
Twelve Ways to Use VoiceMail

Exploring the Power of Today's Best Telephone Business Tool

Overview

This material was developed at Action 800 Nation-Wide VoiceMail between 1992 and 1993, by staff in collaboration with clients using the VoiceMail service in various ways to help their business and their private projects.



VoiceMail on the surface is simple -- it answers the phone and records a message. But when you begin to consider different ways to use VoiceMail in your private life or your business, it starts becoming clear that there are many ways to use this simple telephone tool to streamline everyday life. Here's How ...

Introduction

At the obvious level, you can use voicemail to answer calls and take messages.

But that's like saying you use a stove to cook food! It's true enough, but doesn't really convey the possibilities.

In the hands of a good chef, there's a world of variety to be created with a stove. And every cook does it a little differently.

And there are several ways to use voicemail service to make your life (or your business) easier, and more powerful. The purpose of this short report is to outline profitable ways to use voicemail.

If you begin using voicemail as part of your business or private life, you'll quickly discover that this simple and easy-to-use tool is powerfully useful. Kind of like the telephone!

1. Get a Phone Number

At the simplest level, one advantage of getting Abe's SuperBudget VoiceMail service is ... that you get your own unlisted phone number included in the deal.

This is especially useful if you don't have a stable living-space, such as when first moving into a new area.

By getting a voicemail number early on, all the tasks of setting up a new life become easier. Landlords and potential employers have a way to reach you, and so does Aunt Mable and the folks back home. Often the first place you stay may be temporary, with a friend, or in a hotel, or an apartment by the month until you know where you'll be working and so on.

If you have roommates, this gives you a way to receive private phone messages with no fear of roommates listening to your messages (or accidentally discarding them!).

Or if you and your roommates wish to go in together, you can play your own messages, and set aside those for the other guys!

2. Start a Business

When you start a new enterprise, often one of the first things you need is a place to receive business calls.

You may not have your office yet. Maybe you need to build a factory or set up a workspace. As you know, this can take quite some time. If you give out your home number, you're going to get calls at

home. At first, this won't seem like a big deal, but down the road, you're going to absolutely hate having your vendors and customers call you at home.

How can you have a moment's peace and get away from the business from time to time?

Simple. Get one of our inexpensive voicemail numbers, and use it. Perhaps forever. Perhaps only until you have a working business phone in your new office.

The voicemail costs a fraction of a business line plus message-taking. For example, a Pacific Bell business line costs -- after they add in all the taxes and access charges -- about \$23-\$25 monthly, not counting any calls made. To add Pacific Bell's voicemail -- which is functionally equivalent to our own -- will add about \$20 monthly, for a total of \$43-\$45 monthly if you go with Pacific Bell.

Abe's rates, however, run less than \$10 monthly for the number and high-capacity message-taking included. Not a bad savings to take while you're getting your business off the ground.

3. Recorded Salesman

Since the outgoing message on Abe's VoiceMail can be up to two minutes, it's a wise use of the greeting to record a sales message.

It can be brief, but it should include at least:

- A. A welcome with a friendly tone
- B. Your company name
- C. Your slogan
- D. Some positioning statements

Taking time to have this recording in place ensures that all callers receive pre-planned sales positioning. This gives you some control over how your company is perceived, and the nice thing about a voicemail recording is that it will deliver the same message, exactly the same way, to every single caller, no matter the hour.

It's worth taking some time to get this message just right. Customers tend to judge you by appearances, and the appearances they see the most easily is your office, your stationery, and your telephone line. Of these, it's easy to set up a good-sounding voicemail greeting to deliver the impression you desire, time after time.

If you want to go further, deliver a complete sales presentation, either a short one as the greeting on your message-taking service, or if you wish, investigate the 'Audio Brochure' concept.

4. Create an Audio Brochure

If you have called either the Abe's SuperBudget recorded-information line, or the Action 800 Nation-Wide VoiceMail recorded-information line, then you have heard our Audio Brochure.

An Audio Brochure lets you, in effect, post a complete brochure on the telephone line.

This means that your customer can call anytime day or night, and come into possession of your information immediately.

No waiting.

And customers seem to like the Audio Brochure, perhaps because it's quick, or perhaps because they get to select the information they want to hear. And it costs far less to set up a professional-sounding Audio Brochure than an equivalent printed brochure.

If you haven't heard one, call one of ours. (Phone numbers given at the end of this report.)

An Audio Brochure can of course be very simple. A single voice mailbox with a recording time of five minutes (Announce-Only) is available on our standard rate and discount rate packages (under \$10 monthly), and more elaborate packages are still inexpensive.

5. Advertisement Expander

Advertising can be expensive. If you can successfully use small advertisements, you can pocket lots more profit. But how to keep small ads powerful?

One good way is by funneling ads into voicemail, which then expands upon the sales points given in the small ad. In addition to being powerful at low cost, like a 1-2 punch, this combo tends to work well for two reasons:

A. Customers are more likely to believe something they've heard more than once. So if your ad says you've got the best service in town, and then they also hear the same thing on your voicemail greeting, it tends to sink in more -- that's just human nature.

B. Plus, when you deliver your sales message through more than one of the Customer's senses, it tends to be better received and better believed. So if your initial small ad is, for example, a print ad, then they see that with their eyes. But then when they hear the same message from your voicemail, with their ears -- the message is better received, and better believed. It just sinks in better. That's human nature.

6. Prospect Qualifier

Experienced salesmen always start an interview the same way.

The first thing you must do is to qualify the prospect. In other words, quickly determine whether the prospect has a need for your product and an interest in purchasing it.

Of course, the salesman may still have the job of selling the product to the prospect, but the wise salesman wants to make sure that the prospect is really a prospect before the salesman invests the time in making the sale.

This isn't because the salesman is lazy, but usually because the salesman is efficient. There are only so many hours in the day and in the week. If the salesman is to make lots of sales, then the salesman must concentrate on true, qualified, prospects.

One of the nice things about voicemail is that it will do this task for you, and it will waste none of your time in the process.

To be specific, when our company sold answering service before we knew about voicemail, the folks who found us in the Yellow Pages called and talked with a Sales Rep. We used an organized ("scripted") presentation, which was tested and quite efficient.

It took us about five minutes to qualify, another fifteen to make a sales presentation, and about ten more to answer questions, and sometimes fill out the signup form.

But only about one out of three callers signed up.

And even those who did sign up required another ten minutes of follow-up, on the average.

So for each sign-up we made, we'd actually invested an hour and forty minutes. That's three complete presentations at 30 minutes each, plus about ten minutes follow up with the one person who bought.

So it cost us one hour and forty minutes of sales rep time for each signup. And the reason we had to spend so long was because we had to verbally deliver a sales presentation to each caller. Even to the idly curious. Even to the people 'doing research'. Even to the people who'd already decided to do something else, and were just using us as research to make sure they'd made the right decision.

The actual sign-up and follow-up time was only about fifteen minutes, but we had to invest an hour and forty minutes total.

Since we've been using an Audio Brochure as an automated salesman, we discover that 85%-95% of the people who then call us (after hearing the Audio Brochure) start off with the words, "I want to sign up."

No sales presentation needed from our humans!

We fill out the form, instruct the client, and that's the end of it.

In fact, since the client's been pre-educated about our rates and how the service works by our Audio Brochure, it doesn't even take us fifteen minutes any longer. Our average signup time is now seven minutes flat!

From an hour and forty minutes down to seven minutes.

That's a great saving in our Customer Service time, which is real important. That means that Customer Service can spend time with the actual customers, and very little time is required 'making sales.'

This is because your fully detailed message both pre-qualifies and pre-educates your prospect.

Do you lose some sales? Yes, of course, you still lose some sales. But now the sales you lose are lost without you personally having to spend 30 minutes on the phone first!

Are the number of sales we get about the same?

Yes, they are.

It's nice.

7. Hiring Pre-Screener

If you ever have to hire people, you can save your interviewer a whole lot of time.

Our company used to offer live answering service, and that meant we had to hire operators, and that usually meant advertising jobs in the San Francisco paper, then screening them to make sure they could talk and that they seemed bright, that they could get to work, and then setting an appointment for an interview.

Unfortunately, just about everybody thinks that talking on the phone is one of their skills, so we sometimes got 300 responses. Even though we'd posted the hours and wages in the advertisement, we got lots of calls from people who couldn't work those hours, or who thought they'd receive some other wages. In addition, we got calls from people who could not talk intelligibly on the phone!

These wasted calls could easily take up 3-4 days of the interviewer's time, before any interviews were even scheduled!

Then we got wise.

We began placing the ads (with hours and wages as before), but in the ad we put a voicemail number. On the voicemail greeting, we could then make it totally clear that these were the actual hours and wages -- not some other hours or wages -- and they could either call us, if the situation fit, or they could leave a message.

If a message was left, we knew in advance who could speak on the phone, so we could concentrate on the better applicants.

But more importantly, the repetition of our requirements seemed to sink in better (just as it does in making sales), and the curiosity-seekers and non-qualified generally did not then call through to take the time of our human. Which was sure fine with us.

Screening time for the interviewer dropped from an average of three and half days to less than one day. It sure made our job easier.

And it could make your job easier, too.

8. Rent out an Apartment or House

If you are a landlord, you will find it very powerful and timesaving to have your ad refer to a voice mailbox which gives a sales presentation (qualifying the caller at the same time).

Here you're taking advantage of the voice mailbox as an ad-expander, and as an applicant screener at the same time.

In addition, many landlords have other jobs, and so miss a lot of calls when the place is vacant. Having voicemail on-line is like having an automated salesman available 24 hours a day.

Because when an apartment is vacant, you want to handle it quickly, to avoid the losses of an empty property.

So the voicemail increases your power in the moment you need it. We have several landlords who keep a voice mailbox on hand. They may go months without needing it -- the cost is so low, it's negligible -- and it's there to help them when needed.

9. Have a Garage Sale

Everybody has some stuff to sell off, from time to time. Every musician sells off this old gear so they can get this new gear. Every apartment dweller gets a new sofa and sells off the old one. Or maybe you just want to clear out the garage.

Boy, does a voice mailbox ever come in handy!

If you put your private phone number in a 'Stuff-For-Sale' ad, you get calls at all hours, and you also miss a lot of calls, because you can't just sit by the phone.

You'll also notice that each caller just asks the same questions, and you have to waste some time with people who don't believe that your price is related to reality.

So record a detailed description of your goods on the voicemail and you'll not miss any calls, and you'll notice that the ones leaving messages for callbacks are the more serious buyers.

Try it. You'll like it.

10. Separate Different Enterprises

If you're like many small business owners, you will, from time to time, try some new project. It might be another small business idea, or it might just be a separate project related to your current business.

If you're a jobholder, maybe you want a way to keep your job but also have a side-enterprise, and you'd like to keep the calls separate from your existing workplace.

So use a voice mailbox for the new project.

For that matter, you might be doing a job-search and you don't want callers reaching you during the daytime at your present office. Have them reach your voice mailbox, and return calls when you have some privacy.

Discreet and easy to control.

Or, what if you're running a business (or a department within a business) and you have several people in your department? By getting everyone a voice mailbox, you can pass messages back and forth no matter the time of day. Great across different time-zones.

If you add the optional 'Group Features' you can also broadcast a message to everyone at once, pass along messages you receive to some of the other guys, and more. This way everybody's separate projects and workload can be separated out and easily managed!

11. Find True Romance

Ever place a personals ad?

Ever worry about wierdos calling you at home?

You can handle that by placing your own voice mailbox number in the ad as your contact phone. Then you only return calls from callers who interest you. (And who sound balanced!)

Another nice plus is that your callers get to hear the sound of your voice, and they like that. You can tell a lot about a person by their voice, and this gives you a lot of control over the message you send!

12. Keep your Messages Organized

In addition to the usual message-taking function, you'll find the voice mailbox gives you a lot of control to arrange and rearrange your messages.

For example, while you're playing them, you can use the special 'Fast-Forward' button to leap ahead, like maybe if Aunt Mabel is telling you a really boring story and you need to skip forward to some info at the end of her message, such as what time she and Uncle Bob are coming to dinner next Sunday.

You can use the 'Quick Reverse' button to repeat the last little bit of a message. For example, when you're writing down your caller's address. It lets you move quickly, yet be sure you got it correctly.

Many people use their own voice mailbox as an instant dictation machine. For example, on your way to a meeting, you need to leave yourself a note for later. Just call your own voice mailbox! Its long four-minute message recording time means you can even dictate a letter, and your secretary can use the special buttons to control playback in order to transcribe the letter.

If you have more than one person working in the sales department, and each of you cleans off messages when you come in, here's an easy way to pass messages back and forth:

Just throw the message into your voice mailbox. Then when they come on and clean off the message, there's your message among those from customers.

Lastly, do you travel around town or around the country?

If so, you'll appreciate that you can easily control even advanced functions using simple touch-tone commands. And all the commands our system offers you are memory-easy, using the first letter of a code word, such as "Press 'P' to 'P'lay the message, 'K' to 'K'eeep the message, or 'D' to 'D'iscard the message."

It's so simple that without even thinking about it, you'll know these commands within a couple of days, and then you need not wait for the voicemail machine to prompt you.

Of course, if there's ever any question, remember ... The voicemail machine will always tell you what your choices are, so it's super-easy to use, no matter the time of day or night.

About our Company

If you require information about our voicemail services, contact either Abe's VoiceMail or Action 800:

Abe's SuperBudget VoiceMail™

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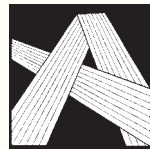
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