

Junk calling

Thanks to Tony Attwood, from the U.K.-based Hamilton House, a direct mail enterprise, for pointing out that telemarketing calls are more intrusive than junk mail. I quite agree and that is why the U.S. government was right to create the "Do Not Call List." It is about choice. We can reduce the "junk mail" and "junk calls" we get. Of course, we can always just hang up the phone when we realize it is a telemarketing call. Particularly offensive, in my opinion, are those recorded calls you get on your cell phone.

This got me to thinking about telemarketing calls. Somewhere, a marcomm person wrote a script for those calls. Ideally, the caller should move the call receiver to some sort of action—buy something, subscribe to something, donate money, etc. As in direct mail, these calls do have a success rate, and I am sure it varies by product or service and all by telemarketer (I have had rude telemarketers call me. Needless to say, they don't get very far.).

The media was busy reporting this week that a new nuisance is text spam, in which you get unsolicited sales messages as text messages on your cell phone. Email spam is noxious, primarily because it is unsolicited and often advertises pharmaceuticals or sex-related services. We have legitimate email solicitations, which feature an opt-out option. But we don't pay per email message. We do pay for text message. Text spam may be even more nefarious than email spam.

Back to telemarketing—there is a role for direct calls in a marketing campaign. Clearly, politicians use this technique quite a lot, since they are trying to reach people "directly" and motivate them to vote. In some cases, it can backfire. If I get too many recorded messages, I get irritated. I wonder if telemarketing is more effective to retirees or people who are homebound. To these people a call is not an intrusion as much

as chance to connect with someone. Somebody who has been on the phone all day and just wants to relax in the evening may find unsolicited calls from telemarketers very intrusive.

From a marketing standpoint, my advice about telemarketing is to proceed with caution. Certainly, the more targeted your message and your list, the more successful. Telemarketers who ignore common sense (calling too early or too late or too often) or run afoul of the Do Not Call list will not help the product or service they are trying to sell.