

Too much customer contact can hurt business

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Research conducted by an SMU marketing professor and two associates reveals that businesses can go too far when trying to keep in touch with customers, who are easily driven away by too many emails, phone calls and mailers.

A three-year study by University of California at Riverside Professor Andrea Godfrey, Boston College Professor Kathleen Seiders and Southern Methodist University Professor Glenn Voss found there is an “ideal level” at which businesses should communicate with clients, and once that's exceeded, the risk of losing them increases considerably.

The trio's findings are detailed in a report, “Enough Is Enough: The Fine Line in Executing Multichannel Relational Communication,” that appears in this month's edition of the *Journal of Marketing*.

The scholars based their research on the records of an auto dealership, gauging nearly 1,200 customers' reactions to [phone calls](#), emails and mailings from the enterprise.

According to Godfrey, she and her colleagues were surprised to find that traditional “snail” mail was generally the most effective means of contacting customers, who were less annoyed by it than too many emails and calls.

The research showed that, over a three-month period, people were willing to tolerate three phone calls before they reacted negatively. If all the contact was by [email](#), customers were OK with four, but no more.

And if they received information via the postal service only, up to 10 mailings were fine without eliciting a negative response.

The figures change if a business utilizes more than one communication channel for outreach.

According to Godfrey, the ideal number of email contacts appears to be five when one mailer is also sent. However, customers often become irritated after three emails when a business makes an equal number of phone calls over the same period of time.

Negative customer reactions mean less spending, according to the researchers.

More information: *Journal of Marketing*, Volume 75, Number 4, July 2011

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