



Voice Mail - Friend or Foe?

There are as many theories about how to approach voice mail as there are spots on a leopard. This issue's Sales Tip will address this issue, offering some ideas on how you can turn this mechanical gatekeeper into a minor obstacle at worst, and an ally at best.

"To leave or not to leave?" a voice message. I'm frequently asked this question by clients who find themselves stymied and frustrated by the usual lack of response to one. There are two broad schools of thought on this issue: the first advocates not leaving one, supported by the contention that "voice mails are never returned." The other espouses the belief that since sales is a numbers (actually, a [ratios](#)) game, *some* voice mails will be returned, and therefore leaving a voice mail is a wise decision.

I subscribe to the second school, primarily from a time-management perspective. Since time is a limited commodity, we want to get as great a return on it as we can. If you make that call, get voice mail, and then hang up, the return on that time *spent* is zero – it's wasted. If, on the other hand, you leave a message, the (albeit greater) time *invested* has the potential to yield a positive return. That is, the recipient might return your call. The one for whom you didn't leave a message cannot. Since you've invested the time anyway, why not leave a message and give yourself a chance, however small you think it might be?

So, for those of you who are still with me in my school, let's tackle the nitty-gritty details of leaving voice messages – What to say, how to say it, when to say it. And when to call it quits.

What should I say? And how long should it be? You must offer a compelling reason for the recipient to call back. You should have an "elevator pitch" stating who you are, whom you represent, what you do, and a benefit for the customer, something that addresses a need you suspect he or she has. The message should not exceed 30 seconds (Laura Allen of [15-Second Pitch](#) teaches people how to do it in 15 seconds!).

How should I say it? Your first message should be businesslike – you are making a first impression. However, after leaving three or four messages, I'll sometimes leave a somewhat flippant message (“Geez, Bob, we’re singlehandedly keeping the phone company in business trying to connect!”) to try to dislodge the prospect from his inertia.

How frequently should I call back? I call back every three business days – I feel that’s frequent enough so that they know they’re a serious target for me, and not some name on a list of 500, but not so frequent that I’m perceived as either a pest, or as being desperate. After the third unsuccessful call, I’ll reduce my frequency to once a week, and also try an indirect approach (see below).

Are some times of the day better than other to leave a message? One suggestion is to leave a voice mail at such a time that when your contact comes in in the morning, yours will be the first one he or she retrieves.

How many times should I call and leave a message? Should I leave the same message each time? At what point should I call it quits?

Would it surprise you to know that there are many (OK, *some!*) people out there who actually respect and admire persistence? People who may have gotten to where they are by being persistent themselves. Sure, some may view you as an irritant, but for every five, six, or seven of them who do, there’ll be one who respects you. And that’s the one who’ll call, as you forget about the others. Never forget - the squeaky wheel gets the grease.

Keep this little ditty I was favored with a long time ago in mind:

80% of all sales people quit after the first call
60% of all sales people quit after the second call
50% of all sales people quit after the third call
40% of all sales people quit after the fourth call
30% of all sales people quit after the fifth call
20% of all sales people keep calling

20% of all sales people close 80% of the business.

But don't squeak the same message over and over again – if you do, you'll be less likely to get a response, and more likely do induce the person to hang up. Vary your message, provide a different benefit, or a different take on the same benefit.

Having said all this, there does come a point where you have to decide if the time you're spending chasing this person is worth it. If it's a random name from a list of five hundred, with no particular significance, you're better off cutting your losses and putting that time to better use. If it's a target account (e.g., a large \$ opportunity), you may want to try an indirect approach. Contact someone else in the department – anyone – and make an ally of him or her. Then ask that person to make a pitch on your behalf.

As you have seen, there are benefits – even advantages - to leaving voice messages. As with most things in business – and in life – nothing works all the time. But used judiciously, leaving a voice message can be an effective tool in helping you get your message out, and, ultimately, to close more business.

Good Selling!

Send your comments on this Sales Tip, or techniques you've used to successfully deal with Voice Mail, to feedback@sales-solutions.biz. We'll share the best ones with other subscribers in the next issue.