

Answering Service/Call Center Best Practices – Live Response vs. Voice Mail

In today's world of right sizing and cost reduction, many companies have lost the point of view of their prospects and customers. This white paper will look at the two areas that have the largest impact on the bottom line – sales and customer service.

Sales – How many new prospects and orders are you losing – and you do even know about it?

We all like to get up to bat and take a swing at a pitch – this also relates to the opportunity to sell our products or services to a client with a need. In today's new world of automation many firms do not even know there is a game being played, let alone knowing they should be up to bat.

Voice mail--used improperly--can translate into lost business for suppliers, according to a recent survey of PURCHASING readers.

"Ninety percent of the time I've dealt with voice mail, it has been a disaster," says Barbara Main, vice president and purchasing manager, Texas Refinery Corp., in Fort Worth. Main says--and many other respondents agree--that given a choice, she will call and award **business** to a supplier who is available at the time. "When I have made the time to place an order, I don't want to be interrupted later to continue the transaction."

Today's Best Practice is to have a "Live person" answer your sales Line. They can provide your prospective customers with some basic information and most importantly give them the feeling of TRUST that if they need you they can reach someone when they have a requirement of problem. People buy from people.

'Voice-mail jail' and other blunders of automation

They don't call it "voice-mail jail" for nothing.

Like you, I've served some hard time in the prisons of press 1 for this, press 2 for that, and inevitably, press 7 to return to the main menu. Just try stabbing "0" for operator to reach a human. The Interactive Voice Response System pretends to be puzzled:

"I'm sorry, but I don't recognize that command. Please try again."

1 <http://www.microsoft.com/smallbusiness/resources/marketing/customer-service-acquisition/voicemail-jail-and-other-blunders-of-automation.aspx#Voicemailjailandotherblundersofautomation>

How many times have you called a vendor for customer support and experienced voice mail jail? We all have and we all get very frustrated. Put yourself in your customers shoes. Do they get a "live" person no matter what time of day they call?

Appletree Answers Virtual Receptionist Best Practices

Answer every Sales inquiry 7x24x365. Appletree Answers offers a Virtual Receptionist to provide that “live” human touch when a prospect or customer calls. From a sales standpoint, Appletree Answers services can range from taking messages to placing orders on your system for your clients. The caller will be greeted by a trusted, professional agent, who can answer Frequently Asked Questions, provide pricing information and process orders. In some cases, we collect the contact information and questions and forward it to the appropriate member of our sales team.

Customer Service 7x24x365. Appletree Answers offers “Live” agent customer service ranging from opening trouble tickets to providing level one support. If a client calls in and wants to know “how to reset their password”, an Appletree Agent can provide that information. If the problem requires higher level support, it can be escalated all the way to dispatching a technician.

An Appletree Agent will be a trusted member of your team, at fraction of the cost, typically less than 10%, of a full time employee. In most cases, the profit from one new customer or one order easily pays for the Appletree service.

On the customer service side, today’s best practice is to have a “Live Agent” answer afterhours calls and provide basic answers to frequently asked questions and open trouble tickets and dispatch personnel for critical problems.