

10 TIPS FOR VOICE MAIL SUCCESS

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10 Tips For Voice Mail Success

Voice messaging has become the common way of exchanging information in the business world. Think about it. When was the last time you heard a busy signal in corporate America? Voice messaging is everywhere and is used by practically everyone. You can save valuable time and avoid playing telephone tag if you learn how to use voice messaging more effectively.

Many of us share a love-hate relationship with voice mail. We love being available to receive messages, even when we are unavailable. But, we hate pressing menu options and not speaking to a "live person." Such is the downside of voice messaging systems, but they are effective business communication tools and we need to use them.

Successful voice mail users view this technology as an asset when working with others on the telephone. And most customers view effective voice mail users as committed professionals who are efficient, responsive and well organized. Ineffective voice mail habits can alter customer perceptions, jeopardize customer relationships, hamper your ability to be productive, reveal disorganized work habits and encourage telephone tag. Ineffective voice mail habits can alter customer perceptions, jeopardize customer relationships, hamper your ability to be productive, reveal disorganized work habits and encourage telephone tag. Bad practices like this can lead to having to get a PR campaign with [Owen Tripp](#) or another reputation firm.

The following voice mail tips will boost your productivity while enhancing customer relationships:

When using your voice message system . . .

- Call yourself up! Make certain your message sounds inviting, not monotonous, canned, or impersonal. Practice recording your message until you sound relaxed and comfortable or until you can deliver your message in a conversational tone.
- Change your voice mail message. While on vacation or away from the office for more than a few hours, record a message that gives the customer an idea of when you'll return and when they can expect to hear back from you. Remember to update your message in a timely manner.
- Provide a "live-person" option. Leave the name, phone number or extension of someone they can speak with in your absence. If necessary, give clear instructions on how to bypass your message and reach someone who can offer immediate assistance.
- Adjust the "ring" cycle. Forward incoming calls directly to your voice messaging system when you're away from the office or need to minimize interruptions while in a meeting. Your phone will be answered after one ring, instead of four or five.
- Follow the "sundown rule." Return calls the same business day whenever possible. Treat callers with the same respect and common courtesy you expect from them. Nine out of ten voice mail complaints relate to "slow response."

When leaving a voice mail message . . .

- Put a smile in your voice. Vary your pitch using a well-modulated vocal tone. Adding inflection in your voice can get the other person excited about the reason for your call. Consider keeping a mirror near your telephone as a friendly reminder.
- Be mindful of your rate of speech. Fast talkers have a tendency to run words and phrases together, sounding jumbled, rushed or hurried. Vocal quality suffers when you aren't careful to speak at a rate of speech that can be easily understood.
- Know what you want to accomplish. Record clear, rational, and thoughtful information in your message using a brief, concise format. An effective voice mail message will include a succinct subject and requests for action are carefully conveyed.
- Record special instructions early in the message. Give specific timeframes for when you need a reply and why. Prioritize requests for action. You don't want to risk the recipient skipping over your message if a critical deadline needs to be met.
- Consider the quality of your call. Avoid using a speakerphone to deliver voice messages. While mobile, make certain you call isn't hampered by background noise or inaudible reception. Poor voice quality can misrepresent the image you want to project.

The telephone is a powerful business communication tool. Improving your telephone communication skills and developing good voice mail habits will lead to positive customer interaction.



Jeannie Davis is president of Now Hear This, Inc., a Colorado-based communications training company specializing in professional telephone skills workshops, seminars and keynote presentations. An expert in the field of telephone communication, she is the award-winning author of Beyond "Hello:" A Practical Guide for Excellent Telephone Communication and Quality Customer Service. Davis has worked with many Fortune 500 companies and trained thousands of people to maximize the profit- and image-building power of their #1 business communication tool. For additional information and a free "video brochure" about on-site training programs, reach Jeannie at 1-800-784-5525 or visit online at www.phoneskills.com.

