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METHOD AND SYSTEM FOR ACTIVITY RESPONSIVE TELEMARKETING

RELATED APPLICATIONS

This application is related to U.S. Patent Application entitled METHOD AND APPARATUS FOR ORIGINATING VOICE CALLS FROM A DATA NETWORK filed Oct. 10, 1997 and assigned Ser. No. 08/948,975, the specification of which is incorporated herein by reference in its entirety.

TECHNICAL FIELD

The present invention relates generally to telemarketing and, in particular, to directed telemarketing in response to activity of a potential customer browsing a public server which may be accessed through a data network such as the World Wide Web (WWW).

BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

Telemarketing has matured to a significant industry in which a large number of companies compete for business. Today's telemarketing is based on a strategy of attempting to call qualified prospects at times when they are most likely to be at home. Lists of qualified prospects are often compiled from indirect sources that may poorly reflect past behaviour or may not accurately reflect current buying interests. Besides, qualified prospects are often not at home or are not interested in a sales pitch at the particular time they are called.

Consequently, much inventive ingenuity has been invested in making telemarketing systems more efficient to ensure that a maximum number of calls are handled in any given time period, in order to increase the number of sales opportunities. Such innovations include a system and method for out-dialling telephone calls on a basis which takes into account the availability of agents who are assigned to process telephone calls placed, as described in U.S. Pat. No. 5,553,133 which issued to Perkins on Sep. 3, 1996. The patent describes a system in which telephone calls are placed ahead of the availability of agents so that the overall productivity of the agents is increased. The number of telephone calls that should be placed is determined in light of the actual measurements of system performance and in light of performance objectives. Determinations are dynamically refined based on measurements of actual agent and telephone call activity provided by the telephone system.

While such innovations ensure that agent time is efficiently used, they do nothing to address the problem of targeting an audience that is interested in the product or service being marketed and available to respond to a call.

In recent years, the World Wide Web (WWW) has provided a constant presence for business which may be visited by potential customers. While the importance of the WWW has been increasingly accepted and tens of thousands of companies now have a presence on it, there is currently no provision to permit those companies to participate in the process of closing a sale. In its current form, the WWW does not support spontaneous behaviour that characterizes impulse buying.

Although recent innovations have provided mechanisms to permit interested individuals to contact company representatives using call request buttons, such as described in applicants' copending patent application described above, such mechanisms are passive and may be ignored by poten-

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tial customers who would otherwise respond to a more immediate and personal contact.

There therefore exists a need for a method of telemarketing which is responsive to the specific activity of potential customers in order to ensure that effective contact with interested parties having focused attention is achieved.

SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

It is an object of the invention to provide a method and a system for alerting a telemarketing agent of a promotion opportunity in response to activity of a potential customer browsing a public server.

It is a further object of the invention to provide a method and a system for automatically contacting a potential customer in response to activity of the potential customer browsing a public server and alerting a telemarketing agent of a promotion opportunity if the potential customer expresses an interest in communicating with a telemarketing agent.

It is yet a further object of the invention to provide a system for alerting a telemarketing agent of a promotion opportunity, wherein a call is automatically placed to the potential customer when an agent to which an alert message has been sent initiates a call process, the number for placing the call being retrieved automatically from a data terminal of the agent.

It is yet a further object of the invention to provide a method of determining when a telemarketing agent should be alerted to a promotion opportunity by examining the contents of a cookie received from a potential customer's browser.

It is yet a further object of the invention to provide a method of determining when a telemarketing agent should be alerted to a promotion opportunity, wherein if the potential customer refuses cookies, a session information table is maintained respecting the potential customer's session with the public server to determine whether some aspect of the session satisfies a predetermined criteria and the agent is sent an alert if the predetermined criteria is satisfied.

It is yet a further object of the invention to provide a method and an apparatus for automatically compiling a list of potential customers representing promotion opportunities when an agent is not available to receive a promotion opportunity alert in real time.

In accordance with the invention, there is therefore provided a method of alerting a telemarketing agent of a promotion opportunity in response to activity of a potential customer browsing a public server, comprising:

monitoring the public server to determine if past or present activity of the potential customer satisfies a predefined criteria; and

sending a message to the telemarketing agent to advise the telemarketing agent of the promotion opportunity when the activity of the potential customer satisfies the predetermined criteria, the message including means for identifying the potential customer to permit the telemarketing agent to communicate with the potential customer.

In accordance with a further aspect of the invention, there is provided a method of alerting a telemarketing agent of a promotion opportunity in response to a potential customer browsing a public server, comprising:

monitoring the public server to determine if past or present activity of the potential customer satisfies a predefined criteria;