Telemarketing guide

Contents

Contents

Q Contents

Campaign response

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Introduction

Relevant and personalised

Telemarketing, when done well, can be a brilliantly successful, profitable and mutually beneficial channel of communication and sales between you and your customer.

It gives you an invaluable opportunity to communicate a highly relevant and personalised offer to your customer or supporter in a timely, sensitive manner.

One-to-one phone marketing allows you to build a closer relationship with your customer in a very personal, relevant manner – complete with instant interaction and resolution – to give them a new offer that they appreciate or help them get more value from a product or service that they are already using.

Your best practice goals

Best practice is about much, much more than mere compliance. Instead, following these guidelines will add tangible value to both your organisation, looking to prosper, and your customer, looking to benefit.

As with all one-to-one marketing, your main goal must always be to do the right thing for your customer – to *put your customer first*.

Only by doing this will you enjoy the fullest rewards of telemarketing – and continue to enjoy the freedom to engage with your customer by telephone in the future.

Getting it right

The sign of a great telemarketing call is that your customer would not describe it as telemarketing – but would instead describe it as a great service call!

Following these guidelines will most certainly help you to achieve this goal.

Business practice

Compliance

Regulation, compliance and standards

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

- Legislative requirements
- Data Protection Act 1998
- Privacy and Electronic Communications Regulations 2003
- Telecommunications (Lawful Business Practice) Interception of Communications Regulations 2000

Regulatory enforcement

Compliance with your legal obligations is adjudicated and enforced by Ofcom, the Information Commissioner's Office (ICO) and the Financial Services Authority (FSA).

The penalties for non-compliance include fines, sanctions, public censure and reputational damage.

For more information on penalties – including examples of organisations that have been sanctioned – visit the ICO:

ico.org.uk

Industry standards

Provided by professional bodies such as the DMA.

Although these are not law, contact centres are required to comply with them if they are members of the organisation.

Industry bodies monitor compliance with their codes of practice and can impose sanctions if they are not met.

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 our industry.

- **Comply with relevant standards**
  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.

- **Obtain verification**
  Regulatory requirements and industry standards usually require verification to those bodies responsible for them. A level of transparency is necessary to comply.

- **Encourage internal transparency**
  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.

Verification

As part of the processes around regulation, compliance and standards, you should include a verification process.

- **Assign internal responsibility**
  Appoint an employee to manage this process and 'own' regulation, compliance and standards

verification for your organisation.

The employee appointed to fulfil this task will need to liaise with outside regulatory bodies.

- **Appoint compliance officer**
  Appoint a compliance officer and communicate their responsibilities across your organisation.

  Your compliance officer should be an expert in this area and be able to advise your organisation on its future development as well as the regulation, compliance and standards to which your contact centre must adhere.

- **Demonstrate compliance**
  Use your verification process to monitor and improve the processes that are necessary for compliance.

  Keep relevant records to demonstrate compliance.

- **Create campaign quality assurance**
  Ensure that all relevant personnel understand these verification processes.

  Create quality assurance procedures and measures to ensure compliance at the start of each campaign.

- **Keep records**
  Keep verification records including:

    - Agent and team objectives

    - Dialler compliance reports

    - Copy of agent script for campaign

    - Agent training manual for campaign

    - Campaign results

    - Campaign execution rules – including dialling times, retry counts, abandoned call message handling and so on

    - 'Do not call' (DNC) list management processes

    - Data management process

    - Details of other front office and back office processes

    - Complaints and resolutions

Verifiers

- **Use a verifier**
  Consider using a verifier for certain processes.

  The purpose of a verifier is to check data, a call or a transaction on an individual basis to ensure it is correct.

  This is a double-checked approach that you should adopt for sensitive sales and regulated products such as financial services.

  This approach minimises product cancellations, poor agent selling techniques and incorrect data.

Quality assurance

Quality assurance underlies all sections of your best practice. It is the responsibility of every campaign owner and contact centre to consider and deliver quality to their customers.

Without quality assurance, it is likely that the outbound telemarketing and teleservice industry will fall into disrepute – making it no longer effective as a business practice and possibly attracting direct government regulation.

This section highlights quality assurance best practice that you should implement. There are also other suggestions that will enhance quality and will become practical in the future.

Quality assurance 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 you should understand for the future.

Call recording and quality monitoring

- **Record calls**
  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.

- **Keep recordings**
  Recordings can be accessed and examined in any customer disputes.

- **Use quality monitoring**
  Use quality monitoring, with supervisors proactively assessing a sample of calls against your criteria.

- **Use screen capture**
  Use screen capture to complement call recording. Replay both at the same time to gain a full view of your agent's process and check that data capture is consistently high.

- **Define specific training for each agent**
  Use the findings to target specific training for each of your agents. Ensure that you quickly spot and address any quality issues.

- **Notify agents about any monitoring**
  Make all reasonable efforts to inform your 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, under Ofcom regulations the operations of any predictive dialler must be captured and stored.

- **Monitor against campaign measures**
  Assess calls against your campaign measures, such as conversion rate or customer satisfaction indexes, as part of a balanced scorecard to improve quality.

Business practice

- **Monitor for potential problems**
  A number of quality monitoring solutions can spot other potential problems in calls, including:

  - Long silences in calls

  - Where the agent and consumer talk over each other

  - High levels of stress in a voice

Speech analytics

Speech analytics is a very new technology but it will become commonplace in the future and will profoundly affect the way contact centres assess performance. It allows the identification of key words, phrases and stress patterns.

Speech analytics 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.

- **Identify call issues**
  Use speech analytics to uncover patterns that are quite unexpected, alerting you to issues that you would not be able to discover otherwise.

- **Combine with call data**
  Combine speech patterns with call data to reveal in-depth information and allow you to make further analysis. "Pull" calls individually and and inspected them for quality.

- **Monitor for swear-words**
  Monitor for inappropriate language, including swear-words or other offensive terms.

- **Investigate benefits and issues**
  Investigate and assess all factors around how your specific organisation can benefit from speech analytics, including:

  - Management of the technology

  - Use of alerts and trends

  - Feeding back results

  - Using results to improve quality

  - Legality and regularity compliance

Corporate and social responsibility

- **Define non-financial standards**
  Consider the impact of your campaign in non-financial terms:

    - How is it affecting your customers and prospects who do not convert?

    - Is it socially responsible, for example, to inconvenience 49 people with an inappropriate phone call in order to make a single sale?

    - Identify a reasonable and socially responsible conversion rate for your campaign

- **End an under-performing campaign**
  At the start of your campaign, set a minimum daily conversion rate.

  Stop your campaign if you fall below the threshold.

Customer satisfaction

Customer satisfaction and consumer acceptance of industry telemarketing practice are vital for the sustainability of our industry.

- **Maintain and improve satisfaction**
  Ensure this is at least maintained at a minimum level and improved over time.

- **Note differences between audiences**
  Customer satisfaction may naturally be different for different consumer segments, applications and campaigns.

- **Assess each campaign**
  Two techniques for assessment are noted below, but you should investigate others to identify and adopt the most appropriate techniques to monitor your campaign.

Pre-campaign testing and benchmarks

- **Test all campaigns**
  Test all campaigns against a set of measures and benchmarks.

- **Do not be misled by profitability**
  Your campaign assessment should not just a question of campaign profitability – your campaign could be profitable in the immediate term but still not deliver quality or long-term benefit.

  For example, a conversion rate below a certain level will show that a high number of your customers do not find your offer or service relevant. In cases such as these, modify or withdraw your campaign to avoid negative consequences – such as damage to brand reputation – even if your campaign is profitable.

- **Assess against best practice**
  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

- **Conduct post-call surveys**
  Conduct post-call surveys to ensure that your customer satisfaction does not fall below acceptable standards.

- **Identify the right survey technique**
  Post-call surveys can be in several different forms, including:

    - **End-of-call**
      Ask your customer to complete a survey at the end of a call

    - **Follow-up call**
      Make a later call to a sample of customers

    - **Survey**
      Survey via another medium, such as post

- **Benchmark customer satisfaction**
  Establish customer service benchmarks over a period of time to ensure that you maintain quality.

Complaints procedure

Definition of a complaint

A complaint is any expression of dissatisfaction – whether oral or written and whether justified or not.

Complaints policy

Your complaints policy should cover the following issues:

- **Obligation to have a written complaints policy**
  As a requirement of the *DMA Telemarketing Manifesto*, any contact centre that undertakes outbound calling activity – whether outsourced or in-house – is required to have a written complaints policy.

- **Obligation to deal with complaints**
  Your company has a duty to improve your customer's experience of an outbound telemarketing call by fully understanding the root cause of any dissatisfaction.

- **Identify systematic issues**
  As a company, you are required to manage and analyse complaints stemming from outbound calling and must:

    - Identify systemic issues

    - Remedy them

    - Make root-cause analysis of the reasons for the complaint

    - Change processes and procedures to minimise customer dissatisfaction

- **Train complaint-handling staff**
  Make sure your complaint-handling staff are knowledgeable, trained, respectful and supported by specialist supervisors so that they are able to have empathetic and productive conversations with your complainant.

- **Turn complaints into an opportunity**
  Well-trained staff will help your customer feel confident that their complaint has been respected and that they are valued by your organisation – in fact, a well-handled complaint can actually improve customer loyalty.

- **Use complaints to gain valuable insight**
  Although unwelcome on the surface, complaints can give you hugely valuable insights into how you can continuous improve your customer's experience and remain competitive.

Business practice

Complaints process

- **Be professional**
    - Listen to your customer and acknowledge their complaint
    - Respond quickly, honestly and appropriately to issues they raise

- **Collect required information**
  Your organisation is required to have its own written complaints procedure.

  As a minimum you should collect the following information:
    - Date of complaint
    - Reason for complaint
    - Outcome
    - If complaint was escalated
    - Tracking back to agent/campaign
    - If complaint was handled within service level agreement (SLA)
    - Date complaint settled

- **Categorise complaint**
  You should categorise each complaint as either:
    - A complaint that can be answered and resolved immediately on the call by your agent
    - A complaint that requires further investigation

- **Provide information to complainant**
  If a complaint cannot be immediately resolved, you must provide your complainant with the following information:
    - Acknowledgement of receipt of their complaint
    - Details of your organisation's complaints procedure
    - Named contact within your organisation to handle their complaint
    - Telephone number for this contact
    - Your organisation's business hours
    - A timeline of your investigation process, to inform your customer's expectations
    - Details of when you expect your investigation to be completed

- **Notify when complaint cannot be settled within seven days**
  If your customer's complaint cannot be settled within a seven-day period, contact them with:
    - Notice by telephone, letter or email to advise the reason for your delay
    - An updated timeline in which you expect to conclude the matter

- **Explain escalation policy**
  In the event of your customer remaining dissatisfied, explain your organisation's escalation procedure courteously and guide them through it.

Complaints reporting

- **Document full complaint procedure**

Business practice

Provide your agent with clear, documented information on when, how and to whom to escalate a complaint – together with a clear expectation on how long a complaint will take to resolve.

- **Log all complaint communications**
  As a minimum, log all complaints and conversations so that all communications are tracked and followed up in accordance with your procedures.

  Show your agent where complaints are stored and what information is required for analysis purposes.

- **Keep agents informed**
  It is essential to regularly update your call-handling teams about any existing complaints.

- **Align process with policies**
  Align your escalation process with your organisation's complaints policy.

- **Manage customer expectations**
  Make sure your agent is able to help manage your customer's expectations by providing a timeline at the point at which they make their complaint.

- **Create dedicated handling for group complaints**
  Set up a dedicated complaints line, using live operators, in circumstances where a large number of customers may complain.

  Ensure that your operators can classify the nature of each complaint and, if they are unable to resolve it themselves, are able to connect your customer to the most relevant person or department.

  Ensure that someone from the appropriate department is always available to take the call.

Complaints analysis

- **Identify long-term trends**
  Spot trends and implement improvements by building up complaints records over time, including:

    - Reasons for complaints

    - How complaints are managed

    - How many complaints are resolved at point of call

- **React quickly to problems**
  Identify trends within your complaints in order to tackle underlying issues.

  For instance, you may find that a particular data batch caused more complaints than others and can change your data strategy and stop buying data with this customer profile.

- **Turn findings into training**
  Implement findings into vital training to help your supervisors have impactful conversations with your frontline staff and, in turn, enable your staff to offer a better customer experience.

  Give your supervisors the time to support your frontline staff through call monitoring and regularly competency testing.

Complaint-handling training

Your must train your entire customer-facing staff to be able to handle complaints appropriately and positively.

- **Key areas for training**
  As a minimum, this training should include:

- 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' – explaining to your customer where you got their data from
- Complaints procedure
- Complaint recording
- Escalation process

- **Train all customer-facing staff**
  Before having conversations with customers, ALL your front-line staff should attend training on complaint resolution to help them recognise dissatisfaction and be able to resolve the complaint through polite and respectful dialogue.

- **Provide empathy training**
  Empathy should be a key part of your staff training programme. If your agent does not understand or convey the right attitude or tone, there is a real danger that your customer's dissatisfaction will not be recognised and will be escalated.

- **Train staff to recognise a complaint**
  Make sure your agent has the knowledge and the confidence not only to recognise a complaint, but also to acknowledge this in a proactive manner.

  A complaint can often be effectively ignored as your agent continues with their own commercial objective – brushing the complaint off instead of appropriately acknowledging and responding to your customer's concern.

  An appropriate response to the complaint can often allow both your agent and your customer to relax and move on through the call.

- **Prepare helpful scripts**
  Equip your customer-facing staff with precise, pre-prepared scripts or factual responses to help answer your customer's anxieties and diffuse any potentially heated conversations.

- **Background/knowledge training**
  Give your agents the following knowledge to help them handle complaints confidently and appropriately:

  - **Educate about TPS**
    Ensure your agent understands how the TPS works – and how to respond appropriately if your customer has registered for this service, including asking appropriate questions such as "May I ask when you signed up for this service?".

  - **Provide original data source**
    If warm calling, make sure your agent is able to explain to your customer where their data was obtained from – for example, during a previous enquiry.

  - **Full project briefing**
    Make sure that your agent can explain to your customer why they are being called. This will help reassure your customer, clarify that the call is relevant to them and make them more likely to listen to what your agent has to say.

Business practice

Customer behaviour

- **Define unacceptable customer conduct**
  Create a written policy to define inappropriate behaviour from your customers – covering complaints, offensive or aggressive behaviour and discrimination (such as sexist or racist remarks).

- **Train agents to handle difficult customers**
  Make sure your agents understand clearly what is and what is not acceptable behaviour from a customer and how to handle such situations.

Inclusivity and vulnerable consumers

- **Have written 'vulnerable consumers' policy**
  You must have a written procedure, included in your training manual, to offer your staff guidance when dealing with vulnerable consumers, including:

    - Older people

    - People who speak English as a second language

    - Children and young people

    - People with mental illness

    - People with learning disabilities

    - People with physical disabilities

    - People with alcohol or drug use problems

- **Develop inclusion objectives**
  Develop measurable, customer-centric objectives to enable effective communication with all groups of customers. Train your agents to respond to all customer types.

- **Strategise handling of different communication needs**
  Make provision to ensure an easy flow of two-way information for as many of your customers as possible.

  Develop a sensitive communication strategy, capable of engaging with disadvantaged groups via sensitive and responsive telephone discussion in an appropriate way.

  For example:

    - Avoid the temptation to just speak louder in reaction to someone who does not speak English well

    - Instead, avoid using metaphors or phrases that might confuse, such as 'second to none'

    - Speak at a steady pace using standard, non-embellished, clearly-enunciated language

- **Have responsible policies in place**
  Accept that we all have a responsibility to protect the interests of the vulnerable and consider additional safeguarding steps, such as a longer cooling-off period, or a policy of confirming every transaction by post.

- **Offer no-quibble refunds**
  Offer no-quibble refunds or cancellation to any customer believed to be vulnerable.

- **Be extra vigilant for customers with mental illness**
  With consumers suffering mental illness, such as Alzheimer's disease, it is not always possible to detect or respond to vulnerabilities, particularly towards comprehension.

  Consumers may suffer with episodes of confusion and may therefore agree to something they do not want or need.

Business practice

Train your agents to recognise any signs that a customer may be vulnerable and to react appropriately.

- **Make appropriate allowances for the hearing-impaired**
  Sometimes your customers will be using certain sensory assistance services – for example, if they have impaired hearing.

  These will impact on your call but can easily be accommodated by varying your speed and tone of speech.

  You must make Type Talk or similar transcription facilities available prior to beginning a campaign if your agents might regularly contact the hearing-impaired.

- **Record vulnerable consumers' needs**
  Annotate your records to flag up vulnerable consumers and their particular requirements.

  Ensure that your agent is aware of any known special requirements and has taken appropriate action before your call begins.

- **Check in-depth guidance**
  Download the DMA's guidance for call centres dealing with vulnerable consumers:

  www.dma.org.uk/toolkit/white-paper-guidelines-call-centres-dealing-vulnerable-consumers

Human resources

This section outlines the importance of agents or frontline staff to the future health of your business and the telemarketing industry.

The following areas are covered to enable you to understand your minimum obligations to your staff in order to meet best practice:

- **Recruitment**
- **Training**
- **Contracts**
- **Remuneration**

Key principles

- **Think long-term**
  The number of agent places in the UK has risen significantly over recent years. As our industry continues to expand, evidence suggests that a career in the contact centre industry is no longer seen as a stepping stone between alternative careers but for many agents is a career in its own right.

- **Provide a positive work environment that encourages growth**
  It is more important than ever to make sure that the training and environment you provide for your team is positive and constructive in the long-term as well as the short-term.

  With further growth forecast well into the next decade, it is important for you to create a positive vision of your business, our industry and the different contact centre careers available to talented individuals.

- **Present roles honestly and fairly**
  When recruiting for outbound telemarketing positions, consider the way in which you present different roles to best reflect the actual work that your recruits will undertake.

Roles

For the purposes of this best practice document, the following roles are considered in scope (the list is not exhaustive):

- Telemarketing executive
- Telemarketer
- Telesales executive
- Telephone sales canvasser
- Customer relationship telephone adviser
- Outbound customer adviser
- Outbound sales agent

Recruitment

- **Recruit with honesty**
  In order to attract and retain the best people, your recruitment process should be fair, open and honest about the nature of the role throughout – from initial advertising through to recruitment days or interviews and job offer.

Business practice

- **Check latest legal requirements**
  Ensure that your recruitment policy complies with current employment and immigration law.

- **Include telephone interview**
  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.

- **Use one process**
  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.

- **Use reputable agencies**
  In the event that you are employing temporary staff, there are many reputable recruitment agencies from which to draw agents.

- **Check full references**
  Agents will have access to your consumer's personal data and will be working in a privileged position, effectively entering 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.

  In order to ensure compliance with security of customer data, always obtain and check your recruit's full references.

Contracts

- **Include full job specification**
  The contract of employment should include a full job specification that clearly states:

  - Job role

  - Place of work

  - Hours of work

  - Holiday entitlement

  - Sickness entitlement, if applicable

  - Disciplinary and grievance procedure

  - Remuneration, including financial and non-financial benefits

- **Review annually**
  Review this annually as part of your agent's annual performance review to ensure it continues to accurately reflect the activities they are required to undertake on your behalf.

- **Clearly explain incentives**
  Providing full, clear information and explanation of any incentive structure, if this is an integral part of the job you are offering.

- **Agency staff contracts**
  For agents working via a recruitment agency, your agent's contract of employment is with the agency itself.

Business practice

Remuneration

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

- **Pay a sufficient basic rate**
  Pay a basic rate of pay, whether a salary or hourly rate, that allows individuals to focus on the best interests of each and every consumer they contact in the course of their work.

- **Comply with minimum wage**
  Ensure that rate of pay complies with the current national minimum wage. We recommend that you should guarantee your agents a pay rate of no less than the minimum wage, irrespective of their employment status or the number of sales that they make.

- **Enforce minimum wage from agencies**
  We further advise that it is best practice for you to contractually enforce a basic pay rate of no less than minimum wage on the agencies you use – and actively supervise their third-party sales agents.

- **Make incentives achievable**
  Set incentives to achievable levels and reflect the ability to convert.

- **Incentivise good behaviour**
  Set team goals and individual rewards to minimise poor behaviour and maximise positive outcomes.

- **Incentivise QUALITY of customer interaction**
  Think about exactly what you are incentivising. Reward the QUALITY of customer interaction rather than focusing exclusively on the outcome (sale). Encouraging your agents to focus on quality is a key factor in allowing the natural conversion rate for a campaign to rise.

- **DO NOT pressure conversions**
  Forced conversions can often lead to cancellations and or complaints which, in turn, take business time and effort to resolve.

- **Align motivations for all staff**
  Ensure that your payments structure incentivised all members of the team, and all levels of management structure, towards the same behaviours and objectives.

- **Monitor against incentivising bad practice**
  Observe the outcomes of your commission structure to ensure that is not deliberately or inadvertently encouraging bad practice.

- **Things to avoid when remunerating sales staff:**
  - Commission-only deals between agencies and clients
  - A high proportion of your telemarketer's remuneration paid in the form of commission
  - Low levels of accountability

- **Further resources**
  Further resources:

  Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (CIPD) (member access only)

Training

Telemarketing relies on great telemarketers

The performance of your telemarketing is inextricably linked to the skill of your agent making the call.

- **Offer continual training**
  Identify and address ongoing training and development needs within your telemarketing or contact centre environments to ensure best practice and best results.

  Not only will your commitment to training activities produce immediate higher business effectiveness, it will also encourage a high-performance culture that will help to grow your business in the long term.

- **Nurture staff performance as a key competitive advantage**
  A culture of lasting high performance and efficiency is the keystone of top organisations.

  Nurture a community of engaged agents, with a clear idea of how they are performing and where they are going, to gain a pivotal differentiator between your organisation and your competitors.

  Your ultimate goal is to create a culture where your staff can improve, give their best and deliver your business sustainable high performance.

- **Use training to create a successful culture**
  Build organisational values, hard work ethic, clear reward and a customer care ethos into the framework of your training.

  Well-structured training will also enable you to raise the profile of your company, your agent's role and telemarketing generally – shaping the future of your business and our industry.

- **Deliver creative training programmes / introduce innovative telemarketing practices**
  Creative training programmes will help stir thought and get agents thinking, responding, contributing, and releasing creative potential with each call made.

- **Invest in training to improve profitability**
  Practitioners who embrace and promote training, whether accredited or not, will invariably cash in on tangible bottom line rewards.

  Well-trained teams naturally tend to achieve better results, leading to greater efficiencies, higher quality standards and an uplift in financial returns.

- **Provide meaningful shared vision**
  Delivering a clear vision and strategy that benefit ALL levels of your organisation to provide your staff with motivational shared objectives.

- **Reward employee training**
  Getting staff to connect with your business and buy into the idea of high performance can be tricky.

  Provide real rewards for successful training and recognise employees who perform highly or make a particularly valuable contribution to your training or culture.

  Ensure that you are incentivising positive, quality-focused behaviour rather than poor practice or goals that might compromise customer experience.

Campaign training

Once you have recruited the staff required for your telemarketing needs, it is paramount that you offer a structured training programme relevant to the needs of your individual recruit – not just the specifics of the product or service you are promoting.

Your training programme should provide your telemarketer with a good understanding of:

- **The product**
  The fullest details of the product or service being promoted – and where these sit in the market place.

- **The organisations involved**
  The position of the promoted organisation in its market place.

- **Their role**
  Their own role in the sales process alongside other promotional materials and marketing.

- **Telemarketing good practice**
  How to get the best out of a telephone call with a prospect or customer in the right manner.

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 and the TPS

Soft skills

- Listening techniques
- Call structure
- Strategies for dealing with different customer types
- Handling complaints
- Updating customer records

Key training goals

- **Empower your staff**
  The key is to empower your front-line staff to understand and respond to any query from a prospect or customer, including how to handle a complaint.

  This in turn should reassure consumers and help to positively change the perception of our industry as a whole.

- **Scale training to task**
  The level of training you need to undertake will be proportionate to the amount of information appropriate to the product or service being promoted.

- **Consider staff knowledge levels**
  Consider the telemarketing experience – including both good and bad habits – of the labour pool from which you recruit.

- **Take advantage of qualification schemes**
  There are a number of schemes to consider for the development of your staff at all levels, such as:

  - **Train to Gain** – basic literacy and maths programme funded by the DTI

  - **NVQs** – Institute of Customer Service

- **Give staff portable skills**
  Both the above provide portable qualifications that your member of staff can take with them as their career progresses.

- **Promote industry reputation**
  Best practice dictates that you safeguard the future of our industry by providing the highest level and quality of training that your organisation's resources will allow.

Accredited training schemes

- **Offer accredited training**
  Offer training that is linked to some form of accreditation.

  This can offer faster payback on your investment as your staff are better incentivised to learn when extra qualifications are at stake, leading to obvious performance benefits to your organisation.

- **Recognise that accredited training attracts good staff**
  Equally, accredited learning can help you attract and retain the best staff.

  Offer your staff the opportunity for practical work-based learning to both raise their competency levels and help them in their career path.

- **Accredited qualifications emphasise measureable improvement**
  Accredited learning programmes are fundamentally different to training because they place far more emphasis on the individual learner and the measurable change in their performance as a result.

- **Measure key competencies**
  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, a task such as 'opening a call' might be scored on a scale of 1-5, with 1 being lowest and 5 highest:

  1. **Below expectation** – Agent did not properly announce the call, failed to check they had the correct person, spoke unclearly, provided inaccurate information.

  5. **Exceeded expectation** – Agent used customer's 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.

- **Accredited training improves business performance**
  Accredited learning programmes in the workplace help place stronger focus on business performance, enabling higher levels of employee engagement and better business results.

- **Offer ongoing training**
  The best training programmes are those that never stop happening and are linked to daily activities like your company intranet, call logging systems, morning meetings, individual feedback and so on.

- **Accredited schemes available**
  There are several kinds of accredited learning programmes available.

Business practice

These 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.

National Vocational Qualifications (NVQs)

NVQs are recognised competency-based qualifications acknowledging proficiency in a particular occupation or task.

An NVQ is roughly equivalent to a GCSE so are ideal for those who wish to extend their qualifications.

They are based and evidenced on workplace activities, not coursework or exams.

NVQs are not necessarily dedicated to learning new skills but are typically focused on raising and recognising competence in an existing role.

BTEC

BTEC is one of a small number of exam boards that offer a standalone qualification.

A BTEC, like an NVQ, is an occupational qualification, but comparable to an A Level.

BTECs 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 awarding bodies or exam boards that offer similar qualifications include OCR and AQA.

Corporate training programmes

Some organisations run their own custom training scheme, developed in line with the specific needs of the business.

These may not have a recognised qualification but are valuable in that they are ongoing and will have a regular systematic framework.

These programmes are based on key competencies required for specific jobs and are linked to individual learning plans tailored to each individual. They break down performance to sets of competencies and set clear measurement objectives for each.

Supervision and support of agents

Ongoing competency

- **Appoint supervisors**
  Support each of your agents with a supervisor who listens to their calls regularly.

- **Comply with regulation**
  Ensure supervision is done in compliance with the requirements of the Regulation of Investigatory Powers (Lawful Business Practice) Regulations 2000.

- **Gather feedback**
  Make sure that your supervisor monitors how customer dissatisfaction is being recognised during calls and that calls are managed effectively, in line with your processes and procedures, and recorded appropriately.

- **Offer praise where praise is due**
  Do not forget to praise your agents when they have done a good job!

Note for agents

This document is a summary of what 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 that fall short of the standards being set in this document.

The emphasis is on doing what is right by the consumer in order that we may retain the freedom to make contact with consumers by telephone in the future.

Supplier–client relationships

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.

View your relationship as a partnership – with both parties working together to ensure compliance and best practice is being delivered.

- **Client guide to outsourcing**
  These guidelines outline all the key areas that need to be considered for a successful partnership, but for further information see:

  The DMA Client guide to outsourcing

Campaign creation

Campaign objectives

Questions to consider:

- What do you want to achieve from your campaign?
- How will your campaign benefit your customer?
- Are your objectives measurable?
- Are your objectives achievable?
- How, in detail, is your telemarketing agent going to help achieve the objectives?
- Is there a secondary objective to your agent's call?
- How many dials and decision-making contacts (DMCs) will be required?
- What conversion rates are achievable?
- What quality objectives should you establish, in addition to the financials?
- What valuable customer insight can you collect during the call?
- How will this insight be used to help improve your customer's experience in future campaigns?

Campaign strategy

Key principles

- **Put your customer first**
  - Place your customer at the heart of your calling process
  - Respect their rights and requests – particularly their right to say NO
  - Experience your processes and practices from the perspective of your customer
  - Take time to understand how your service comes across and resolve any practices you would find inappropriate

- **Be honest and fair**
  - Make clear, honest and open two-way communication central to all practices and processes

- **Foster excellent communication**
  - Share information as appropriate to enable excellent communication
  - Be consistent, clear, easily understood, relevant and up-to-date in all communication – whether spoken, written or electronic

- **Encourage conversation over conversion**
  - Be careful when setting timeframes for outbound calling

    Encouraging shorter talk times may well be counter-productive – but on the other hand, your customers should not feel 'hostage' on the phone either

    Find a careful balance and build some element of flexibility into your agents' efficiency targets

- **Deliver what you promise**
    - Do not overpromise at any stage: whether through goal-setting or through the commitments your agents make to customers
    - Only deliver what can be achieved realistically and in a fair, positive manner for both agents and customers

Add value to your customer and brand

As with any channel, your telemarketing campaign is a vital part of your whole brand development and reputation. Give careful thought to how you can complement and advance your brand or campaign goals through the one-to-one interaction you design.

- **Create a positive customer experience**
  Identify the most impactful communication that ensures your prospect or customer remembers your call for positive reasons.

- **Integrate messaging with other marketing**
  Strategise your telemarketing communication to integrate with any other advertising that may be taking place for the same product or service.

- **Support brand development**
  Ensure that the messaging, tone and specific details of your telemarketing campaign supports and enhances other channel communications and brand development.

  For example:
    - Script language and phrasing that fits with the brand being promoted
    - Select agents whose personality is most appropriate to the brand's persona
    - Pitch your approach to suit for the product you're promoting

- **Brief agents on other marketing activity**
  Thoroughly brief your agents on all other marketing activity for the same product or service so that they can deliver a more effective and informed offer to your customer.

- **Add extra customer benefit**
  A good quality call will mitigate the inconvenience to those you don't convert, so look for a benefit to make your call beyond your primary sales objective.

  For example, offer a customer services tag to the end of your call, such as: "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?"

- **Avoid high pressure telemarketing**
  High pressure, aggressive campaigns can lead to high staff attrition rates and distress consumers who feel they are being treated in a robotic manner, not as individuals.

Conversion rates

- **Define acceptable conversion rate**
  Define the minimum conversion rate acceptable for your campaign, based on both profitability and the likely customer impact or annoyance factor.

- **Stop campaign below acceptable conversion rate**
  You must monitor the conversion rate and pause your campaign if your minimum conversion rate is not being met.

- **Define for different segments**
  Consider conversion rates in the context of specific data sets.

- **Define for different data sources**
  Rates will differ between warm and cold calling and between different data lists selected.

Campaign planning

To maximise your chance of a successful telemarketing campaign, carefully plan your campaign before calling starts.

- **Use planning to drive good service**
  Good planning will ensure you support your staff and provide a valuable service to prospects and customers alike – whether you are carrying the work out in-house or outsourcing it.

- **Pinpoint your customer**
  Undertake research to fully profile and understand your potential customers and their needs. Define the ideal profile of your customer, enabling you to approach them effectively.

  Calling the wrong people simply demoralises contact centre agents, upsets consumers, is extremely inefficient and will damage your brand image.

- **Pinpoint data by quality, not quantity**
  Select a quality database of consumers who have a high propensity to buy, matched against your ideal customer profile – do not just select high volumes of data.

- **Apply previous learnings**
  Apply any learnings from previous campaigns or industry research.

- **Match agents to the task**
  Whenever possible, select telemarketing agents who have a genuine interest in the product they will be promoting.

  This will enhance consumer confidence and promotes a genuine conversation rather than a scripted dialogue.

Brief your front-line staff

- **Brief agents thoroughly**
  Provide your staff with as much information as possible so that they can have well-informed, meaningful conversations with customers – which will reflect in positive conversions and higher customer satisfaction.

- **Learn from agents' feedback**
  Get feedback from your agents. They will gain extremely valuable and highly relevant first-hand information to contribute to the success of your campaign and organisation.

Call and after-call process

The four key components of your call should be:

1. **Disclosure**

2. **Call structure**

3. **Summary**

4. **Post-call process**

1. Disclosure

- **Use real agent names**
  Ensure your agent uses their real name to introduce themselves and the purpose of your call.

- **Provide client with list of agents**
  If activity is being outsourced, the client should be provided with a regularly updated list of agents' names.

- **Disclose key information**
  Your call opening should contain the following information briefly but clearly:

  1. Who you are

  2. Where you are calling from

  3. The reason for your call

  4. You should ask "Is this a convenient time to speak?" – and perhaps add that the call will take just X minutes and be sure it takes no longer

  5. Complete any relevant security checks quickly where appropriate

2. Structure

- **Have a clear call structure**
  Have a clear structure for your call that is designed to draw your customer into a dialogue quickly. Once your customer is talking they become 'involved' in your call and is less likely to hang up.

- **Establish relevance**
  Aim to establish early on whether there is a 'need' or 'relevance' to your customer for your particular product or service. In other words, are you likely to convert your call to a sale, and is it relevant for your call to continue?

- **Use question technique**
  Typically, you might use some kind of question technique, for example: "We'd be keen to know if you currently subscribe to X."

- **Follow call blueprint**
  A good call structure will usually resemble the following blueprint:

  1. Question

  2. Establish a 'need' or 'desire' that you can meet with your particular product or service

  3. Explain in greater depth how your product or service will meet your customer's need

4. Deal with your customer's questions or resistance WITHOUT pushing or embellishment

5. Discuss any additional up-sell or cross-sell opportunities ONLY if appropriate

6. Close your call with a suitable conclusion – summarise what your have discussed or agreed

- **End unsuccessful calls professionally**
  If your customer has no apparent need or desire for your product or service, you MUST conclude your call professionally and politely.

- **Build brand 'mind share'**
  Respect that even where no sale is made, a good customer experience will spread a positive perception of the brand you are promoting (i.e. 'mind share') and will eventually encourage more customers and long-term market share.

3. Summary

- **Ending your call**
  This is the process for the appropriate ending of your call. This part of your call is vital to ensure that your customer is clear about the outcome of your call and to ensure there has been no misunderstanding about what will happen next.

- **Summarise your agreement**
  Concisely summarise what your call has achieved. It should include the following things:

  1. Synopsis, for example: "Okay Mr X, so you would like to..."

  2. Explain whom your customer's data will be passed to, and what action they will take

  3. Ask your customer if they are happy to receive email, phone or mail contact in future

  4. Thank your customer sincerely for their time and end the call

4. Post-call process

- **Fulfil your commitments**
  You must complete any commitments or promises made during a call within the timescale agreed with your customer.

- **Brief agents on after-call process**
  It is essential that your agents are well-briefed and do not promise things that cannot be delivered upon.

Data

Data and direct marketing are inextricably linked. Put simply, you can have no contact of any kind without using your consumer's correct personal information.

Data quality must, therefore, be your priority at every level. But it is most critical for you regard to the legal imperatives and from the perspective of achieving optimum ROI.

Sourcing data

Cold data

- **'Warm' versus 'cold' data**
  Data is often referred to as being:

    - '**warm**' – when contact of some sort has been established by the brand on whose behalf your call is being made, or

    - '**cold**' – when there has been no previous contact with the brand

- **Expect to need cold data**
  While intuition suggests that warm data is preferable to cold data, the reality is that your campaign will probably require cold data at some stage.

- **Cold data can be effective**
  Cold data can be as effective as warm data, when selected intelligently and appropriately.

- **Source cold data**
  If you are looking to contact consumers who are not already your customers, there are many sources of data available.

Data ownership

The following conditions are typical, but always check the precise terms of your own list rental agreement for variations.

- **One-off data usage**
  In most cases, data acquired for direct marketing purposes is purchased as list rental for one-off use.

  The 'use' is generally defined as being a live, answered call with the correct consumer.

  Once the consumer has declined to participate further as the call unfolds, their number is deemed to have been used and may not be called again.

- **Call-back permitted**
  The consumer may request to be called back at a more convenient time, in which case a further call may be permissible.

- **Limit number of attempts**
  Setting a limit on the number of times a number should be called where there is no answer or answer-machine disposition.

- **Positive response**
  A positive response, and one which entitles you to have ownership of that record, will depend on the terms of your list rental agreement.

  This could be where your consumer has shown sufficient interest in your product or service to indicate that they have taken preliminary steps towards the conclusion of a contract, i.e. purchasing such product or service.

  This would NOT normally include you simply claiming the consent of the consumer to be re-contacted at a later date, unless otherwise agreed by your data supplier.

Data owners

Telemarketers with knowledge and experience of the data market may choose to approach data owners directly.

List brokers

Those who are unfamiliar with the data market are at no disadvantage. There are many list broking experts who will advise, guide and acquire data on your behalf and at no additional cost.

- **Use DMA member brokers**
  To ensure a high level of both legal compliance and efficacy of the data, you should only use data owners or data brokers who are members of the DMA.

- **Do thorough due diligence**
  Whenever you buy or rent data, you are responsible for its compliance – so always ensure you conduct full due diligence on any data you source.

  See the *Buying, selling and renting data section* of the *Data guide* for full details.

Origin

- **Check how data was collected**
  With the increase in TPS registrations in recent years, third-party data with telephone numbers is scarce. It is, therefore, incumbent upon you, as the telemarketer, to question the source of your data and the method by which it was collected and verified.

  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 (i.e. offering an opt-out).

- **Check recency of data**
  Accuracy is also absolutely critical when considering choice of data.

  You must ensure that data is accurate and up to date in order to ensure compliance with the DPA.

  Best practice requires that you check on the provenance of the data and recency of the contact in order to ensure you reach your intended customer.

Handling data

Legal compliance

- **Use data legally**
  As well as gaining the assurance that the source data has been collected in accordance with the DPA and the PECR, it is imperative that you use the data with the same adherence to relevant legislation.

- **Screen cold data data against TPS and check accuracy**
  Screening cold data 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.

- **Screen against other suppression files**
  Screen files against proprietary suppression files, where appropriate (i.e. mortality, gone-aways and home-mover files), as well as internal suppression files.

- **Maintain DNC list**
  As a legal requirement, you must maintain and consistently update in-house do-not-call (DNC) lists and ensure that this information is always shared between any retained agencies and/or outsourced call centres.

Often call lists are collated from a number of sources, and it is important to remember that these must always be run against your in-house DNC list.

Your in-house DNC list must always be updated to include any 'do-not-call' requests made to the agency or call centre(s).

- **Make data source available**
  Track the data chain as far back as possible so that you can correctly provide the source of the data if your consumer asks.

  This is essential, even if it proves a challenge in the event of different sources of data being used for the same campaign.

- **Honour suppression requests promptly**
  Act upon suppression or subject access requests from consumers promptly – and certainly within a maximum of 40 days of the written subject access request.

- **Only use freshly-screened data**
  Before you can use data for telemarketing purposes, your must have updated or refreshed it (at the very least by screening against suppression files) within the previous six months; and screened it against the TPS no more than 28 days prior to use (see below).

TPS

- **Screen before supplying**
  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.

- **Screen before use**
  You must ensure that data has been screened against the TPS no more than 28 days prior to unsolicited calls being made.

- **Legitimate market research exception**
  The only exemption to this is for data which is to be used for legitimate market research.

- **Opted-in data exemption**
  Your proprietary lists (i.e. lists of consumers with whom you have an established relationship) may be used without cleaning against the TPS, providing your consumer has supplied their number directly to you (i.e. you have not sourced it) and you have gained their opt-in permission to use their number for direct marketing purposes.

TPS Assured

- **Accreditation of TPS compliance**
  TPS Assured is an annual audit and certification service that assesses whether your organisation complies with PECR, Ofcom guidance and TPS Assured's guidance on outbound telemarketing best practice.

  If you're a UK-based organisation that uses outbound telemarketing to contact UK consumers, you can apply for TPS Assured certification.

- **TPS Assured helps your business**
  Achieving TPS Assured accreditation helps your business with three key benefits:

  - **Stay on the right side of the law**
    TPS Assured brings all the rules governing telemarketing together in one place to make it easier for you to comply and follow best practice.

    You'll also receive expert advice, guidance and immediate updates about any changes to the laws, rules or regulations that could affect the telemarketing industry.

- **Gain competitive advantage**
  Use the TPS Assured logo on your website and corporate literature to differentiate your business from those who have not achieved accreditation.

  Accreditation also gives consumers confidence that you have been independently assessed.

- **Protect your reputation**
  Avoid the bad publicity and reputational damage of unwittingly breaking the law – as well as the hefty fines that come with it.

  The ICO and Ofcom have issued non-compliant telemarketers with millions of pounds of fines over recent years – and will crack down heavily on any rogue practitioners.

- **Find out more and apply for accreditation**
  For more information and to apply for TPS Assured accreditation, visit:

  tpsassured.co.uk

Suppression files/'do-not-call' lists

- **Offer opt-out**
  When undertaking warm calling, if your customer wishes to have their number added to your in-house suppression file, you should give them the opportunity to identify that they do not wish to receive calls on any telephone number associated with their account.

- **Honour DNC across multiple numbers**
  Consumers often have multiple devices and numbers and organisations tend to attempt to capture as many numbers as possible for a customer. Your management of suppression files must take this into account.

  Scenarios where your customer is called on one number, requests to be added to a do-not-call list, and is then called on another number clearly brings DNC lists into disrepute with consumers.

- **Unsubscribe at individual's level**
  Where possible, use account-oriented do-not-call lists so that you can still contact other customers in the same household.

Security

- **Be diligent with data**
  Take appropriate technical and organisational measures to protect the security of personal data, particularly when holding and transferring your consumers' personal data.

- **Password-protect data**
  All files should be password-protected.

- **Strictly control access**
  No one should have access to your data unless they are directly involved in the process of preparation or use of the data.

- **Appoint data compliance officer**
  Appoint a person or persons to be aware of and responsible for your organisation's DPA and PECR compliance relating to the security of personal data handled as part of your telemarketing activities.

- **Use DataSeal**
  DataSeal is the industry standard for security of data handling and covers the transfer or data between two parties.

  DataSeal is administered by the DMA. For full information and to apply for accreditation, visit:

  dma.org.uk/content/dataseal

Using data

Selection and targeting

- **Targeting is critical**
  Optimum targeting is an absolute imperative.

  It is pointless to contact consumers who are inappropriate for the product or service that you are promoting – it will increase your costs, lower your conversion rate and is likely to antagonise some people.

- **Use detailed data**
  In order to maximise your targeting, use data with as much depth and detail as is possible.

  There are many databases available that can provide not just socio-demographics, but also purchasing habits and intentions, hobbies and interests and even household income.

  Do not compromise detail in favour of volume.

- **Test data first**
  Always validate and test each data selection against your campaign objectives prior to roll-out.

- **Over over-contacting consumers**
  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.

Campaign creation

Data volume

- **Assess required data volume**
  Give special attention to the volume of data you will be using for your campaign. Factors that will influence this include:

    - Number of agents you will be using

    - Length of time that your campaign will run

    - Number of contacts per hour – time of day may influence this

- **Weigh up fine-tuning of data vs volume**
  Note that a greater emphasis on fine-tune targeting will reduce volume of data.

  While it is imperative to ensure that your campaign is aimed at consumers most likely to respond positively, this consideration needs to be balanced with your overall campaign requirements.

  You may want to adjust your requirements to take into account a lower volume of higher-quality data.

- **Plan good dialler usage**
  Do not underestimate the importance of good dialler planning and management – it is imperative that you constantly monitor turnover of your data.

  Data that has been churned time and time again will not deliver your desired results.

Testing, analysis and refinement

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

  The analysis of non-sales dispositions can optimise your targeting for future campaigns.

- **Gather additional information**
  Ask consumers to volunteer additional key information (subject to compliance with the DPA) such as date of birth, presence of children or key events.

  This will help you to match products to suit your consumer during the course of the call, whilst post-campaign analysis will also help shape appropriate targeting for future campaigns.

- **Continually improve scripts**
  Refine agents' scripts as your campaign unfolds. Take the opportunity to learn about and improve your campaign by adapting and testing scripts to suit different datasets.

Campaign delivery
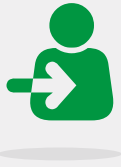
Call scheduling

Key considerations

- **Ensure sufficient agents**
  If you use a dialler, ensure that you always have an available agent to pick up a connected call.

- **Provide appropriate training**
  Ensure that you have sufficient time to fully train agents to work on your campaign before any work starts.

- **Schedule call times sensitively**
  Schedule call times to allow the best chance to reach your target audience.

  Calling customers at inappropriate times may cause resentment and render your future calling ineffective.

- **Honour consumer preferences**
  Clearly, it always makes sense to note your customer's calling preferences, where these are forthcoming.

- **Work around topical events**
  Take topical events into account, such as national emergencies (storms or flooding, for example), when deciding whether to start or continue any outbound calling activity. Limit activity to unaffected parts of the country.

Reasonable hours

- **Respect reasonable hours**
  Do not make sales, marketing or service calls during hours that are unreasonable to your customer.

- **Research demographic preferences**
  Recognise that what is regarded as reasonable can vary in different locations and in different types of households or businesses.

- **Avoid Sundays and holidays**
  While it is not illegal, many consumers consider it unreasonable to be called on a Sunday or on a national or religious holiday.

- **Reasonable hours**
  Generally, reasonable calling hours are:

Monday to Friday:	8am to 9pm
Saturdays:	9am to 9pm

Ring time

- **Define acceptable ring time**
  Consider the length of time you allow calls to ring before being terminated due to no answer

- **Measure from customer's perspective**
  Measure ring time from the point that the call starts ringing on your customer's phone, not from the point at which your 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.

- **Ring time factors**
  The factors that a contact centre must consider when setting the ring time include:
    - **Minimum ring time allowed** – under Ofcom regulations.
    - **Customer demographics** – for example, elderly customers may need more time to get to the phone.
    - **Your team size and answer success rate** – both of which may limit the impact of a higher ring time.

- **Manage agents' time effectively**
  A higher ring time can increase your agent wait time between calls.

  In high wait-time situations where you are using predictive dialling, your agents may become distracted between calls if they have no visual or audible indication of ongoing dialling activity

- **Answerphones**
  Some telephone networks provide answerphone and voicemail capabilities that cut in after a standard delay – for example, BT 1571 answers after 20 seconds.

- **Set dialler functionality**
  Understand any dialler functionality that mitigates longer ring time

  For example, call cancelling over Ofcom minimum ring time, where calls are automatically terminated if leaving the call ringing would result in an abandoned call.

- **Test ring time factors**
  Test with a higher ring time and plot answer count versus ring time for calls answered by customers and by answer phones to identify the appropriate ring time for your campaign.

  Strike a balance between:
    - Ringing too long
    - Hitting a high proportion of answer machines
    - Inconvenience to the customer caused by stopping too early

- **Provide ring time measurement mechanism**
  In preview dialling mode, if your dialler does not automatically hang up calls, provide your agent with a mechanism to measure the ring time to ensure that Ofcom regulations are met.

Call retrying

Retry handling

- **Spread retries**
  Use retry strategies that spread dialling attempts between morning, afternoon, evening and weekends.

  Where possible, use dialler retry rules to avoid retrying numbers at the same time each day.

- **Reset after live calls**
  Reset your retry count to an individual number or customer account following a call that is answered by the customer.

- **Equip agent with all information**
  If you use predictive or progressive dialling, make sure your agents can see:

  - The name of your customer and the reason for your call within one second

  - The reason for your call only needs to be shown if the purpose of your calls varies within your campaign

  - All relevant facts within two seconds

- **Prepare agents for each warm calling**
  When warm calling, it is very important that your agent has all relevant facts to hand concerning your customer's account.

  Your customer will expect your agent to know why they are calling and to be fully conversant with all relevant account details.

- **Take time to understand inbound calls**
  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 and so on.

Nuisance calls

- **Frequent retries can be a nuisance**
  Frequent retries can cause a high level of nuisance to customers.

  Even when your customer's experience of talking to your agent is perceived as good, a high level of retries will be seen by many customers as harassment.

- **Missed calls can be nuisance**
  Nuisance will occur primarily when you dial mobiles or landlines with call history display functionality.

- **Calls are not typically anonymous**
  If you use predictive dialling, you must present a caller line identification (CLI), so unsuccessful dial attempts are not anonymous.

- **Be wary of brand damage**
  When cold calling, you may consider the nuisance to be low enough to not adversely affect your brand. But be cautious in this regard, particularly when warm calling active customers.

- **Avoid causing unnecessary worry**
  In the worst scenarios, there is the possibility that you could cause your customer high anxiety.

  For example, your customer might be left fearing that there is a major problem if they find a series of missed calls from your organisation, but on attempting to call back only reach an automated message stating that your contact centre is closed but had been attempting to call concerning their account.

- **Nuisance call rules of thumb**
  The following recommendations are an initial 'rule of thumb' – but you need to be aware of, and have a clear policy regarding, retry management:

  - **Limit the three redials per day**
    When your outbound call attempt finds no answer, or an answerphone, limit to three dial attempts per day for any individual customer

  - **Minimum redial intervals**
    The following minimum redial intervals are recommended:

Busy	10 minutes
Number unobtainable	120 minutes
No answer	120 minutes
Answerphone	120 minutes

Call-backs

- **Brief campaign timings to agents**
  Brief your agents about the times during which your campaign will be undertaken.

  Ensure your agent knows not to (or cannot) arrange call-backs with your customer for any time when the call-back cannot be performed.

- **Redialling missed call-backs**
  If your call-back is not successful at the date and time requested, attempt same day redials.

  If these are still unsuccessful, redial your customer at the original call-back time on the following day.

Switching call-backs to a different number

- **Switching call-backs to a landline**
  With the increase in outbound dialling to mobile phones, make sure your agent knows how to handle the scenario of a customer wishing to talk on a landline rather than the mobile number originally dialled.

- **Call-backs on a different number**
  Where your dialler equipment does not directly handle immediate call-backs, make sure your agents understand the process used to redial customers if your customer wishes to discuss the matter on a different number to the one originally dialled.

Call abandonment

Abandoned call handling

- **Redial abandoned calls immediately**
  Where your dialler allows it, redial customers who receive an abandoned call as soon as possible, ideally within 10 minutes, using manual, preview or progressive dialling.

- **Flag abandoned calls to agents**
  When a call presented to your agent has previously been abandoned, ensure that your agent is alerted to this either visually or audibly.

Abandoned call information message

There are three important telephone numbers involved in your management of a predictive dialler campaign:

1. The CLI transmitted on your call

2. The number relayed during your information message which is played in the event that your call is abandoned

3. If your consumer calls your CLI number, you might then play a message providing a dedicated number they can call if they wish to be placed on your in-house suppression file

- **Use consistent call-back number**
  Give the same number in your voicemail message as is disclosed in the message played to your customer on a 1471 call-back. This gives your customer a second opportunity to hear your number.

- **Using a different number to your CLI number**
  Your call-back and suppression numbers need not be the same as your outbound CLI number as this can present technical problems if you are not able to issue multiple CLIs.

- **Use campaign-appropriate information messages**
  Your messages do not have to be the same for each call in your campaign. As long as your messages are appropriate for your customer, you may include accounts for different companies and brands in a single campaign.

- **Document all messages**
  For auditing purposes, keep documentation of your CLI information messages and any other messages for each campaign.

- **Sample messages**
  Suggested wording for your messages:

  For information message:

  "Hello, you were called on behalf of [organisation/brand] 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."

- **Clearly identify your organisation or client organisation**
  Your information message must clearly identify the organisation on whose behalf your call is being made.

  Where a plc is a group of branded divisions, use the brand name to the customer, rather than the overall group name.

  This Ofcom requirement 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.

Technology and testing

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
- The public switched telephone network (PSTN)

- **Test regularly**
  Test and monitor your end-to-end infrastructure and the applications that rest on it.

  Refer this duty to your IT department.

Dialler operations

This section 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.

This section also covers different mechanisms to control over-dialling, such as explicit over-dial rates or agent–trunk ratios.

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, to eliminate agent wait time.

Other technologies
Such as power dialling and auto-dialling.

Predictive dialling

- **Provide CLI number**
  It is important to note that the DMA Code and Ofcom regulations differ in that the Code requires you to transmit a CLI for ALL calls you make, whereas Ofcom regulations only apply to your use of predictive dialling equipment.

Productivity factors

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

1. **Pacing**
   The quality of the predictive dialler's pacing engine or algorithm.

2. **Live connection rate**
   The live connection rate of the campaign – i.e. the proportion of calls the dialler makes that are answered.

3. **Call cycle**
   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.

   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.

4. **Size of team**
   The size of your team plays a crucial part. In order for your predictive dialler to be effective, you need a certain number of agents on your campaign in order to improve productivity without generating unnecessary abandoned calls.

   - **Calculate required team size**
     What constitutes this minimum team size will depend on your pacing, live connection rate and average call duration – and each dialler will behave differently under different circumstances.

   - **Understand your chosen dialler**
     It is important to understand how your chosen dialler works with low team sizes and that you use that information to plan your campaign. This is important because:

   - **Be careful using diallers with small teams**
     Many predictive diallers will generate high numbers of abandoned calls when the team size is too small.

   - **Larger teams increase dialler productivity**
     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.

   - **Use maximum number of agents**
     Wherever possible, maximise the number of agents assigned to your campaign.

     Predictive dialling systems are usually more efficient and accurate when you have a large number of agents on a single campaign.

     Use this to minimise your abandonment rate.

Preventing abandoned calls

Some diallers will automatically understand if you have 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 you have a small number of agents working, your campaign is limited to prevent the dialler generating abandoned calls.

- **Reduce abandoned calls by:**

    - Reducing your dialler's abandoned call target

    - Limiting the number of trunks your campaign is configured to use

    - Setting your campaign to be run in progressive, rather than predictive mode

Predictive dialler rules of thumb

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

- **Use minimum 12 agents**
  Experience has shown that 12 agents is the minimum team size to efficiently manage predictive dialling within an acceptable 3% abandoned call cap.

- **Reduce nuisance rate for smallest teams**
  A 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.

- **Use preview/progressive dialling for smaller teams**
  Experience has shown that less than 10 agents should be managed on preview/progressive dialling.

  Dropped calls represent a higher percentage because of the small team size, meaning the dialler becomes inefficient in performance and use of data.

- **Switch diallers to recover nuisance rate**
  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.

- **Seek specialist advice**
  If in doubt, consult you dialler vendor for specialist advice on this complex issue.

Dialler ring time

- **15 seconds of ring time**
  Give your customer 15 seconds of ring time before aborting the call, to give them sufficient time to answer and not be frustrated.

- **Optimise for customer experience**
  Customer experience is what is important in your timing – so make sure that you allow for the time it can take for a call to actually connect and start to ring. Ensure your customer gets the full 15 seconds of ring time.

- **Allow extra connection time for mobiles**
  Mobiles, in particular, can take several seconds to actually start to ring.

- **Allow for optimal dialler performance**
  Look at good operational practice. Too long a ring time has a negative impact on dialler performance because it extends your calling cycle and makes it more likely that answering machines will cut in.

Dialler abandonment timing

- **Connect calls within two seconds**
  Connect calls to your live agent within two seconds of your call being answered.

Campaign delivery

- **Set up abandonment message**
  The DMA Code and Ofcom policies stipulate that If your call is to be abandoned because a live agent is not available, you must play an information message within two seconds of your customer picking up your call; i.e.:

    - No later than two seconds after the telephone has been picked up

      OR

    - No later than two seconds after an individual begins to speak (or 'start of salutation')

Dialler abandonment rate

- **Maximum acceptable abandonment rate**
  Set an abandon rate that is appropriate to your data and audience – and typically no higher than 3%.

- **Balance abandonment rate against efficiency**
  Find the lowest abandonment rate that still delivers high agent performance against an acceptable number of customers receiving an abandoned call.

- **Calculate acceptable rate for each campaign**
  Calculate each campaign at different abandonment rates to find your most appropriate rate.

  For example, if reducing your rate from 2.5% to 2% will add two seconds of idle time per agent per call, how will your cost in lost agent time per week balance against the lower number of customers receiving abandoned calls?

- **Set a lower rate for warm lists**
  Expect your abandonment rate lower when warm calling to current or higher-value customers.

- **Set automatically and manually-tuned abandonment rates**
  If your dialler equipment can self-tune to an abandonment rate, set the rate no higher than 2.8% per campaign.

  If you manually control dialling aggressiveness, aim for an abandonment rate no higher than 2.75%.

  This approach gives you room for occasional rate spikes whilst retaining compliance.

- **Stay compliant per 24-hour period**
  Monitor and adjust your abandonment rate for each campaign through the course of each shift.

  Regulations require that your 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.

Testing predictive diallers

Predictive diallers are the devices that cause the most problems with nuisance and silent calls – so it is vital that you test these specifically, as well as part of your end-to-end solution.

- **Employ third-party testing**
  All testing should be done by an independent third party to provide an objective view.

- **Test relevant factors**
  Testing simulates a large volume of live calls to ensure your predictive dialler is performing its job to the required standards.

- **Tests include:**

    - Applying various answering machine tones to ensure that answering machine detection is optimised and your error rate (i.e. number of false positives) is reduced

    - Measuring the time between your customer answering the phone and reaching a live agent
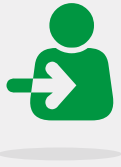
- Determining if a line is released by the contact centre technology when a customer hangs up

- Applying various call termination treatments (such as answered, busy or unobtainable) to emulate real outbound call situations

- Proving that your organisation can be alerted when your over-dial rate exceeds a certain limit (for example, a 3% call abandon rate)

- Verifying that the caller line identification (CLI) is presented

- **Capture baseline configuration**
  Capture a predictive dialler baseline configuration to show that your dialler works within the regulations.

- **Use as benchmark**
  Compare this baseline to later performance and return to it if necessary.

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).

- **Identify system failings**
  AMD technology is not currently 100% reliable and can fail in one of two ways:

  - **A 'false positive'** – where the AMD technology incorrectly judges a live customer 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 your agent

- **Factor in 'reasoned estimate'**
  In most cases, your customer's experience of a false positive is a silent call followed by a disconnection.

  For this reason, Ofcom rules state that you must factor in a 'reasoned estimate' of false positives into the abandoned call figures that count towards your maximum 3% abandoned call rate.

- **Detailed information about handling false positives and false negatives**
  Read the DMA's published paper, endorsed by Ofcom, detailing the statistical treatment of both false positives and false negatives and how you should handle them within your dialler management strategy.

  Download the DMA's paper here:

  www.dma.org.uk/article/calculating-abandoned-calls-in-the-light-of-the-ofcom-2008-statement

- **Understand answering machine redial rules**
  Ofcom also requires that calls dialled using AMD and classified as an answering machine cannot be dialled again for a 24-hour period unless you have an agent reserved – similar in essence to the 72-hour rule for handling calls abandoned by a predictive dialler.

- **Allow for AMD pitfalls**
  Although it is clear that in some circumstances AMD technology can improve the performance of your predictive dialling campaigns, you should also note three clear negative aspects to the technology:

  1. Poor experience for your customer in the event of a false positive

  2. Effectiveness of your predictive dialler is impaired because your abandoned call rate has to be artificially suppressed to cater for the estimate of false-positives
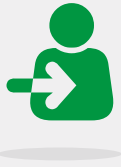
3. Effectiveness of your dialler is further impaired because of the 24-hour rule, which means that either your call cannot be re-attempted for another day or, if that is not an option, your call must be made without using the dialler's pacing technology

- **Avoid AMD unless <1% false positive rate**
  Because of the margins for error, the DMA advises that unless your system has been tested and achieves a false positive rate of 1% or less, it does not make commercial sense to use AMD in your telemarketing campaign at present.

  Because AMD exposes you to the risk of breaching the silent calls thresholds (with subsequent regulatory consequences), and because of the detriment to customer experience, using AMD does not currently constitute best practice.

Campaign response

Results and ROI

Carefully define costs and required ROI based on your campaign objectives.

Use these measures not only to judge your current campaign, but also to preserve the integrity of your future work.

- **There are NOT plenty more customers in the sea**
  With increasing numbers of consumers signing up to the TPS register, your pool of prospects is not infinite.

  Conserving this precious resource is very important – so if your campaign is only generating low conversion rates then you are less likely to sell to these people in the future.

- **Carefully assess campaign impact on customers**
  If your communication is proving inappropriate to your target, seriously consider the impact of your campaign on those customers and prospects who you convert and those that you don't.

- **Quickly suppress poorly-performing data**
  Measure your ROI in data sets.

  Do not damage your brand, your client's brand and your profit margin by continuing to outbound call using lists that aren't delivering required results.

  Continuing to call regardless of negative results will have a major negative impact on your prospects, customers and agents alike.

Campaign monitoring

Review campaign daily:

- **Review daily**
  Review each campaign after 24 hours of calling

- **Re-evaluate samples**
  Re-evaluate a sample of each data set, DMC, conversion rates, complaints, feedback from outbound staff and customers.

- **Check against objectives**
  Check that your campaign is achieving your original objectives

- **Re-forecast**
  Update forecasts and check ROI

- **Monitor customer dissatisfaction**
  Keep in mind customer dissatisfaction levels and evolve your campaign to minimise these.

- **Watch for conversion rate drops**
  In particular, monitor your conversion rate very closely.

  Your campaign may start well, as it is likely you have prioritised your data before calling – but as it continues, your conversion rate will often drop as the tail end of the list is re-processed.

  Assess when to stop running the campaign to avoid increased customer dissatisfaction.

- **Monitor KPIs**
  Campaigns never run exactly to plan, so continually monitor performance against your key performance targets throughout the campaign period.