Title:
Get Replies to Your Voice Mail

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424

Summary:
Does voice mail help or hinder your business? Here's how to leave messages that get results.

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Article Body:
If you are like most business people, voice mail has both simplified and complicated your life. On the good side, it helps you exchange information. On the other side, leaving messages can seem like putting notes in bottles that drift off to sea. Here's how to make sure that your messages get results.

1) Prepare for the call. Realize that you are more likely to end up in a voice mail system than to talk with someone. Thus, write a list of your key points and questions before you dial. Then use that list as an outline when you leave a message. Of course, such preparation also helps you communicate effectively when you actually talk to someone.

2) If you suffer a sudden mental block when the beep tells you to leave a message, hang up. Then organize your thoughts and call back. This is far better than leaving a rambling, incoherent message.

3) When you leave a message, speak clearly. Begin by greeting the person and identifying yourself. For example, I might say "Hi Pat. This is Steve Kaye at 714-528-1300." This standard communication protocol tells the other person whom you wanted to call and identifies who you are.

4) When leaving numbers, write the numbers while you state them. This slows down your speaking pace to match the listener's writing speed. Then as an added courtesy, repeat all numbers. If this is your first contact or if your name is unusual, spell your name, also writing each letter as you speak it. The extra time that you spend leaving a clear message makes it easier for the other person to return your call.

5) State the purpose of you call. Be candid and concise. Provide enough information so that the other person can meet your request by leaving a message on your voice mail system.

6) Never leave personal information on a message. This could embarrass you or the other person. It is possible that an assistant or coworker will pick up your message, the message will be played back on a speaker phone with other people in the office, or your message will be forwarded to someone else.

7) Never leave a message when you are upset. Anger always clouds clear thinking. Instead, hang up and call back after you calm down.

8) Close your message with directions on how to respond. Suggest times when you will be available for a return call. For example, you might say "I'd welcome a return call at three this afternoon." Then add positive encouragement, such as "I look forward to hearing from you."