



# How to use a telephone

How much is it working as a business tool for you?

*by David Festenstein*

**In sales and marketing, using the humble telephone to reach and sustain contact with senior management has always been a headache. But how much consideration has been given by senior management themselves to the potential of the phone to create new opportunities and develop existing ones. David Festenstein examines the communication potential of the ubiquitous phone.**

It is yet another busy day at the office and your phone rings. Your PA isn't there so you pick up the phone. This unknown caller is promoting a new concept and normally you would take the first opportunity to end the call. This time, however, you chose to listen. Why? Unlike other calls that get through, this person has taken the time to find out about you and your business. You also find that their communication style is respectful and engaging.

You want to find out more and agree to a meeting. For the caller this is a formidable business outcome, as not only are you a decision maker but you have access to a valuable network of contacts, which could be of greater value to them with their innovative concept.

But to what extent are you using the phone to get the business outcomes you want? Or are you using it as an ad hoc communication device? The fact is that senior managers, as the sought after targets of speculative phone calls, rarely consider how they could put themselves on the 'other end' of the phone.

Many senior people dislike the phone as a communication medium. "I much prefer face-to-face," is the common cry. They complain that it makes them feel uncomfortable in some way and they use it as little as possible. Consider how your business day, and that of your organisation, ►

would change if you were to extend the use of the phone. What freedom and efficiency would it bring?

### WHAT ARE THE OBVIOUS BENEFITS OF GREATER USE?

Making greater use of the telephone has positive spin-offs:

- It creates more opportunities to initiate new high level contacts and develop existing ones owing to its ease of use.
- It saves time and money by reducing the number of face-to-face meetings.
- It can achieve outcomes quicker and more easily precisely because it is more business like and less personal than a face-to-face meeting.
- They can reach the person you need to speak to directly and cut through the morass of email traffic that now dominates much of people's working days.
- In short, it has much of the advantages of email and face-to-face, with fewer of the disadvantages.

### THE EASY FIRST STEPS

Think about calls that have made an impact on you and why they have been different. Now think about the person that you want to influence.

What is their communication style like? If you break down style into voice tone, speed, energy, volume, as well as their language structure, how will you need to modify your style so it's like theirs, and so that they will find you engaging and be prepared to really listen? Step into their shoes for a moment, would you be convinced by what you are saying?

If you do not already do this, plan and structure your calls so that you can be clear about the outcomes you want. A mind map is a good way to do this as you can see all the possible routes the call can take.

### HOW WILL YOU KNOW WHETHER IT'S WORKING?

It is said that a plane flies 95 per cent of its time off course. It is the feedback on position from the on-board instruments that enables the plane ultimately to make its destination successfully. If we have no feedback on our telephone delivery, how we will know what kind of impact we're making? A head of a professional services organisation once remarked how she had been stuck in traffic one morning and recorded a message on her voicemail at work. She later listened to the recording and was horrified about how dismissive she sounded. Without this feedback she would have never realised this, unless someone had been bold enough to tell her!

Recording your calls (making sure you comply with Ofcom regulations) can help you to understand what impact you're making on others - and it can test your listening skills as well. Once you do this regularly, you'll

be given invaluable feedback and will be able to modify your style accordingly.

### HOW DO I PUT THIS INTO PRACTICE?

- Be curious and ask yourself questions about what you really want and can gain from the call.
- Always start a conversation about the other person and their business. As the focus is on them, their voice tone tends to be more responsive and hence makes us feel more comfortable.
- If it is a new business development call, a referral or even a conversation you can allude to that you have had with an executive PA, confirming their role and responsibility, can make you feel more comfortable as you are not such an 'outsider'.
- How you feel about making a challenging telephone call will depend on your energy level and how you feel.

You can improve how you feel in several simple ways: standing up and smiling; taking some form of exercise; thinking about previous successful calls or events - having certain photographs ready at hand is a good way to do this; listening to appropriate

pieces of music or replaying them in your head; speaking or writing an email to a friend or colleague.

### HOW CAN THIS BE APPLIED TO YOUR ORGANISATION AS A WHOLE?

First, research how the phone is being used in your organisation. Put calls in to see what its like being a potential customer. Is this a good experience? Would you like to engage with your organisation if you were an outsider?

Second, look into how much time and cost can be saved by the implementation of telephone meetings to drive towards basic business outcomes.

Third, decide how much headway would you make against your competition by making a stronger impact over the phone.

Fourth, if individuals paid particular attention to how they communicate with others over the phone, how could this potentially improve the success rate of projects overall in the organisation?

This is just the start of learning how to use the phone more effectively and they are all elementary points. Yet they are often neglected: it's just a question of putting them into practice and enjoying the benefits they bring.

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