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Lexicon Essay

These days, when people think of specific marketing strategies, they often think of campaigns that were brilliant or well designed or ones that fell flat or were total flops. Yet there is one marketing strategy that everyone knows of that has somehow carried on mostly unchanged throughout the decades as a minor annoyance, yet is still able to yield positive results if used correctly. Telemarketing is when a company or person or machine calls a personal phone in most cases to sell a product. The practice of telemarketing was popularized in the 1970's and has been since used heavily in the political sphere, though many companies and arts organizations still utilize it (Eisen, 2008). Out of all of the marketing strategies, telemarketing is probably the one with the worst reputation and connotation. Most people associate telemarketing with annoying and irrelevant calls received at home during dinner or with nonsensical recorded voicemails left on cell phones from unknown numbers. However, effective telemarketing campaigns do exist and can be powerful tools for sending a direct and personal message to a targeted audience.

The reason that I chose telemarketing was because I was remembering something that happened to my boss at my last job. She came into work one day and said that she subscribed to the Eugene Symphony's season simply because someone from the Hult Center had called her, told her about the season, a special discount she would receive because she had gone to some number of symphony concerts in years past, and that they could easily do the transaction right there over the phone.

Because they were so nice and personal, she said, she had subscribed to the season before she even knew what she was doing; she had previously made the decision not to subscribe but this call swayed her. This kind of telemarketing, which is targeted, focused, and personal can be incredibly effective tools for arts managers to use to sell tickets or solicit donations. Stories like these show the power of telemarketing used correctly, yet most people underestimate it.

This underestimation and contempt toward telemarketing is certainly not unwarranted. During any given election season, for example, many unlucky people will receive phone call after phone call trumpeting certain candidates, blasting others, or spreading a certain political message. Telemarketing, for political campaigns, is low hanging fruit because it a “cheap and easy” way to reach a huge amount of voters right in their own homes, yet its efficacy is questionable (Manjoo, 2008). In his 2008 campaign, though, Barack Obama combined telemarketing, direct marketing, and (somewhat) new technology to rally his voting base: the campaign sent targeted text messages to opted-in voters with various messages about Obama, the election, and voting information. This innovative strategy proved very effective and, because many of the voters opted in online, made his 2008 campaign “[change] politics” (Miller, 2008).

From this background research, then, telemarketing seems like a perfect subject for this lexicon essay because it combines old and new technology, has discrete examples of successes and failures, and is one of the few strategies that is a hybrid of the random and targeted, the public and private, and the impersonal and personal.

For this strategy I'm going to use the following lexicon terms:

Technology
System
Domestic
Convergence
Omnipresence
Character
Connections

Last term, when I was defining the word **technology**, I said that it is “a tool that allows processes to be developed and carried out in certain ways”. I think the most important word in that definition for the purposes of this essay is the word “tool.” Technology is something that we use to make something better, easier, more efficient, more enjoyable, or in some cases possible at all. It is important to note that like any tool, technology needs a user at some point; it cannot function fully autonomously. A **system** is a group of disparate but somehow related parts, processes, tools, technologies, or people that form a whole and implement some action or accomplish something when all working together. A system can be something tangible (like a phone system) or intangible (like procedures and scripts for making a sales call). **Domestic** is a word that describes something happening in the home mostly but can also just be someone's personal space. Many people compartmentalize “work life” and “home life” so sometimes time spent outside the home can still be domestic as long as it does not take place at work. Dueze (2009) describes **convergence** as the coming together of things, specifically place, identity, and experience (p. 473). This coming together doesn't always happen smoothly, and in those times when it is violent or not a natural convergence, there can be negative results. **Omnipresence** is the idea of something being everywhere, pervading every

aspect of life. Sometimes this omnipresence can be contained (e.g. students walking and texting on UO campus) or broadly applied (e.g. technology in modern life).

Something important to note about omnipresence is that it doesn't imply permanence. These days with viral trends or pop culture moments, something can be omnipresent one week and irrelevant the next. It is also subjective; what is omnipresent to one person might be invisible to others. **Character** is an intangible marker that we use to assign value to something. It can be identified through actions, presentation, timing, or simply the observer's pre-conceived notions about that thing. We can say that someone doesn't have a trustworthy character because they tend to embellish their stories or that an arts organization has an inviting character because they present humorous and family-friendly programming.

Character is probably the most subjective term on this whole list. Finally, **connections** are the relationships and histories that at least two entities share that can range from physical to emotional to spiritual. Connections help us identify what is important and close to us and what isn't.

To me, these terms belong in two different categories, with two terms as over-arching qualifiers. The first category is the physical "thing" category. This category includes the first two terms: technology and system. Both of these terms tackle the idea of tools or sets of tools that exist in the physical sphere. Technology is often more tangible than system is, but both of them are things that can often be touched or perceived in some other way by the senses or interacted with easily. The second category of terms is the category of place. Domestic is the most obvious inhabitant of this category as it is our signifier of the home. Convergence is an

important place word because it serves as the bridge between the “thing” category and the “place” category. Convergence describes what happens when the things collide with the domestic place: a coming together of outside technologies and systems into the domestic sphere. Finally, omnipresence is in the place category even though it can describe every place. What is important to note about omnipresence is that if something is prevalent (and seen as an invasion) in the domestic sphere, its omnipresence will bleed into other spheres because that invasion is so personal. Finally, character and connections are ideas that play into all of these terms. For the purposes of this paper, character can also be matched with a term like value. Technologies and systems all have their own characters depending on how they are implemented and how effective they are. Places can have their own characters as well, subject to the tastes, values, and memories held by the people inhabiting those places. Because this is marketing, the character is so important not only in the message but also in the product, the systems used to market the product and the people to whom the product is being marketed. And then, based off the character, a person makes a connection that can be either positive or negative; they can identify a product or a person or an organization as something that is important or close to them, or as something they don’t care about or repels them.

What these terms mean when it comes to telemarketing becomes clearer as the terms’ relationships to each other are laid out. For telemarketing, technology and system are literally the technologies and systems that telemarketers might use to enact their strategy. These can be simple calls made by a development volunteer in an arts organization working off of a list of past donors all the way up to the

complexity and huge system of data collection and utilization that the Obama campaign implemented to help him reach more voters. Telemarketing just cannot exist without a technology (a phone on the most basic level) and a system (some way to decide who is being called, why, and what the message is). The system can also function as a sort of subset of the technology when automated calling or computer-generated call lists come into play.

When it comes to place, telemarketing is the convergence of these technologies and systems with the domestic sphere. One of the points of telemarketing is to reach potential audiences and consumers when they are sure to be available: at home usually during some mealtime. That way, the message is not lost to them; they are somewhat captive (even if they hang up immediately, they did at least pick up the phone). The place is also what makes telemarketing so much more negatively viewed than other marketing strategies. There are many annoying marketing campaigns out there, but many of them don't impose onto your personal, private time at home like telemarketing does. It is the great interrupter. Because of this I also chose to include omnipresence because telemarketing does have that feeling of omnipresence, even if it isn't as pervasive as, say, easily ignorable web banners or the latest email from Groupon. I know from personal experience that if I get one of those voicemails telling me to apply for a credit card, I will get instantly annoyed and feel like I'm always getting them even if I haven't gotten one in months. Omnipresence, in telemarketing's case, is negative and something that people and organizations wanting to use telemarketing as one of their strategies have to consider. This is where character comes into play. Character and connections are

probably the most important elements and what got my boss subscribing to the symphony even though she had not planned on it, or what mobilized so many people to vote for Obama in 2008. Character is what makes something that's intrusive (calling to sell something to someone in their own home) seem a little bit more inviting or less presumptuous. The spam calls have no character or a negative character, while calls from trustworthy and generally positively regarded entities can make consumers feel even more personally connected. And these connections can also help because people don't mind getting calls from something to which they are connected like a club or organization, because then that interaction can comfortably exist in the personal sphere.

As it pertains to content covered in class, successful telemarketing is very reliant on data collection and marketing segmentation. The reason that the symphony was successful in its telemarketing campaign to my boss is because they had the data from the Hult box office about how many shows she had attended in the last x number of seasons and that she hadn't yet subscribed for the coming season, so they already knew that she was a probably among the most likely to subscribe again. From there, all it took was some friendliness and personable conversation. The marketing segmentation and data collection, though, had already pretty much won that battle and it was far from a cold call – the more information a caller can have about the person they are going to call, the more likely the call will be successful because the caller can have a clear and personal message. One aspect of telemarketing that I have not yet mentioned in this paper is its use for data collection in the form of surveys. Organizations can use the over-the-phone survey

not only to collect data about the audience and what they think about a specific product or the organization as a whole, but they can also use it to make the person getting the call feel like their input matters to the organization, thus strengthening their connection. This is a form of marketing because it increases the good will among audience members, which is more likely to make them become more financially involved in buying tickets, subscribing, and donating.

The most important aspect of this strategy for arts marketers to keep in mind is balance. With the ever-changing world of technology, marketing changes with it, yet telemarketing seems to be a tenacious holdover from a past era. Its efficacy is still there if used correctly, but many people these days do not want to receive phone calls when they get home from work answering phones all day long. Some people do not even like talking on the phone at all. To answer this, the calls have to have a clear purpose with a pre-existing connection between the caller and the person taking the call if at all possible. Telemarketing can be a powerful tool, but it has to form a small part of a larger marketing plan to really reach its full potential and not over step its razor-thin line into intrusion and annoyance.

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