

B2B Telemarketing Ain't What It Used to Be

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- **Social Media: From Myspace to Today**

In 2003, LinkedIn was celebrating its first birthday while Facebook, Twitter and YouTube were just twinkles in the eyes of their creators. At the same time, Myspace was new, exciting and attracting users.

Today, LinkedIn brings in billions of dollars in revenues for its parent company Microsoft. Twitter has 330 million monthly active users. It's not surprising that as LinkedIn and Twitter have become forces to reckon with, telemarketers have added them to their toolset. (And if you're wondering whether Myspace still exists, it does.)

On LinkedIn, telemarketers use Sales Navigator to research key accounts and

connect with the people who matter most. They search based on their company's ideal account profiles, quickly filtering companies by size, geography and industry and finding people by title. Then they reach out to individuals via InMails.

Reps also use Twitter to break through corporate communication barriers. They comment on influential individuals' tweets. They also share useful information, curated across the web and from their company, which showcases their organization's expertise and raises their visibility.

- **Chat Offers Real-Time Response**

While live chat rooms existed at the turn of the century, call centers were not widely using it. Now, however, it is changing the face of marketing and sales. That's because email interactions have become increasingly automated and, often coming from "do not reply" addresses, have turned into a one-way street. Prospects and customers demanded a more personal communication channel — a two-way conversation. They want a way to interact with a company when they need answers.

Live chat was born — a box that pops up on a website and asks if the site visitor needs help.

Now buyers don't have to call a company to get immediate answers. They don't have to wait for an email response which is too slow by today's standards. (Remember when we thought it was so fast compared to snail mail?) People now demand immediate gratification. That means receiving answers almost as soon as a question pops into their brains. After all, Google has conditioned us to expect that.

With chat, buyers can type a question into the chat box and get an answer pronto from a real live person! Also, they can explore everything from the website where they're doing their research.

By offering chat sessions, companies can engage website visitors who might previously have become frustrated as they sought answers and abandoned their quest. Instead of adding to the website bounce rates, these prospects can type in the chat box and start building business relationships.

- **CRM Gets Off the Ground**

While Siebel introduced the first mobile customer relationship management (CRM) system in the late 1990s, it was never popular. That's likely because there were not many mobile devices to use it. The CRM market started to grow in the 2000s with SugarCRM (2004) and Salesforce.com (2007).

This technology, which put the Rolodex on the endangered list, became an essential tool in managing customer data. It also keeps track of interactions

with contacts across channels — phone, live chat, social media and email. Because CRM is cloud-based, all sales personnel can access the same information. Thus, it enables telemarketers and field sales people to have relevant conversations with contacts and customers.

- **Virtual Conferencing Neutralizes the Field Sales Advantage**

In the early 2000s, conducting a video conference was a big deal. It often involved renting a video conference center where the technology was available to hold the meeting. That's because although video conference tools existed, internet speeds were too slow to accommodate them.

By 2010, however, the internet was running lickety-split over mostly broadband connections. Plus, advanced smartphones with 3G made conferencing possible on mobile phones.

That changed everything!

Now inside salespeople and telemarketers could share presentations with prospects almost as if they were sitting across the desk from them. For software as a service (SAAS) companies, for instance, this technology was ideal. They could be miles away from a prospect and still show them their product and demonstrate how it could help them.

With this innovation, the remote rep could compete head-on with the field sales person. In fact, in many cases, they had the advantage because prospects saw virtual presentations as less intrusive than inviting a rep to their office.

So when considering whether to use telemarketing, don't think of it the way it used to be. It has always been effective, but the tools of today make it more powerful than ever.

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