

Answering to telephobia

Back in the 1980s one of the ‘go to’ jobs we teenagers used to do straight after O’Levels (yes I know that ages me!) was to work the phones in the call centre for a well-known window company writes Kate Ashley-Norman, director at Vast PR

This kind of opportunity no longer exists for young kids – marketing and sales has moved on considerably since those days and no longer requires dozens of young people going through phone directories, cold selling double glazing.

But is the phone completely redundant now?

While CRM systems are now AI driven to provide powerful, error-free pathways from lead generation to final installation and beyond, are we missing out on gaps that could be providing additional revenue? Is the ‘relationship’ element of a CRM inadvertently isolating us from potential customers who might need a bit of additional coaxing? Are we hiding behind the technology and becoming too reliant on it?

The ease of instant communication that we deal with every day has led to a phenomenon known as ‘telephobia’ – a genuine anxiety which, according to some reports, affects about 65% of office workers in the UK. A 2024 Uswitch survey of 2000 people found that 70% of young people aged 18-34 prefer a text to a call. 23% of the same age group admit that they never pick up calls – something that I’m sure all those with teenagers have experienced consistently!

A CBS News Study in Australia found that 90% of Gen Z (born 1997-2012) experience a phobia of speaking on the phone.

This may be having an impact on your business. But because it is not measured by tracking pixels or other KPI values, they are slipping under the radar. This impact could include:

- Delayed responses to enquiries that don’t come in through the more anonymous digital channels.
- Missing out on sales opportunities by proactively not following through an enquiry which might have only listed a telephone number.
- Missing out on an opportunity to warm up a potential lead through relationship and trust building.
- Holding someone’s attention more personally and closing a sale.

The focus may be on weaving in AI into your systems – and rightly so, it may be worth looking at also introducing some confidence building training – particularly with younger members of your workforce. Working backwards from the more pleasant task of checking on completed installations or deliveries, towards the more awkward sales calls can help build that self belief and ‘can do’ attitude which inspires a similar confidence in the customer.

And the overall wellbeing of your employee will also increase exponentially. Younger team members particularly are probably well versed in using aspects of the phone when it comes to apps technology, QR codes, and AI assisted searches. But a good old fashioned conversation...? Unfortunately many of them started their careers in hybrid or remote roles and haven’t had the opportunity to build communication confidence.



Kate Ashley-Norman, VAST PR

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Recognising this is paramount to helping your team build a more determined – and by its very nature a more successful – approach to sales.

Ultimately the telephone is probably still your best commercial tool – because it is also the fastest. Guilty myself of sending a quick WhatsApp, I have more recently made a concerted effort to pick up the phone and have a conversation – it can save wasted hours in back-and-forth emails, and help to strengthen relationships. ☐

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