

That name rings a bell
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MUCH has been made of the role the phone can play as a marketing tool. From text messaging to special offers delivered by wireless technology, the marketing community has been heralding the coming of age of the phone.

However, the phone's most powerful application remains that of being a facilitator. In other words, if you need something, pick up the phone, call someone and voila!

The problem lies in the numbers. As I noted a few years ago, humans and numbers don't mix. Back then, ad agency ResponseBank found that big-name advertisers could not get people to remember their numbers.

At the time, however, the vanity phone number market had yet to take off in Australia, with keypad standardisation only recently completed. Now research from Roy Morgan suggests the time of the vanity number may have arrived.

Research commissioned for the Phone Name Marketing Association in January asked more than 2000 people about phone number recall. In most cases it was dismal. One prime example was the number for the Government's anti-terrorism campaign, which consumed more than \$22million. Barely 0.3 per cent of people could recall the number they were supposed to dial if they spotted Osama and his henchmen plotting evil deeds. Perhaps the feds should have registered the number 1300-terrorism.

The survey has found that 79 per cent of people are aware of phone names as a way of dialling a number. The figure is highest in the 14-24 age bracket, with 97 per cent recall of the concept. In the same group, 54 per cent say they have dialled a number using a word or name.

The figures get really interesting when you look at what it is people are recalling. According to the survey, the company with the highest recall of its number is Pizza Hut (16.7 per cent), a company that does not use phone words. However, No.2 is Westpac (14.7 per cent), whose brand name is at the heart of its 1300 WESTPAC number. Third is Rams home loans (10.3 per cent and another user of phone names) with Domino's Pizza No.4 (7.3 per cent).

With their home delivery businesses reliant on phone transactions, Pizza Hut and Dominoes spend millions of dollars on television and radio advertising to promote their numbers. Yet the recall of Westpac's phone name came on the back of a test campaign lasting just four weeks last October and November.

So how does short campaign costing about \$1 million manage to get recall equalling that of companies spending 20 or 30 times the amount? The answer is all in a name and the fact that -- as more companies vie for attention across multiple media channels -- the most popular way to connect with consumers is through the phone.

Once you get outside the list of the top 11 companies, the remainder have recall levels for their numbers of less than 1 per cent. If people can't remember your number, how can they talk to you?

Companies invest billions in their brands. Yet it seems that when it comes to the moment when you want to make the connection, the brand investment goes out the window and consumers have to go hunting numbers. It's a strategy that just doesn't add up.