed. This allows a full view of the process and the data quality to be checked as well.

If using a call recording system and taking payments by credit / debit cards then businesses need to bear in mind the PCI Data Security Standards compliance requirements. The DMA has produced a white paper - Guidance Notes on PCI DSS Compliance as it relates to Call Recording, see http://www.dma.org.uk/sectors/cct-faq.asp for the DMA white paper (NB only accessible to DMA members) or the PCI Data Security Standards website https://www.pcisecuritystandards.org/index.php for further details.

Reporting and Business Intelligence

Technology can provide reporting on a wide range of measures. Some of these are fundamental to verification by regulatory authorities. For example, measures in respect of the operation of any predictive dialler must be captured and stored, under Ofcom regulations. However, other measures need to be considered as part of a balanced scorecard to improve quality. As noted above, these can be campaign measures like conversion rate or customer satisfaction indexes.

In addition, a number of quality monitoring solutions can spot long silences in calls, where the agent and customer talk over each other or where there are high levels of stress in a voice. These all point to potential problems.

Speech Analytics

Speech analytics is a new technology but will become commonplace in the future. It allows identification of key words, phrases and stress patterns.

It automatically maps call information into language patterns that are based on dozens of indicators such as customer satisfaction, agent politeness, acoustic stress, and call tempo. It's not unusual to uncover patterns that are quite unexpected, alerting to issues that might never have been known. Patterns can be combined with call data to reveal in-depth information allow further analysis. Calls can be 'pulled' and inspected individually for quality.

In the long term, this technology will profoundly affect the way contact centres assess performance. In the case of best practice, contact centres need to consider how it will be used to improve quality, how the technology is managed, the use of alerts and trends, how results are fed back and how legal and regulatory compliance are ensured.

5.5 Call & After Call Process

These guidelines are designed to standardise good practice throughout all DMA member contact centres, conducting outbound B2B telemarketing campaigns. They are not exhaustive but carry the key message that the call should have the ultimate objective of serving the public interest, not the commercial interest. The four key components are:

- Disclosure   - Summary
- Structure   - Inclusivity

5.6 Disclosure

Agents should use their first name to introduce themselves. If the activity is being outsourced the client should be provided with a regularly updated list of agents names.

The call opening should contain the following information briefly but clearly:

a. Who is calling
b. Where they are calling from or on whose behalf they are calling
c. The reason for the call
d. The caller should ask, "Is this a convenient time to speak?", perhaps adding that the call will take just X minutes and be sure it takes no longer
e. The caller completes any relevant security checks quickly where appropriate

5.7 Structure

The agent should have a clear structure for the call that is designed to draw the customer into a dialogue quickly. Once a customer is talking they become 'involved' in the call and the call becomes less likely to abort. The structure of the call should aim to establish early on whether there is a 'need' or 'relevance' for the particular product or service as far as that particular customer is involved. In other words, is there a propensity to convert that call to a sale, and is it relevant for that call to continue? Typically this would involve some kind of question technique e.g. "We'd be keen to know if you currently subscribe to X?"

A good call structure will usually resemble the following blueprint:

a.   Question
b.   Establishing a 'need' or 'desire' which the caller aims to meet with the particular product or service
c.   Explaining in greater depth how something meets their needs
d.   Dealing with any questions or resistance without pushing or embellishment
e.   Discussing any additional up-sell or cross-sell opportunities ONLY if appropriate
f.   Closing the call with the suitable conclusion - Summarising

It's key to remember at stage b. of this process that if a need or desire is not apparent, the call MUST be concluded professionally and politely respecting that where no 'market-share' as such is generated with these calls, good customer experience (i.e. 'mind share') will eventually lead to more customers and therefore market share long term.

5.8 Summary

This is the process for the appropriate ENDING of a call. This part of the call structure is vital to ensure that the customer is clear about the outcome of the call and to ensure there has been no misunderstanding about what happens next.

The summary is a quick paraphrase of what the call has achieved. It should include the following things

a.   A quick recap of what has been agreed during the call and a summary of the next steps, e.g. "OK Mr. X you have agreed to [   ] this is what happens next."
b.   Explain that the information will be passed to X who will do y
c.   Ask them if they are happy to receive email / phone / mail contact in future and capture responses as appropriate
d.   Thank them sincerely for their time and end the call

5.9 Inclusivity: Setting communications objectives

It's important to ensure that contact centres develop measurable, customer centric objectives for effective, inclusive communication with all groups of people. Agents should be coached to respond to all customer types. Some customers will speak English as a second language; others will have disabilities or learning difficulties that will make the call more challenging. There should be a written procedure (perhaps in the contact centre's training manual) offering guidance in these subjects:

•   People who speak English as a second language
•   People with learning or physical disabilities
•   People with mental illness.

Provision should be made to ensure that the easy flow of two-way information is practicable for as many of those individuals contacted as possible. A sensitive communication strategy will be capable of engaging with disadvantaged groups via sensitive and responsive telephone discussion in an appropriate way e.g. resisting the temptation to speak louder as a reaction to someone who does not speak English very well; instead choosing to eliminate the use of metaphors and phrases like 'second to none', speaking at a steady pace using standard non-embellished language.

It's also important that agents are trained to understand that sometimes the people they call will be using certain sensory assistance services if for example they are deaf. These will impact on the call but can very easily be accommodated by varying the speed and tone of speech. The use of Type Talk or similar transcription facilities for

campaigns regularly involving the deaf must be made available prior to commencement. Records for customers with special requirements within the call should be tagged appropriately to ensure that the agent is aware of any special requirements, and had taken appropriate action before the call begins.

5.10 Post call process

It is imperative that any commitments / promises made during the call are completed in the timescale agreed within the call. Promises should always be met. It is therefore essential that agents are well briefed and do not promise things that cannot be delivered upon.

Key Principles

- Place the customer at the heart of the calling process respecting their rights and wants, particularly their right to say NO.
- Clear, honest and open, two-way communication should be central to all practice and process.
- Information should be shared and made available in support of communication excellence across the board.
- All communication – spoken, written and electronic – should be consistent, clear, easily understood, timely and up-to-date.
- Timeframes set for outbound calling should be carefully considered. The systematic targeting of talk-times may well be counter-productive; on the other side customers should not be given cause to feel 'hostage' on the phone either. Hence a careful balance is required regarding talk times, with some element of flexibility built into to efficiency targets.
- There should be a written policy regarding appropriateness of behaviour if a customer complains or becomes aggressive. This should perhaps be extended to cover discrimination (sexist / religious remarks etc) so that all agents understand clearly what is and what is not acceptable behaviour by the customer with a coherent, common policy on handling of such circumstances.
- Make yourself a customer – see your records within the data set and experience your offer from the perspective of a customer.
- Deliver what you promise.

6. Complaints procedure

Under the DMA Telemarketing Manifesto, DMA contact centre members whether outsourced or in-house which undertake outbound calling activity are encouraged to have a written complaints policy to ensure that they effectively manage and analyse complaints stemming from outbound calling in order to identify systemic issues and remedy them. This section provides contact centres with information on how to assist agents in identifying complaints and how the organisation can undertake an in-depth root cause analysis for complaints received.

6.1 Definition of a complaint

A complaint is an expression of dissatisfaction (whether oral or written and whether justified or not).

6.2 Assisting the agent

Staff Training

Training should be provided by the organisation for its entire customer-facing staff on the organisation's complaints procedure in line with their own organisation's written policies and, at a minimum, the following training should be covered:

- Complaint identification
- Complaints recording – accuracy of this recording
- Complaints resolution / handling difficult customers
- Regular organisation briefings and updates
- Understanding the difference between CTPS / TPS and its requirements
- Overcoming 'the right to call' – where data came from
- Complaints procedure
- Complaint recording
- Escalation process

Complaints Resolution / Handling difficult customers

All customer-facing staff should attend training on complaint resolution before having conversations with customers in order that they can recognise dissatisfaction and have the ability to resolve the complaint through a polite and respectful dialogue. Empathy should be stressed as part of any agents' training programme. Without the right attitude and tone, there is a danger that the customer's dissatisfaction will not be recognised, managed or escalated.

To do this, the agent is required to have the knowledge and the confidence not only to recognise a complaint but also to acknowledge this in a proactive manner. A complaint is sometimes ignored as the agent continues with their own commercial objective, for example 'I am sorry to hear you feel that way', instead of acknowledging and responding appropriately to the customers concern. If an appropriate response is given to the complaint, then the agent and the customer will be in a better position to relax and move on through the call. Preprepared Q & A's with precise scripting can diffuse any potential heated conversations and give factual responses.

Background / Knowledge Training

So that staff can confidently interact with customers, they need to be provided with knowledge that ensures they can have impactful conversations. Details of the Corporate Telephone Preference Service (CTPS) and Telephone Preference Service (TPS) and how to manage the customer and respond appropriately is an important aspect of this training, and asking more questions if cold calling, such as, 'can I ask when you registered for this service'. If warm calling it would be particularly helpful to agents if they know where the data has been obtained and can advise the customer why they are calling, for example if it is in response to a previous enquiry. A full campaign briefing should be provided to the agents since it is clear that if a customer understands what has motivated your organisation to call them, then they are likely to be less suspicious and listen to what your agents have to say. Agents should have a good understanding of the Manifesto so that they can answer any comments from customers effectively.

Complaint Reporting / Escalation

Each agent should receive documented information on when, how and to whom to escalate a complaint, together with a clear expectation on how long complaints will take to resolve. As a minimum, complaints should be logged and conversations recorded on this log, so that all communications are tracked and followed up in accordance with agreed organisation procedures. Regular communication with the call handling teams is essential. If there is a backlog of complaints, agents can assist in meeting the customer's expectations by providing them with timeline information at the point of the call. The escalation process needs to be in line with the organisation's complaints policies. Each agent should be shown where complaints are stored and what information is required for analysis purposes. In circumstances where a large group of customers may call, it may be advisable to set up a dedicated hotline, using live agents, that can classify the nature of the complaint and if unable to resolve it themselves are able to connect the caller to the most relevant person or department and ensure someone is always available to take the call.

Ongoing Competency

Each agent should be supported by a supervisor who listens to calls regularly in compliance with the requirements of the Regulation of Investigatory Powers (Lawful Business Practice) Regulations 2000, provides feedback to ensure dissatisfaction is being recognised, and that calls are managed effectively, processes and procedures are adhered to and recorded appropriately. Contact centre management should not forget to praise agents when they have done a good job!

6.3 Industry to advocate

Complaint reporting

Companies are required to manage and analyse complaints stemming from outbound calling in order to identify systemic issues and not only remedy them but to take a root cause analysis on the reasons for the complaints and change processes and procedures to minimise customer dissatisfaction. Companies have a duty to support their staff by providing the tools to respond respectfully to customers but also to improve the customer experience of an outbound telemarketing call by fully understanding the root cause of their dissatisfaction. Each organisation is required to have its own written complaints procedure. As a minimum the following information should be collected:

- Date of complaint
- Date complaint settled
- Reason for complaint
- Outcome
- Was complaint escalated
- Tracking back to agent / campaign
- Handled within SLA

Each complaint should be categorised as follows:

- Complaints that can be answered and resolved immediately on the call by the agent
- Complaints that require further investigation

Those complainants whose issues need further investigation should receive an acknowledgement communication and details of the organisation's complaints procedure with a timeline to manage the customer's expectations.

Those complainants, whose issues cannot be settled within a seven-day period should be contacted by telephone / letter / email to advise the reason for the delay with a timeline of expected conclusion.

The minimum information each complainant should receive is:

- Name of Contact
- Telephone number to contact person handling complaint
- Details of when the investigation should be completed
- Organisation complaints procedure

In the event of a customer remaining dissatisfied, they should be advised of the organisation's escalation procedure.

Analysing

Once you start building up records on how many complaints are resolved at point of call, understanding the reason for the complaint, and how this was managed, you can start looking at trends and implement improvements. For instance, you may find that a particular data batch caused more complaints than others. You are now in a position to stop buying data with this customer profile and change your data strategy.

The organisation's support and training for supervisors is crucial in order that they have impactful conversations with their frontline staff and in turn the staff members treat customers respectfully and fairly. Supervisors should be given the time to support staff through call monitoring, regularly testing staff for ongoing competency.

Organisation to assure – Customer contact and successful handling of complaints
As customers' expectations rise in respect of the way they are treated when called by a contact centre, it is obligatory that all customers should receive the following service in the event of a complaint:

* Knowledgeable, trained, respectful staff who can have impactful conversations with the customers and who are supported by specialist supervisors. They also require a business that listens to customers and responds honestly and appropriately to issues, which they raise.

* Acknowledgement communication on all complaints by letter / email / telephone should include:
    o A name of staff member within the contact centre
    o Telephone number to contact the person handling the complaint
    o Timeline regarding completion of the investigation
    o Organisation's complaints procedure
    o Opening hours

The customer will feel confident that his/her complaint has been considered appropriately and that they are valued. Through their insights companies can and will make changes with a view to continuously improving the customer experience.

7. Campaign objectives

7.1 Diallers and Dialler Usage

To maximise your chance of a successful telemarketing campaign, support your staff and provide a valuable service to prospects and customers alike, you need to carefully plan the campaign before calling starts - whether the work is being carried out in-house or is being outsourced.

7.2 Campaign planning

Ensure that you know who are your potential customers and you understand them. Undertake research. What is the ideal profile of your customer? If you know this then you will be able to target them effectively. If it is a sales call, carefully select a quality database of businesses that have a high propensity to buy, matched against your profile, not just volume. What learning can you apply from previous campaigns? Calling the wrong people simply demoralises contact centre agents, upsets business professionals and damages the brand image. Whenever possible, select contact centre agents to work on campaigns who have a genuine interest in the product they are promoting. This enhances the audience confidence and promotes conversations rather than a scripted dialogue.

7.3 Campaign objectives

What do you want to achieve from the campaign? Are the objectives measurable and are they achievable? How is the telemarketing team going to help achieve the objectives? Be specific. Is there a secondary objective to the call? How many dials and decision-making contacts (DMCs) are required? What conversion rates are achievable? Consider the conversions against data sets, as these will differ not only between warm and cold calling but also between the different data lists that have been selected. What quality objectives will be established, in addition to the financials? How is the telemarketing campaign benefiting the corporate customer? Are you collecting valuable customer insight during the call? If so, how will it be used to help improve the customer experience in future campaigns?

7.4 Communications objectives

This part needs your careful thought. High pressure, aggressive campaigns can lead to high staff attrition rates and irritate your audience who feel they are being treated in a robotic manner and not as individuals. So what is the most impactful communication that ensures your prospects / customers remember your call for all the right reasons? How does the telemarketing communication reflect on any other advertising that may be taking place? Are staff members aware and briefed on this and is there consistency between the two communications? A good quality call will mitigate the inconvenience to those you don't convert. If you are calling customers, can you offer a service tag to the end of the call – for example, "OK, I understand that you are happy with your existing suppler at the moment, would you like me to email you from time to time of details of product promotions we may be offering in the future?".

7.5 Staff

Provide your staff with as much information as possible so that they can have well-informed, professional conversations with likeminded business professionals, which will be reflected in positive conversions and customer satisfaction. Obtain feedback from your staff. They are in the frontline and have first-hand and highly relevant information, which will be an asset to the organisation and contribute to the success of any campaign.

7.6 ROI / Results

Once you have decided on the above you can define costs and the ROI. Measure the ROI in data sets, for example. If a list purchased has not provided the results required then why damage your brand and that of your client and your profit margin by continuing to outbound call. If you continue to call regardless of negative results, this will have an impact on your prospects, customers, and agents. If the communication is inappropriate to your target, consider

the impact of the campaign on those customers and prospects who you convert and those that you don't. With increasing numbers on the CTPS and TPS register (June 2011 16.5 million numbers registered on the TPS and 1.8 million numbers registered on the CTPS); the pool of prospects is not infinite. Conservation of this precious resource is very important, and if your proposition is only generating low conversion rates then you are less likely to sell or even get to speak to these people in the future.

7.7 Campaign monitoring

Review each campaign after 24 hours of calling. Re-evaluate a sample of each data set, Do Not Call (DNC), conversion rates, complaints, feedback from agents and customers. Are you achieving your original objectives? Re-forecast and check ROI but keep in mind customer dissatisfaction levels. In particular, monitor your conversion rate very closely. The campaign may start well, as it is likely you have prioritised your data before calling, but as it continues, the conversion rate will drop as the tail end of the list is re-processed.

Campaigns never run exactly to plan, so performance against your key performance targets needs to be continually monitored throughout the campaign period.

7.8 Corporate and social responsibility

Consider the impact of the campaign in non-financial terms. How does it affect those business customers and prospects who you don't convert? Is it socially responsible, for example, to inconvenience 49 professional business people with an inappropriate phone call in order to make a single sale? What is a reasonable and socially responsible conversion rate for your campaign?

At the start of the campaign, set a minimum daily conversion rate. Stop calling when you fall below the threshold.

8. Data

Data and direct marketing are inextricably linked. Put simply, there can be no contact of any kind without access to the business contact information of those with whom an advertiser wishes to have a dialogue. Data quality must, therefore, be a priority at every level. But it is most critical in regard to the legal imperatives and from the perspective of achieving optimum ROI.

The following headings break down the key considerations in the use of data for telemarketing:

8.1 Source

Data is often referred to as being 'warm' or 'cold'. Whilst intuition suggests that warm data (when contact of some sort has been established by the advertiser) is preferable to cold data (when there has been no previous contact), the reality is that most campaigns, particularly those focussed on demand generation will probably require cold data at some stage. The good news is that cold data, when selected intelligently and appropriately, can be effective.

If you are contacting organisations that are not already customers, there are many sources of data available. Those with knowledge and experience of the data market may choose to approach data owners directly. But those who are unfamiliar with this aspect of direct marketing are at no disadvantage. There are many list broking experts, who will advise, guide and acquire data on behalf of the end user and at no additional cost. To ensure a high level of both legal compliance and quality, best practice dictates that only data owners or data brokers who are members of the DMA should be used.

8.2 Origin

Whilst business and public sector telephone numbers at main switchboard level are still relatively straightforward to source, the increase in TPS and CTPS registrations in recent years, has led to a decrease in the availability of third-party data with individual contact or DDI telephone numbers.

You need to question the source of the data, the method by which it was collected or verified and under what circumstances the data was acquired, even if the data was collected in accordance with UK data protection legislation.

8.3 Selection / Targeting

Optimum targeting is an imperative. It is pointless to contact organisations or contacts that are inappropriate for the product or service being promoted. It increases costs and is likely to antagonise the recipient. It can damage the advertisers brand and image and from a very practical perspective, can lead to contacts 'opting-out' and removing themselves from the available data pool for future campaigns.

In order to maximise efficiency and ROI, you should study your data carefully and target both organisational types and contact points appropriately. Data selection is thus determined by the nature of the campaign and data sources with the required depth and detail should be utilised.

There are many databases available that can provide not just basic business profiles, but additional information on a wide range of organisational and contact attributes, such as an organisation's financial history, it's size and sector, it's geographic location, ownership and subsidiary relationships, it's purchase history, the equipment in use or services consumed, as well as a wealth of contact information.

Best practice is that marketers should not compromise detail in favour of volume.

It is always advisable to validate and test each selection against campaign objectives prior to roll-out.

8.4 Data Volume

Special attention should be accorded to the volume of data to be used for a campaign. Factors, which will influence this, are:

•   number of agents to be used
•   length of time that the campaign will run
•   number of contacts per hour - time-of-day may influence this

Note that a greater emphasis on targeting will reduce the volume of data available. Whilst it is imperative to ensure that a campaign is aimed at those most likely to respond positively, this consideration needs to be balanced with the overall requirements of the campaign – or the requirements adjusted to take into account a lower volume of data.

8.5 Legal compliance

As well as gaining the assurance that the source data has been collected in accordance with the Data Protection Act 1998 (DPA) and the Privacy & Electronic Communications Regulations 2003 as amended by the Privacy & Electronic Communications (Amendment) Regulations 2011 (PECR), it is imperative that this data is used with the same adherence to relevant legislation.

Screening against TPS and/or CTPS is a legal requirement and you should be careful to use both files if your target audience includes sole traders or partnerships, which may well have numbers registered in the TPS file. It is worth remembering that some partnerships are substantive organisations.

It is also a requirement to ensure that data is screened against internal opt out and suppression files. Not only is it common sense not to call those that have indicated that they do not wish to be called, it is a legal requirement to maintain and consistently update in-house do-not-call (DNC) lists.

If agencies and/or outsourced call centres are utilised, it is crucial that such suppression files are provided to them and utilised.

Furthermore, you should always know the source of the data, so that if prospects ask how their personal information has been obtained, it is possible to provide them with this information.

Requests for suppression should take place immediately. Requests for information on the source of the contact's data (Subject Access Requests) should be acted upon speedily and certainly within a maximum of 40 days.

Prior to use for telemarketing purposes, data should have been updated or refreshed (at the very least by screening against suppression files) in the previous six months and against the TPS and/or CTPS files no more than 28 days prior to being called (see below).

8.6 TPS & CTPS

Data purchased through a 3rd party supplier, who is a DMA member, must have been screened against the TPS and/or CTPS files no more than 28 days prior to supply. Irrespective of the source of data, you must ensure that any data used has been screened against the TPS and/or CTPS files no more than 28 days prior to unsolicited calls being made.

There are certain exceptions to this, such as where the data is to be used for legitimate market research, or where there is a contract in place that provides for telephone communications (such as in commercial partnership, distribution or reselling agreements) and best practice is to seek authoritative guidance if in any doubt.

Proprietary lists (i.e. lists of organisations and contacts with whom the advertiser has an established relationship) may be used without cleaning against the TPS or CTPS files, provided the contact data has been supplied directly (i.e. it has not been sourced) and it was been made clear at the point of collections that the number provided may be used for direct marketing purposes.

8.7 Security

Appropriate technical and organisational measures should be taken to protect the security of data, particularly when personal data is being held or transferred. You should remember that contact data, even in a B2B contacts, is still considered personal data and should be subject to the same security as any other personal data.

All files should be password protected and no one should have access to data unless they are directly involved in the process of preparation or use.

Advertisers or their agents should appoint a designated person or persons who is aware of, and responsible for, compliance with the DPA and PECR relating to the security of personal data, in connection with its telemarketing activities.

8.8 Testing / Analysis / Refinement

Segmentation of the data into test cells prior to calling and subsequent detailed analysis of results will reap dividends for future campaigns.

Attention should also be paid to refining the scripting as a campaign unfolds. Much can be learned and improved upon over its duration by adapting scripts to suit different datasets.

8.9 Data Ownership

In many cases, 3rd party data acquired for direct marketing purposes is purchased as list rental for one-off use. In telemarketing, this is generally defined as being a live call with the correct contact, subject to the terms of the list rental agreement. The contact may request to be called back at a more convenient time, in which case a further call may be permissible, depending on the terms of the list rental agreement. However, once the contact has declined to participate further, their number may be deemed to have been used and may not be called again, depending on the terms of the list rental agreement.

9. Outbound call scheduling

With regards to resource planning, where a dialer is utilized you must ensure that appropriate levels of resource are available in order that connected calls find an available agent. Please see the notes below under Section 10 'Dialler Operations' regarding best practice using a dialler for business to business calling.

It is also important to ensure that you have sufficient time to fully train agents working on a particular campaign before any work starts.

The scheduling of calling times should allow for the best chance to reach your target audience. Calling prospects/customers at inappropriate times may cause resentment and render future calling ineffective. Clearly, it always makes sense to note a contact's calling preferences, where these are forthcoming. This is particularly important with B2B, busy decision makers' time is precious and therefore effective diary management for call backs is key – if you promise a call back at a certain time and day ensure that you do it!

The majority of B2B dialing will of course take place during normal working hours Monday to Friday 9am to 5pm. Do also bear in mind the target market and allow for flexibility around this, for example certain decision makers may be more contactable before 9am and others only available in the evenings – you should always build this flexibility into any campaign and be obsessive with customer/prospect feedback PLUS the quantitative feedback that your Management Information should give you. Very simply study what works and design the campaigns that suit both your campaign targets and your prospects availability.

Please also be mindful of sector specific calling times within the day, calling a pub at lunch time for example may not be terribly effective!

General awareness of topical events, including national emergencies (e.g. storms / flooding), should always be taken into account when deciding whether to start or continue any outbound calling activity and or limit activity to particular parts of the country.

10. Dialler operations

10.1 Diallers and Dialler Usage

The section covers a number of different scenarios:

- Manual (number dialled by hand, even if data selection is by a system)
- Preview (agent has to indicate that it is OK to initiate dial)
- Timed preview (agent has a pre-determined time period to review call details before call is made)
- Progressive (call will be dialled when previous one is completed, but only one per agent
- Predictive (more calls are made than there are agents waiting to eliminate agent wait time)
- Other technologies such as power dialling, auto-dialling

This guide covers all types of dialling - the abandoned call and Answer Machine Detect (AMD) sections are, however, only relevant to predictive dialling. Recipient's experience does not relate to how a call was initiated, if it is not abandoned.

It covers the different diallers which use different mechanisms to control over dialling - explicit over dial rates, agent – trunk ratios etc. None of these are relevant to best practice because all best practice is interested in is the recipient's experience e.g. abandoned calls.

10.2 When to use Predictive Dialling

Predictive dialling provides varying levels of productivity gain over progressive dialling, depending on four main characteristics:

- The quality of the predictive dialler's pacing engine or algorithm
- The live connection rate of the campaign i.e. the proportion of calls the dialler makes which result in an answered call
- The average duration of the call cycle once connected (this is the time spent talking, plus any wrap-up time after the caller has disconnected)
- The size of the team working on the campaign

In general, **shorter call cycle durations** and **lower connect rates** reduce the effectiveness of progressive dialling and there is, therefore, a greater productivity dividend for predictive dialling.

In a B2B environment specific factors affect whether predictive dialling is likely to be effective:

- Unless you are phoning very small businesses the connection rates are likely to be very high. However, where DDI numbers are not being used the person answering the phone is likely to be a receptionist or switchboard operator acting as a gatekeeper. Agents are therefore likely to spend less time waiting for calls and more time trying to get past the gatekeeper.
- Many businesses use Automated Attendant systems. Using AMD on these calls is generally ineffective because they will be detected as an automated answer and screened out. If the call is passed to an agent they can respond, with tones or voice as required, to get to the required person.

The size of the team also plays a part. In order for the predictive dialler to be effective, there needs to be a certain number of agents on a campaign in order to improve productivity without generating unnecessary abandoned calls. What constitutes this minimum team size will depend on the first three factors detailed above, and each dialler will behave differently under different circumstances. It is important to understand how your chosen dialler works with low team sizes and that you use that information to help you plan your campaigns. This is important because:

- Many predictive diallers will generate high numbers of abandoned calls when the team size is too small.
- Productivity is increased with larger team sizes, and if it can be done within the operational priorities of the contact centre, it is better to run with larger teams.

Some diallers will automatically understand if there are enough agents under the given calling conditions to start predictive dialling. However, most will not. If this is the case, you will need to ensure that when there are a small number of agents working on a campaign, that campaign is limited to prevent the dialler generating abandoned calls. This can be achieved by:

• Reducing the dialler's abandoned call target
• Limiting the number of trunks the campaign is configured to use
• Setting a particular campaign to be run in progressive, rather than predictive mode.

If you are unsure how your particular dialler performs under these conditions, you should consider the following rules of thumb for a typical dialler that cannot compensate for small team sizes itself:

• Experience has shown that 12 agents is the minimum team size to efficiently manage predictive dialling within the 3% abandoned call rate.
• The dialler can operate with 10 agents provided the nuisance rate is reduced to 2% - otherwise, there is a significant risk of poor dialler performance in the latter half of the shift due to the dialler compensating for higher dropped calls at the start of the shift.
• Experience has shown below 10 agents should be managed on preview / progressive dialling. Dropped calls represent a higher percentage because of the small team size; therefore the dialler becomes inefficient in performance and use of data.
• Switching from predictive to preview / progressive dialling during a shift should not cause a dialler to treat the call list as two separate lists and is therefore a method of recovering a nuisance rate over the working window – but it is important to ensure that this applies to your dialler.

If in doubt, consult you dialler vendor for advice on this complex issue.

10.3 Dialler Administration

1. Conversion rates
The call centre's management, in association with the client, should define the minimum conversion rate acceptable for each campaign, based on both the profitability of a campaign as well as a consideration for the likely customer impact / annoyance factor of the campaign. This must be monitored and agents moved to an alternative campaign if the minimum conversion rate is not being met.

2. Suppression files / Do-not-call lists
All calling should take into account the requirement to honour CTPS and TPS registrations and maintain an in house suppression list as described elsewhere in this document.

3. Ring time
• Contact centres must consider the length of time that calls are allowed to ring before being terminated as no answer.
• Ring time must be measured from the point that the call starts ringing on the customer's phone, not from the point at which the call is launched. This is particularly important when calling mobile phones where the delay between dial and ringing can be more than a couple of seconds. Where the point at which the call starts ringing on the recipient's phone cannot be determined, a reasonable extension to the ringing time should be introduced to allow for this unknown.
• The factors that a contact centre must consider when setting the ring time include:
    i. Minimum ring time allowed under the DMA Code of Practice (15 seconds).
    ii. The demographics of the customer being contacted.
    iii. The size of the team and the answer success rate both of which may limit the impact of higher ring time.
    iv. A higher ring time can increase the agent wait-time between calls. In high wait time situations where predictive diallers are used, agents may become distracted between calls if there is no visual or audible indication of ongoing dialling activity.
    v. Some telephone networks provide answer phone and voicemail capabilities that cut in after a standard delay e.g. BT 1571 answers after 20 seconds.
    vi. Any dialler functionality present that mitigates longer ring time e.g. call cancelling over Ofcom minimum ring time, where calls are automatically terminated if leaving the call ringing would result in an abandoned call.

- Contact centres should use campaign testing with a higher ring time and plot answer count versus ring time for both customer answered calls and answer phones to identify an appropriate ring time for each campaign. The contact centre must strike a balance between ringing too long, hitting a high proportion of answer machines and the inconvenience caused by stopping too early.
- In preview dialling mode, if the dialler does not automatically hang up calls, the agent needs to be provided with some mechanism to measure the ring time to ensure that Ofcom regulations are met.

4. Retry handling

Frequent retries can cause a high level of nuisance to customers. Nuisance will occur primarily when dialling mobiles or landlines with call history display functionality. As contact centres, the DMA requires in its Code of Practice that all outbound calls made (regardless of whether a predictive dialler is used or not) must present Caller Line Identification (CLI). Unsuccessful dial attempts are not anonymous. When cold calling, the contact centre may consider the nuisance to be low enough not adversely to affect the brand. However, contact centres need to be cautious in this regard, particularly when warm calling active customers. Even when the customer experience talking to an agent is perceived as good, a high level of retries will be seen by many customers as harassment.

The following recommendations should be considered as an initial 'rule of thumb' and are suggested to limit the nuisance caused. Primarily, however, call centres need to be aware of, and have a clear policy regarding retry management.

- Where the dialling result of an outbound call attempt is no answer or answer phone, the maximum number of dial attempts in a single day should be limited to 3 for any individual customer telephone number and account.
- The following minimum redial intervals are recommended:

Busy	- 10 minutes
Number unobtainable	- 120 minutes
No answer	- 120 minutes
Answer phone/Voicemail	- 120 minutes

- In B2B environments it is common practice to leave messages on automated answering systems. Where messages are left retry rules should take this into account and give the recipient a reasonable amount of time to respond before they are called again.
- The numbers above should be considered as minimum values. Contact centres should attempt to use retry strategies that spread dialling attempts between morning / afternoon / evening and weekends (if appropriate for the business sector targeted). Where possible, dialler retry rules should be used to avoid retrying numbers at the same time each day.
- Retry counts to an individual number or customer account can be reset following a call that is answered by the customer.

5. Presenting all relevant facts to the agent

If using predictive or progressive dialling, agents should have the following information presented:

i. Within 1 second the name of the customer and the reason for the call is displayed. The reason for call only needs to be shown if the purpose of the calls varies within the campaign.
ii. Within 2 seconds all relevant facts are presented to the agent.

- When warm calling, it is very important that the agent has all relevant facts to hand concerning the customer's account. When customers call inbound, they appreciate that the agent may need a little time to familiarise himself or herself with the customer's account, its status etc. However, if the customer is called, he / she expects the agent to know why they have called and to be fully conversant with the account details.

6. Abandoned call handling

- Where a dialler allows it, any customers who receive an abandoned call should be redialled using manual, preview or progressive dialling as soon as possible after the abandoned call, ideally within 10 minutes.
- When a call that was previously abandoned, is presented to an agent, the agent should be alerted (visually or audibly) that the customer has previously received an abandoned call.

7. Call-backs

- Agents should be informed about the times when the campaign will be undertaken. The agent should not agree call-backs with the customer for times when the call-back cannot be performed (or be allowed to set).
- If a call-back is not successful at the date and time requested and same day redials are unsuccessful, the customer should be redialled at the original call-back time on the following day.

8. Immediate call-backs
- Where the dialler equipment does not directly handle immediate call-backs, agents should understand the process used to redial customers where the customer wishes to discuss the matter on a number other than the one dialled. With the increase in outbound dialling to mobile phones, the contact centre must know how to handle the scenario of a customer wishing to talk on a landline rather than the mobile number dialled.

9. Agent grouping for predictive dialling
- Wherever possible, call centres should maximise the number of agents assigned to a particular campaign. Predictive dialling systems are usually more efficient and accurate when there are a large number of agents on a single campaign. This should be used by contact centre to minimise the abandonment rate.

10.4 Notes on the Telemarketing Section of the DMA Code

This section is designed to clarify parts of the telemarketing section of the DM Code of Practice and how they relate to best practice.

21.22 - Definitions of dialler

Please refer to section 11.2 above on when to use predictive dialling equipment and when to use other forms of technology. It is also important to note that the DM Code of Practice and the Ofcom regulations differ in that the DM Code of Practice at para 21.40 requires a CLI to be transmitted for all calls made, whereas the Ofcom regulations only apply to the use of **predictive** dialling equipment.

21.31 - 15-second minimum ring time.

- Recipient experience is what is important in the timing **not** dialler experience. i.e. coping with call set-up time, incorporating estimates if equipment cannot start timer from network delivered event.
- Look at good operational practice - too long a ring time has a negative impact on dialler performance because it extends the calling cycle making it more likely that answering machines will cut-in.

21.33 - Information message in the event of an abandoned call

Timing - the DM Code of Practice only stipulates that if a call is to be abandoned because a live agent is not available, the information message should be played within 2 seconds of the call being answered. However, as a matter of best practice, calls that are to be handled by a live agent should be connected to that agent within 2 seconds of the call being answered.

The term 'answered' is included in both DM Code of Practice and Ofcom regulations. Contact centres should measure this from the point at which the dialling equipment is informed (by the telephony network) that the call has been answered by the customer.

21.34 - Contents of the Information Message

There are three important telephone numbers involved in the management of a predictive dialler campaign.

- a. The CLI transmitted on the call.
- b. The number relayed during the information message which is played in the event that the call is abandoned.
- c. In the event of a recipient calling the number transmitted as a CLI, many call centres then play a message which provides a third telephone number for people to call if they wish to be placed on an in-house suppression file.

It is important to note that the inclusion of a 080 no charge number or 0845 special services basic rate number in the abandoned call information message (see b. above) may not achieve its objective because:

- the recipient of the call was not expecting the call
- if the recipient listened to the information message - it is unlikely they would expect to hear a number to call if they want to be placed on an in-house suppression file

- very few people can accurately memorise a telephone number played to them once - especially if unexpected
- once the information message has played - the recipient is unable to reactivate it to hear it again – meaning that he / she cannot retrieve the number if they missed or have forgotten it.

The objective could be better achieved by the information message giving the same number as is disclosed in the message played to a caller on a 1471 call back (see 3 above) which gives the caller a second opportunity to hear the number. The number in the case of either b. or c. above need not be the same CLI number that is transmitted by the call (see a. above) as this presents technical problems for some contact centres that are not able to issue multiple CLIs.

The CLI information message and any other messages do not have to be the same for every call on a campaign. Accounts for different companies and brands can be included in a single campaign, as long as the CLI presented information message and any other messages are appropriate for the account being dialled.

It is recommended that for auditing purposes, contact centres keep documentation of the CLI information messages and any other messages associated with each campaign being dialled.

Suggested forms of words for the messages:

For information message:
"Hello, you were called on behalf of [organisation / Client Name] by our appointed representative to discuss our latest offers. Please accept our apologies for inconveniencing you but our system has failed to connect you to one of our advisers. We hope this call has not caused you any anxiety. If you prefer not to receive any further calls on our behalf, please call us on 08xx xxx xxxx. Thank you"

For message heard when returning a call to the transmitted CLI:
"Hello, you are not being charged for this call. You were called on behalf of [organisation / Client Name] to discuss our latest offers. We are sorry to have missed you and apologise for any inconvenience or anxiety our call may have caused. We will try to contact you again in the near future. If you prefer not to receive any further calls on our behalf, please call us on 08xx xxx xxxx. Thank you"

Ofcom Regulations state that the information message must identify the organisation on whose behalf the call was made. Maximum clarity should be used when presenting the organisation's name. Where a plc is a group of branded divisions, the brand name should be used to the customer, rather than the overall group name. This is particularly important for 'warm calls' and the Financial Services sector where a customer will have a relationship with a brand rather than a plc.

10.5 Abandonment Rate

- The 3% abandonment rate should be seen as the maximum rate for compliance. Contact centres should identify and use the minimum rate that balances agent performance and the number of customers receiving an abandoned call as a matter of best practice. Campaigns should be checked at different abandonment rates to find the most appropriate rate. If a reduction from 2.5% to 2.0% adds 2 seconds of idle time per agent call, what is the cost in lost agent time per week in comparison to the number of customers receiving abandoned calls? This is particularly important when performing warm calling of current customers.

- Where a call centre has dialler equipment that can self-tune to an abandonment rate, the rate should be set no higher than 2.8% per campaign. Where call centres manually control dialling aggressiveness, the policy should be to aim for an abandonment rate no higher than 2.75%. This approach provides a call centre with room for occasional rate spikes whilst retaining compliance.

- Call centres should monitor and adjust the abandonment rate for each campaign through the course of each shift. The regulations require that the rate will be no more than 3% per campaign over ANY 24 hour period. It is recommended that the abandonment rate measurement is performed from midnight to midnight. For QA monitoring, where possible, a random selection of alternative 24-hour period times is also checked as a matter of best practice.

11. International considerations

The majority of this document considers Best Practice within the context of domestic telemarketing activities (i.e. telemarketing activities carried out by, or on behalf of, UK based organisations to customers in the UK). However, a substantial volume of international telemarketing activity (i.e. to customers ordinarily resident outside the UK) is conducted from the UK and there are a number of best practice guidelines that should be considered by anyone involved in international telemarketing, whether inbound or outbound.

The following is not an exhaustive list, but rather a summary of some of the more significant areas to be considered. Please note that the term 'customer' is used here to indicate the 'caller' in the case of an inbound call or the 'recipient' (in the case of an outbound call).

11.1 Language and cultural support

Language

It seems self-evident that telemarketing should be conducted in the language best suited to the customer and best practice is that calls should be transacted in the language that is native to the customer.

The demands of budget, timescales and practicality sometimes makes this unachievable and it is thus incumbent on the telemarketer to take all reasonable steps to ensure that customers are presented with a best 'second language' alternative that it likely to be understandable. Typically this will be English, but may be another major language such as German or French.

Agents should be aware that language and country cannot always be used interchangeably and in some cases it's best to use a second language alternative to avoid cultural difficulties. Inbound calls from Belgium, for instance, may well be better answered in English rather than in French or Flemish. Similarly, inbound calls from Switzerland may best be taken in German, depending on the likelihood of area of origin, but again may best be taken initially in English. In both cases, it is advisable to have the appropriate language support available so that the receiving agent can quickly transfer the call to a native speaking agent:

- in the case of Belgium, French and Flemish will typically be needed
- in the case of Switzerland, German (ideally Swiss-German), French and potentially Italian may be required (we're assuming that Romansch is not necessary!)

As there are a large number of multi-language countries, best practice dictates that you carefully consider;

- the locale of the target audience
- the targeted individuals and their propensity to speak English
- their likely native and second language preferences
- the nature of the call and the need to use technical or industry specific terms
- any cultural nuances in regards to language selection
- the requirements for agents to recognise, understand and accurately capture names and addresses in their correct format
- the systems requirements to handle non-English characters and formats and to capture & store language preferences

Cultural support

There are a number of cultural aspects that need to be considered as a part of best practice international telemarketing.

As many UK customers have discovered over recent years, simply offering a language capability is not necessarily sufficient to support a good level of communication and mutual understanding. The fact the many former British colonies speak English does not mean that English speaking agents can communicate effectively with their customers. Accents alone can seriously hinder communication and in some extreme cases completely undermine the effectiveness of the call.

Best practice is to deploy native language speakers that can grasp the idiosyncrasies and idioms of a language, but sufficient consideration and weight needs to be applied to all the necessary cultural references that the agent may encounter.

In some cases a knowledge of the geography specific to the customers location may be necessary: A classic example being the UK customer of a major insurance company who suffered the misfortune of a road traffic accident whilst on holiday in Wales and who was informed that he couldn't have a replacement vehicle as his policy didn't provide this level of cover whilst travelling 'abroad'.

In other cases it's necessary to understand differences based on other cultural references, even when dealing with nominally English speaking territories. Agents dealing with US or Canadian customers may need to be aware of the linguistic challenges involved and on local conventions for dates, weights & measures and even the way that building floors are notated.

There are literally thousands of cultural references that are largely taken for granted in day to day life, but which if not recognised and addressed can cause confusion, inconvenience and even a real cost to customers.

It's not necessary to provide additional anecdotal evidence of cultural misunderstandings as these are many and widely understood, but what is necessary is that any organisation undertaking international telemarketing should consider the cultural references that may be involved in any calls and that agents are sufficiently well trained to deal with them without causing offence or inconvenience to customers.

11.2 Time-zones & hours of calling

Care needs to be taken to schedule outbound campaigns and calls as well as accommodating inbound calls in accordance with the business hours in place at the customer's location.

Such schedules need to take into account the following:

*   The actual time-zone covering the customer's location and it's relation to UK time
*   Public and religious holidays
*   Standard working days (not all countries work Monday to Friday)
*   The customers 'normal' working hours

Call should thus be scheduled within the target audiences 'normal' operating hours.

11.3 Compliance

Most countries have laws pertinent to privacy, data protection and the delivery of sales & marketing communications, whether by electronic or more traditional means, so marketers need to consider the regulatory environment that's applicable to their specific operation. For example, organisations conducting telemarketing activities in the UK must, as a minimum, comply with the provisions of the Data Protection Act and the attendant Privacy and Electronic Communications Regulations (PECR). In addition, DMA members are obliged to operate within the DM Code of Practice, which in many instances sets higher standards than those required by the applicable regulations.

Accordingly, Best Practice for domestic telemarketing operations may be construed as operating both within the UK's regulatory framework and in accordance with the DM Code of Practice. However, many countries operate a 'stricter' level of regulation than that adopted in the UK, where, in general, B2B telemarketing is considered to be a form of electronic communication and (in general terms) operate under an 'opt-out' regulatory framework (with the TPS and CTPS preference services). That is to say, any customer has the right to 'opt-out' of future telephone communications and organisations have a legal duty to recognise and enforce the customer's wishes in this respect.

Other countries operate in quite different ways and some operate under an 'opt-in' framework, that is to say that customers cannot be called (assuming that the call is an unsolicited sales and or marketing call) unless they have previously opted-in to receiving such calls. The implications for telemarketers wishing to reach out to a prospect audience across multiple countries are thus far-reaching.

Best Practice should commit the telemarketer to a regime whereby the regulations and laws applicable in the location of the customer being called should be applied. In practice this can be very challenging, as international campaigns may target many different countries and thus be the subject of a wide variety of differing and dynamic set of laws and regulations. The UK laws and regulations covering B2B telemarketing are complex and, in some areas, open to interpretation. Other countries have regulations that are equally complex and similarly may be open to interpretation in specific areas. It is recognised by the DMA that whilst it may be challenging for telemarketers to understand the regulatory regime in detail in each country targeted, those wishing to do so must make **all reasonable efforts** to comply with those regulations in force in those countries being targeted. In addition:

- The UK regulatory framework must be applied as a minimum standard
- Only 'opted-in' contacts be used, unless there is a valid, existing supplier/customer relationship between the relevant organisations and where the contact targeted is relevant for the proposition being presented
- CLI numbers must be presented on all outbound calls.

The DMA Legal Department may be able to provide information through FEDMA.

12. Accreditation schemes

In telemarketing the performance of agents (or the individuals making the calls) represents the sum and substance of what is produced. How good or bad the call outcome is linked inextricably to the skill of the person making the call. Identifying and addressing ongoing training and development needs within telemarketing or contact centre environments is central to best practice. Not only will commitment to these activities produce higher business performance, they will also help to provide a high performance culture to sustain the business during the medium and long term.

Building a culture of lasting high performance and efficiency is the keystone of most organisations. A community of engaged agents who know how they are performing and have a clear road map of where they are going is often the pivotal differentiator between organisations.

0rganisational values, hard work, reward, customer care etc can be built into the framework of training. Creative innovations will help stir thought and get agents thinking, responding, contributing, and releasing creative potential with each call made. Well structured training provides a high-integrity method of raising the profile of companies, the agent role and the medium generally, in turn shaping the future of the industry.

Practitioners who embrace and promote training whether accredited or not will invariably cash in on tangible bottom line rewards. In general terms, teams achieve better results leading to greater efficiencies and higher quality standards hence uplift in return.

In rapidly changing market conditions, getting staff to connect with the business and buy-in to the idea of high performance can be tricky without some means of rewarding or recognising employees. Systematic, ongoing training linked to a clear vision and strategy will achieve just that by providing all stakeholders with shared objectives.

Accreditation

Training investment that is linked to some form of accreditation can offer faster payback as there are obvious benefits to learners who become more marketable themselves as a result of gaining extra qualifications. Equally, accredited leaning can help telemarketing organisations attract and retain staff by connecting them with the needs of the business, whilst giving them the opportunity for practical work-based learning to both raise their competency levels and help them in their career path.

Accredited learning programmes in the workplace help place stronger focus on business performance, enabling higher levels of employee engagement and better business results. Creating the culture and climate where people can give of their best whilst the business gets sustainable high performance is the ultimate goal.

There are several kinds of accredited learning available. They are usually work based and can take the form of practical assignments, workplace assessments, coursework, college courses or apprenticeships depending on the type of qualification and the awarding body.

- Some organisations have a custom built programme that is developed in line with the specific needs of the particular business. These may not have a recognised qualification but are similar in that they are ongoing and will have a regular systematic framework that is used. These programmes are based on key competencies required for the job and linked to 'Individual Learning Plans' specific to each individual. Essentially they break down performance to sets of competencies and set clear measurement objectives for each (example below).

- NVQ (National Vocational Qualifications) are recognised qualifications relating to a particular industry or job. They are competency based qualifications which mean they are related to a particular occupation or task. An NVQ is roughly equivalent to a GCSE so are ideal for those who wish to extend their toolbox by way of qualifications since they are simply based and evidenced on workplace activities and not coursework or exams. NVQs are not necessarily dedicated to learning new skills they are more about raising competence in existing roles.

- BTEC is one of a small number exam boards who offer a standalone qualification which like an NVQ is an occupational qualification but at a higher level, comparable to A Levels. These are designed to help learners progress in their career, learning new skills and increasing their competence in new tasks aimed towards a certain job. Other examples of awarding bodies or exam boards offering similar qualifications to the BTEC are OCR and AQA.

This kind of accredited leaning is fundamentally different to training per se because it places far more emphasis on the learner and the measurable change in their performance as a result. These programmes communicate with learners by breaking key competencies or 'skill sets' down so they are measured and scored by certain written and shared standards.

For example scoring the 'opening of a call' might look like this, 1 being lowest and 5 highest, 3 grades in between;

SCORE
1. Below expectation – Didn't properly announce the call, failed to check they had the correct person, unclear speech. Provided inaccurate information.
5. Exceeded expectation – Used first and last name, Communicated call objective well, immediately generated interest and went on to progress the call.

Feedback and continued development are features of this method of learning. The best being those programmes that never stop happening and are linked to daily activities like the company intranet, call logging systems, morning meetings, and individual feedback etc.

13. Glossary of terms

AQA - Assessment and Qualifications Alliance. The largest of the three English exam boards, awarding GCSEs and A-levels.

B2B - Business to Business is a communication between businesses rather than Business to Consumer (B2C).

BIS - Department for Business, Innovation and Skills - BIS is supported by a wide range of organisations in delivering its strategic priorities. Their network of partner organisations provide services, information and advice to the Department and directly to a wide range of people and organisations.

BTEC - Business and Technical Education Council. A national body which validates vocational courses, generally Ordinary or Higher National Certificates.

CLI - Caller Line Identification. A telephone service that transmits and displays a caller's number to the called party's telephone.

Client – Typically this is the Brand owner, for example British Gas.

CTPS – The Corporate Telephone Preference Service (CTPS) is the central opt out register whereby corporate subscribers can register their wish not to receive unsolicited sales and marketing telephone calls to either all their organisation's telephone numbers, or to certain numbers. See also TPS.

Customer – Anyone with whom the Client has an existing relationship.

DDI – Direct Dialling Inward. A service whereby a call made to a DDI number can be routed directly to an internal extension without intervention by a switchboard operator.

Dialler – An automatic telephone dialling system that dials from a list of numbers and turns the call over to an agent when a human responds.

DNC - The Do Not Call list is the US version of TPS; a central register of people who have opted-out of receiving telemarketing calls. Note; in US this does not include some sectors such as political parties and charities and differs from TPS in this respect.

DTI - Department of Trade and Industry – The department of Trade and Industry was renamed the Department for Business, Enterprise and Regulatory Reform (BERR) in 2007. It became the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (BIS) in 2009.

KPI – Key Performance Indicators. A quantifiable measurement that can be used to track the progress in achieving important goals within a company

Market Share - Market share refers to a brand's share of the total sales of all products within the product category.

Mind Share - Mind share, or the awareness or popularity of a product type or category.

NVQ - National Vocational Qualifications (NVQs) are work based awards in England, Wales and Northern Ireland that are achieved through assessment and training.

OCR - OCR (Oxford, Cambridge and RSA Examinations) is an examination board that sets examinations and awards qualifications including GCSEs.

PAS 2020 - PAS 2020 is an environmental standard to be used to control the environmental impact of direct marketing operations. It is run by BSI (British Standards Institute) in conjunction with the DMA.

Prospect – Anyone who is targeted for outbound telemarketing. It can either be a Customer or someone who has no existing relationship with the Brand.

Recipient – same as Prospect.

SLA - Service Level Agreement is the performance objectives reached by agreement between the user and the provider of the service.

Telemarketer – An individual who practices selling goods or services to customers by means of the telephone or of surveying consumer preferences in telephone conversations.

TPS – The Telephone Preference Service (TPS) is a central opt out register whereby individuals, sole traders and partnerships can register their wish not to receive unsolicited sales and marketing telephone calls.

14. Reporting

Most call centres have access to a considerable wealth of information. Almost everything can be recorded and broken down from 'logged on' time to 'wrap time' to 'average call duration' to 'sales per hour'. It is imperative that both the 'qualitative' and the 'qualitative' are analysed in terms of Best Practice. It is just as important to study the 'how' as to the 'what' when looking at what delivers an exceptional customer/prospect experience.

The key to reporting is to consider what is actually going to be of use to help take better business decisions on a weekly/daily/hourly basis. Below are a list of typical areas that should be reported on for both compliance and best practice;

Report Heading	Section	Objective/KPI	Metric	Comments
Dialler Operations	7.3	Abandon call rate	< 3% in any 24hour period	Self Tuning Diallers 2.8% Manual 2.75%
Dialler Operations	7.5	Ring Time (outbound)	< 20 secs Min 15 secs	
Dialler Operations	7.4	Retry handling	Max. 3 in one day	Single Customer & Customer Account
Dialler Operations	7.4	Redial Intervals - Busy	10 Mins	Minimum Value Reset following answer
Dialler Operations	7.4	Redial Intervals - NU	120 Mins	Minimum Value Reset following answer
Dialler Operations	7.4	Redial Intervals - No Answer	120 Mins	Minimum Value
Reset following answer	7.4	Redial Intervals - Answer phone	120 Mins	Minimum Value Reset following answer
	7.5	Screen Pop/Live Operator	2 seconds	
Dialler Operations	7.5	Abandoned Call – Use preview or progressive redial	<10 Mins	Alert should be provided to agent
Data Penetration		Number of 'completed' records per data file	% which is campaign specific	This is entirely linked to the quality of the data and flexibility of calling times
Sales conversion		Number of people who say 'yes' against total people pitched	% which is campaign specific	Campaign specific
Call quality score		Typically worked as a percentage	% which is determined at the outset	Determined and calibrated at the start of the campaign audited throughout – please see the DMA's Client Guide to Outsourcing for more details.