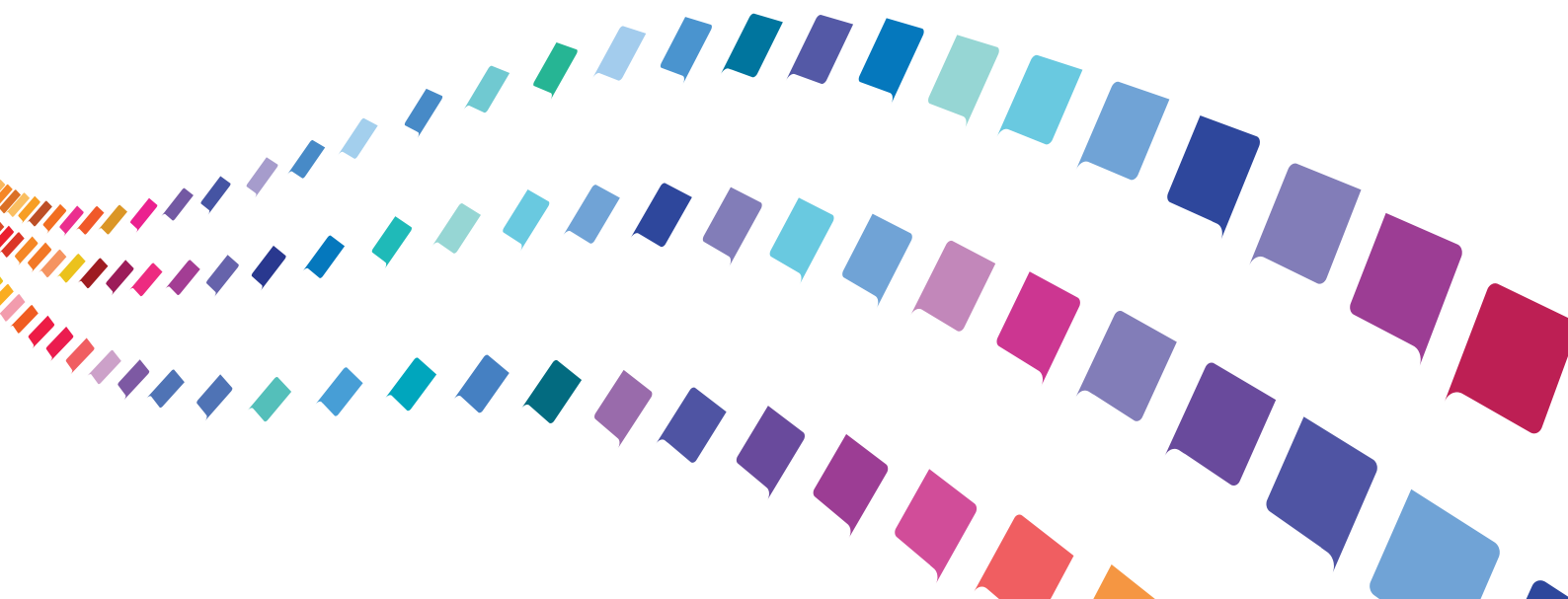




Best practice guide
**Business to consumer
telemarketing**

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Contents

Acknowledgements	3
Introduction.....	4
1. Agents	5
1.1 Recruitment	5
1.2 Training.....	6
1.3 Contracts.....	7
1.4 Remuneration.....	7
2. Supplier/client relationship responsibilities	8
3. Quality assurance	9
3.1 Business procedures regulation, compliance and standards.....	9
3.2 Verification.....	9
3.3 Customer satisfaction.....	10
3.4 Tools.....	11
3.5 Does the technology work?	11
4. Complaints procedure	13
4.1 Definition of a complaint.....	13
4.2 Assisting the agent.....	13
4.3 Industry to advocate.....	14
5. Campaign objectives	16
5.1 Introduction.....	16
5.2 Campaign planning	16
5.3 Campaign objectives	16
5.4 Communications objective	16
5.5 Staff.....	16
5.6 ROI/Results	17
5.7 Campaign monitoring	17
5.8 Corporate and social responsibility	17
6. Data	18
6.1 Overview	18
6.2 Source.....	18
6.3 Origin	18
6.4 Selection/Targeting.....	18
6.5 Data volume.....	19
6.6 Legal compliance.....	19
6.7 TPS	19
6.8 Security	20
6.9 Testing/Analysis/Refinement	20
6.10 Data ownership.....	20
7. Outbound call scheduling	21
8. Dialler operations	22
8.1 Diallers and dialler usage.....	22
8.2 When to use predictive dialling.....	22
8.3 Dialler administration	23
8.4 Notes on the telemarketing section of the DM Code	26

cont.

8.5 Abandonment rate	27
8.6 Answer machine detection (AMD)	27
9. Call & after call process	29
9.1 Disclosure	29
9.2 Structure	29
9.3 Summary	30
9.4 Inclusivity: Setting communications objectives	30
9.5 Post-call process	31
10. Accreditation schemes	32
11. Reporting	34
About the DMA	35
Copyright and disclaimer	36



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Introduction

Telemarketing when done well is a phenomenally successful and profitable channel of communication and sales between an organisation and its customers. The telephone provides businesses and charities with the opportunity to provide relevant and personalised offers/appeals to their customers/supporters in a timely way. The personalisation allows the development of the relationship and allows instant interaction and resolution in a way that no other channel can.

These business to consumer best practice guidelines were first developed by the Direct Marketing Association (UK) Limited (DMA) Contact Centre and Telemarketing Council in 2009. This edition provides a reviewed and updated view which reflects the telemarketing landscape in 2012. Best practice is a step beyond complying with the DM code of practice and the council firmly believes that following these guidelines will add value to both the organisations making the calls and the consumers receiving them.

The sign of a great telemarketing call these days is that your customers wouldn't describe it as telemarketing – they'd describe it as a great service call! Following these guidelines will most certainly help you to achieve this goal.

Elaine Lee
Chair, DMA Contact Centre & Telemarketing Council
April 2013

1. Agents

This section outlines the importance of agents or frontline 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

1.1 Recruitment

The number of agent places in the UK has risen significantly over recent years. As the industry continues to expand, evidence suggests that a career in the contact centre industry is no longer a stepping stone between alternative careers. With further growth forecast well into the next decade, 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 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
- Customer relationship telephone adviser
- Outbound customer adviser
- Outbound sales agent

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 security of customer data, full references should always be sought and checked. Telemarketers will have access to personal data and will be working in a privileged position in that they effectively enter a consumer's home 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.

1.2 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 service being promoted.

While any training programme should encompass in-depth knowledge of the products or services being promoted, this should be combined with an appreciation of how to get the best out of a telephone call with a prospect or customer. As with the aim of this document, at least part of the training should be to give the individual 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 terms and conditions
- Objectives of project or campaign
- Demographics of customers/prospects
- Briefing on previous/current promotions including telemarketing
- Escalations
- Industry guidelines including data protection/Telephone Preference Service

Soft skills

- Listening techniques
- Call structure
- Strategies for dealing with different customer types
- Handling complaints (see Section 4)
- 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 complaint section 4. This in turn should reassure consumers 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 – DTI - 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.

1.3 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.

1.4 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 consumer they contact in the course of their work. You should ensure that rate of pay complies with the current national minimum wage.

Incentives should therefore be set to achievable levels and reflect the ability to convert (see conversion). If possible you should try and set team goals and weight individual rewards to minimise poor behaviour 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. The Financial Services Authority (FSA) has stated that some "pay structures are incompatible with treating customers fairly."

Things to avoid when setting up sales projects:

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

In summary, we recommend that all sales agencies should guarantee their agents a pay rate of no less than the minimum wage 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 agencies that they use in their contracts by actively supervising their third-party sales agents.

Further resources – [Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development \(CIPD\)](#) member access only

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 consumer in order that we may retain the freedom to make contact with consumers in the future by telephone.



2. 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 hand over 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.

3. 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 consumers. 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.

3.1 Business procedures regulation, compliance and standards

There are many regulations and standards available to the 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 and The Telecommunications (Lawful Business Practice) Interception of Communications 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 kitemarks such as those contained in this document aim to raise standards and retain consumer 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.

3.2 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 and they should keep relevant records to demonstrate compliance.

The person responsible will also need to understand the verification processes of those 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
- Copy of agent script for campaign
- Agent training manual for campaign
- Campaign results
- Campaign execution rules, eg dialling times, retry counts, abandoned call message handling etc
- Do not call (DNC) list management processes
- Data management process
- Details of other front office and back office processes
- Complaints

Lastly, they must be the subject matter experts in this area and advise the organisations on their future 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.

3.3 Customer satisfaction

Customer satisfaction and consumer 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 consumer segments, applications and campaigns. Two techniques for assessment are noted below but there are others.

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 clearly do not 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 the 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.

3.4 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 Telecommunications (Lawful Business Practice) Interception of Communications 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. Businesses should make all reasonable efforts to inform agents that calls are being monitored or recorded.

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 consumer 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 very new technology but will become commonplace in the future. It allows the 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 to allow further analysis. Calls can be "pulled" and inspected individually for quality. In addition, swear words can be spotted and highlighted.

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 legality and regularity compliance are ensured.

3.5 Does the technology work?

All contact centres are reliant on technology to perform their task. This includes a whole range of different technologies including predictive diallers, computer networks, databases, voice or voice over internet protocol (VoIP) networks and the public switched telephone network (PSTN). The end-to-end infrastructure and applications that rest on it can be tested and monitored and this should be referred to your IT department.

However, predictive diallers are the devices that cause the most problems with nuisance and silent calls and they can be tested specifically, as well as part of the end-to-end solution. All testing should be done by an independent third party to provide an objective view.

This testing actually simulates live calls at volume to ensure the predictive dialler is performing its job to the required standards. For example, you can:

- Apply various answering machine tones to ensure that answering machine detection is optimised and the error rate (ie number of false positives) is reduced
- Measure the time between the customer answering the phone and reaching a live agent
- Determine if a line is released by the contact centre technology when a customer hangs up
- Apply various call termination treatments (eg answered, busy, or unobtainable), emulating real outbound call situations
- Prove that the organisation can be alerted when the over-dial rate exceeds a certain limit (eg 3% call abandon rate)
- Verify that the caller line identification (CLI) is presented

This allows a predictive dialler baseline configuration to be captured where it is known that the dialler works within the regulations. This baseline can be compared to later performance and returned to if necessary.

4. Complaints procedure

As a requirement of the *DMA Telemarketing Manifesto*, contact centres whether outsourced or in-house which undertake outbound calling activity are required 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 document provides contact centres with information on how to assist agents and identify and undertake an in-depth root cause analysis for complaints received.

4.1 Definition of a complaint

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

4.2 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 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 agent's training programme. Without the right attitude and tone, there is a danger that the customer's dissatisfaction will not be recognised 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 customer's 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. Pre-prepared 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 with customers. Details of the Telephone Preference Service (TPS) and how to manage the customer and respond appropriately if they have registered for this service is an important aspect of this training, and asking more questions if cold calling, such as, "can I ask when you signed up 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, eg a 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 more likely to be less suspicious and listen to what your agents have to say.

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 organisation 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 operators, 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!

4.3 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 also 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 and 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 service level agreement (SLA)

Each complaint should be categorised as follows:

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

Those complaints that 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 complaints that 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 of the matter.

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 to 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:
 - A name of staff member within the contact centre
 - Telephone number to contact the person handling the complaint
 - Timeline regarding completion of the investigation
 - Organisation's complaints procedure
 - Opening hours

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

5. Campaign objectives

5.1 Introduction

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.

5.2 Campaign planning

Ensure that you know who your potential customers are 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 consumers who 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 consumers 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 consumer confidence and promotes conversations rather than a scripted dialogue.

5.3 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 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?

5.4 Communications objective

This part needs your careful thought. High pressure, aggressive campaigns can lead to high staff attrition rates and distress consumers 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 customer services tag to the end of the call – for example, "Okay, I understand that you are happy with your existing car insurer at the moment, but while you are on the line is there anything I can help you with? Would you like to check the balance on your account?"

5.5 Staff

Provide your staff with as much information as possible so that they can have well-informed, meaningful conversations with customers, 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.

5.6 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 TPS register, 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 to these people in the future.

5.7 Campaign monitoring

Review each campaign after 24 hours of calling. Re-evaluate a sample of each data set, DMC, conversion rates, complaints, feedback from outbound staff 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.

5.8 Corporate and social responsibility

Consider the impact of the campaign in non-financial terms. How does it affect those customers and prospects who you don't convert? Is it socially responsible, for example, to inconvenience 49 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.

6. Data

6.1 Overview

Data and direct marketing are inextricably linked. Put simply, there can be no contact of any kind without access to the personal 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 for the telemarketer 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:

6.2 Source

Data is often referred to as being 'warm' or 'cold'. While intuition suggests that warm data (when contact of some sort has been established by the brand on whose behalf the call is being made) is preferable to cold data (when there has been no previous contact with the brand), the reality is that most campaigns will probably require cold data at some stage. The good news is that cold data, when selected intelligently and appropriately, can be as effective as warm data. For telemarketers who are contacting those who are not already customers, there are many sources of data available. Telemarketers 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 efficacy of the data, best practice dictates that only data owners or data brokers who are members of the DMA should be used. Best practice requires that third-party lists used for telemarketing are also registered with the List Warranty Register.

6.3 Origin

With the increase in TPS registrations in recent years, third-party data with telephone numbers is scarce. It is, therefore, incumbent upon the telemarketer to question the source of the data, and the method by which it was collected and verified. In principle, consumers who have had telephone contact with the brand will be more responsive to telemarketing. It is also worth considering under what circumstance the data was acquired, even if the data was collected in accordance with UK data protection legislation (ie offering an opt-out). Accuracy is also absolutely critical when considering choice of data. Telemarketers have to ensure that data is accurate and up to date in order to ensure compliance with the Data Protection Act 1998 (DPA). Best practice requires a check on both provenance of the data and recency of the contact, in order to ensure reaching the correct DMC.

6.4 Selection/Targeting

Optimum targeting is an absolute imperative. It is pointless to contact consumers who are inappropriate for the product or service which is being promoted. It increases costs and is likely to antagonise the consumer. In order to maximise targeting, it is best to use data with as much depth and detail as is possible. There are many databases available that can provide not just socio-demographics, but purchasing habits and intentions, hobbies and interests and even household income. Do not compromise detail in favour of volume. It is always advisable to validate and test each selection against campaign objectives prior to roll-out.

When purchasing data for similar campaigns from the same list source, request the exclusion of data previously supplied in the last 12 months. This will minimise the risk of consumer antipathy towards your brand from perceived over-contacting.

6.5 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 fine-tune targeting will reduce volume of data. While 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. The importance of good dialler planning and management cannot be underestimated here, with constant monitoring of turnover of the data an absolute imperative. Data churned time and time again, will not deliver the desired results.

6.6 Legal compliance

As well as gaining the assurance that the source data has been collected in accordance with the DPA and the Privacy & Electronic Communications Act 2003 (PECR), it is imperative that this data is used with the same adherence to relevant legislation. Screening against TPS is a legal requirement, but it is also a legal requirement to ensure that data is accurate and up to date under the DPA. To achieve this it is advisable that files are screened, where appropriate against proprietary suppression files (ie mortality, gone-aways and home-mover files) and internal suppression files.

It is a legal requirement to maintain and consistently update in-house do-not-call (DNC) lists and, if agencies and/or outsourced call centres are retained, to ensure that this information is always shared between the parties. Often call lists are collated from a number of sources, and it is important to remember that these must always be run against the in-house DNC list. The in-house DNC list must always be updated to include any 'do-not-call' requests made to the agency or call centre(s). Furthermore, the marketer must always know the source of the data, so that if consumers ask how their personal information has been obtained, it is able to provide this correctly. This is essential, even if it proves a challenge in the event of different sources of data being used for the same campaign.

Finally, subsequent follow-up of requests from consumers, whether for suppression or subject access must be acted upon speedily and certainly within a maximum of 40 days of the written subject access request. Prior to use for telemarketing purposes, data must have been updated or refreshed (at the very least by screening against suppression files) in the previous six months and against the TPS no more than 28 days prior to being called (see below).

6.7 TPS

Data purchased through a third party supplier, who is a DMA member, must have been screened against the TPS no more than 28 days prior to supply. The telemarketer must ensure that it has been screened against the TPS no more than 28 days prior to unsolicited calls being made. The only exemption to this is for data which is to be used for legitimate market research.

Proprietary lists of the telemarketer (ie lists of consumers with whom the telemarketer has an established relationship) may be used without cleaning against the TPS file, provided the consumer has supplied their number direct (ie it has not been sourced) and it has been made clear to the consumer that the number may be used for direct marketing purposes.

6.8 Security

You must take appropriate technical and organisational measures to protect the security of personal data, particularly when holding and transferring 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 of the data. Your organisation should appoint a designated person or persons who is aware of, and responsible for, its compliance with the DPA and PECR relating to the security of personal data, in connection with its telemarketing activities

6.9 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. The analysis of non-sales dispositions can optimise targeting 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. Furthermore, by asking consumers to volunteer additional key information (subject to compliance with the DPA) such as date of birth, presence of children or key events, not only can products be matched to suit the consumer during the course of the call, but post-campaign analysis will also help shape appropriate targeting for future campaigns.

6.10 Data ownership

In most cases, 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 DMC, subject to the terms of the list rental agreement. The DMC 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 DMC has declined to participate further as the call unfolds, their number may be deemed to have been used and may not be called again, depending on the terms of the list rental agreement. The telemarketer should consider setting a limit on the number of times a number should be called where there is no answer or answer-machine disposition.

A positive response, and one which entitles the telemarketer to have ownership of that record, will depend on the terms of the list rental agreement. This could be where the individual has shown sufficient interest in the product or service offered to indicate that they have taken preliminary steps towards the conclusion of a contract, ie purchasing such product or service. This would not normally include simply claiming the consent of the person canvassed to be re-contacted at a later date, unless otherwise agreed by the data supplier.



7. Outbound call scheduling

With regards to resource planning, where a dialler is utilised you must ensure that appropriate levels of resource are available in order that connected calls find an available agent.

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 customers at inappropriate times may cause resentment and render future calling ineffective. Clearly, it always makes sense to note customers' calling preferences, where these are forthcoming.

Reasonable calling hours are Monday to Friday 8am to 9pm and Saturdays between 9am and 9pm. While it is not illegal to contact people on Sundays we do not advise this as best practice, as many consumers might consider it unreasonable to be called on a Sunday or on a national/religious holiday.

General awareness of topical events, including national emergencies (eg 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.

8. Dialler operations

8.1 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 okay 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. Consumer 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 consumer experience ie abandoned calls.

8.2 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 ie 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.

However, 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 cap
- 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 your dialler vendor for advice on this complex issue.

8.3 Dialler administration

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.

{Refer to Section 5 - Campaign objectives - for a full set of guidelines concerning conversion rate management}.

Suppression files/Do-not-call lists

- When undertaking warm calling, if a customer wishes to have their number added to the in-house suppression file, the customer should be given the opportunity to identify that they do not wish to receive calls on any telephone number associated with their account. Consumers often have multiple devices and numbers. Organisations tend to attempt to capture as many numbers as possible for a customer.
- The management of suppression files must take this into account. Scenarios where a customer is rung on one number and requests to be added to a do-not-call list, only then to be called on another number clearly brings DNC lists into disrepute with consumers
- Where possible, account-oriented do-not-call lists should be used so that different customers in the same household can still be contacted ie even if one member does not wish to receive calls, this should not block others from receiving calls.

Ring time

- Contact centres must consider the length of time that calls are allowed to ring before being terminated due to 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:
 1. Minimum ring time allowed under Ofcom regulations.
 2. The demographics of the customer being contacted. Elderly customers may need more time to get to the phone.
 3. The size of the team and the answer success rate, both of which may limit the impact of a higher ring time.
 4. 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.
 5. Some telephone networks provide answerphone and voicemail capabilities that cut in after a standard delay eg BT 1571 answers after 20 seconds.
 6. Any dialler functionality present that mitigates longer ring time eg 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.

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. Like contact centres, those using predictive diallers must present a caller line identification (CLI), unsuccessful dial attempts are not anonymous. When cold calling, the contact centre may consider the nuisance to be low enough to not adversely 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.

In the worst scenario, there is the possibility of causing high anxiety when a customer finds a series of missed calls, calls back to the CLI provided but is then presented with an automated message identifying that the contact centre is closed but was attempting to call concerning the customer's account. A customer may reasonably fear that there is a major problem, if, as it appears, the organisation has tried to contact the customer a number of times.

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 answerphone, the maximum number of dial attempts in a single day should be limited to three 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
Answerphone	- 120 minutes
- 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. 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.

Presenting all relevant facts to the agent

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

1. Within one second the name of the customer and the reason for the call is displayed. The reason for the call only needs to be shown if the purpose of the calls varies within the campaign.
 2. Within two 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.

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.

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.

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.

Late evening calling

- Members must not make sales, marketing or service calls during hours which are unreasonable to the person being called, recognising that what is regarded as reasonable can vary in different locations and in different types of households or businesses. In general, members should not make calls between the hours of 9pm and 8am Monday to Friday and 9pm and 9am at weekends, unless an express invitation to do so is received. Members must also be aware that many consumers might consider it unreasonable to be called on a Sunday or on national/religious holidays.

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 the contact centre to minimise the abandonment rate.

8.4 Notes on the telemarketing section of the DM 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.

Definitions of dialler (21.22)

Please refer to sections 6.1 and 6.2 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 requires a CLI to be transmitted for all calls made, whereas the Ofcom regulations only apply to the use of predictive dialling equipment.

15-second minimum ring time (21.25)

- Consumer experience is what is important in the timing not dialler experience. ie 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 and makes it more likely that answering machines will cut in.

Abandonment timing (21.26)

The DM Code of Practice and Ofcom policies stipulate that if a call is to be abandoned because a live agent is not available, the information message should be played within two seconds of the call being picked up, or answered ie:

1. No later than two seconds after the telephone has been picked up
or
2. No later than two seconds after an individual begins to speak (or 'start of salutation')

However, as a matter of best practice, calls that are to be handled by a live agent should be connected to that agent within two seconds of the call being answered.

Abandoned calls (21.27)

Information message

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

1. The CLI transmitted on the call.
2. The number relayed during the information message which is played in the event that the call is abandoned.
3. In the event of a consumer 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 an 0800 or 0845 number in the abandoned call information message (see abandoned calls: 2 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 abandoned calls: 3 above) which gives the caller a second opportunity to hear the number. The number in the case of either 2 or 3 above need not be the same CLI number that is transmitted by the call (see abandoned calls: 1 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.

8.5 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% adds two 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 while 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 a 24-hour period. Ofcom define a 24-hour period as being between midnight and midnight on a calendar day.

8.6 Answer machine detection (AMD)

Answer machine detection is a technology which uses various techniques to automatically detect if a call has been answered by a live caller or some form of answering machine (either physical machine, voicemail system or network-based call messaging service).

This technology currently used to do this is not 100% reliable and can fail in one of two ways:

- A “false positive” – where the AMD technology incorrectly judges a live caller to be an answering machine
- A “false negative”- where the AMD technology incorrectly judges an answering machine to be a live caller and connects the call to an agent.

In most cases, the experience for a consumer in the case of a false positive is of a silent call followed by a disconnection and, for that reason, the Ofcom rules state that a “reasoned estimate” of false positives be factored into the abandoned call figures that count towards the 3% abandoned call regulation. The DMA has published a paper, endorsed by Ofcom, detailing the statistical treatment of both false positives and false negatives and how they should be handled within the dialler management strategy. A copy of this paper can be found here <http://www.dma.org.uk/toolkit/calculating-abandoned-calls-light-ofcom-2008-statement>

In addition to this measure, Ofcom also requires that calls dialled using AMD and classified as an answering machine cannot be dialled again for a 24-hour period unless an agent is reserved – similar in essence to the 72-hour rule for handling calls abandoned by a predictive dialler.

Although it is clear that in some circumstances that AMD technology can improve performance of predictive dialling campaigns, there are also three clear negative aspects to the technology:

1. There is a poor experience for the call recipient in the event of a false positive.
2. The effectiveness of the predictive dialler is impaired because the abandoned call rate has to be artificially suppressed to cater for the estimate of false-positives.
3. The effectiveness of the dialler is further impaired because of the 24-hour rule which means that either the call cannot be re-attempted for another day or, if that is not an option, the call must be made without using the dialler’s pacing technology.

For these reasons, it is the view of the DMA that unless the member’s system has been tested and achieves a false positive rate of 1% or less, the use of AMD in telemarketing campaigns does not make commercial sense. It exposes them to the risk of breaching the silent calls thresholds (with subsequent regulatory consequences) and, because of the consumer detriment, does not constitute best practice.

9. Call & after call process

These guidelines are designed to standardise good practice throughout all DMA–member contact centres, conducting outbound consumer 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. The four key components are:

- Disclosure
- Summary
- Structure
- Inclusivity

9.1 Disclosure

Agents should use their name to introduce themselves and the purpose of the call. 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:

- Who is calling
- Where they are calling from
- The reason for the call
- 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.
- The caller completes any relevant security checks quickly where appropriate

9.2 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 is less likely to hang up. 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 eg "We'd be keen to know if you currently subscribe to X".

A good call structure will usually resemble the following blueprint:

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

9.3 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 synopsis, e.g. "Okay Mr X this is what happens next" – a quick recap
- Explain that their customer data will be passed to X who will X
- Ask them if they are happy to receive email/phone/mail contact in future
- Thank them sincerely for their time and end the call.

9.4 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 to include the following:

- Older people
- People who speak English as a second language
- Children and young people
- People with learning or physical disabilities
- People with alcohol or drug use problems
- 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 eg resisting the temptation to speak more loudly 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.

In the case of customers with illness like Alzheimer's disease for example, its not always possible to detect or respond to vulnerabilities particularly with understanding. Others may suffer with episodes of extreme confusion or isolation and may therefore agree to something they may otherwise have not wanted or needed. It is important to accept that we all have a responsibility to protect the interests of the weak or vulnerable and should perhaps consider steps like longer cooling-off periods, or a policy of confirming every transaction by post. No quibble refunds or cancellation should be available in such circumstances.

Additionally, agents should be 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 has taken appropriate action before the call begins. See [*DMA guidelines for call centres dealing with vulnerable consumers*](#).

9.5 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/call recipient 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.

10. 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.

Organisational 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 into 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 learning can help telemarketing organisations attract and retain staff by connecting them with the needs of the business, while 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. The ultimate goal is to create the culture and climate where people can give of their best while the business gets sustainable high performance.

There are several kinds of accredited learning programmes 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).
- National Vocational Qualifications (NVQ) 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 of 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 learning 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.

11. Reporting

Table 1

Report Heading	Section	Objective / KPI	Metric	Comments
Dialler operations	9.3	Abandon call rate	< 3% in any 24-hour period	Self tuning diallers 2.8% manual 2.75%
Dialler operations	9.5	Ring time (outbound)	< 20 secs Min 15 secs	Longer for elderly
Dialler operations	9.4	Retry handling	Max 3 in one day	Single customer & customer account
Dialler operations	9.4	Redial intervals – Busy	10 Minutes	Minimum value Reset following answer
Dialler operations	9.4	Redial intervals - NU	120 Minutes	Minimum value Reset following answer
Dialler operations	9.4	Redial intervals - No Answer	120 Minutes	Minimum value Reset following answer
Dialler operations	9.4	Redial intervals - Answer phone	120 Minutes	Minimum value Reset following answer
Dialler operations	9.5	Screen pop/Live operator	2 seconds	
Dialler operations	9.5	Abandoned call – Use preview or progressive redial	<10 Minutes	Alert should be provided to agent

About the DMA

The Direct Marketing Association (DMA) is Europe's largest professional body representing the direct marketing industry. With a large in-house team of specialists offering everything from free legal advice and government lobbying on direct marketing issues to research papers and best practice, it is always at the forefront of developments in the industry.

The DMA protects the direct marketing industry and consumers. It promotes the highest standards through self-regulation and lobbies against over-regulation. The DM Code of Practice sits at the heart of everything we do – and all members are required to adhere to it. It sets out the industry's standards of ethical conduct and best practice.

Our 16 DMA Councils cover the whole marketing spectrum – from the digital world of social media and mobile marketing to the 'real' world channels of door drops and inserts. The Councils are made up of DMA members and regularly produce best practice and how to guides for our members.

We also have a packed calendar of conferences, workshops and discussions on the latest topics and best practice, and 80% of them are free for members and their staff.

As the industry moves on so do we, which is why we've recently launched a number of new services for our members – a VAT helpline, a Social Media Helpdesk and an IP Protection Service.

Visit www.dma.org.uk regularly to keep up to date with all our services.





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