

Five Most Frustrating Voice Mail Phrases

By Nancy Friedman

Voice mail remains a large frustration in a busy business world. And it's not just voice mail. The automated attendant is also on the list. In an effort to help reduce voice mail frustration, here are the five most frustrating phrases that your callers don't want to hear. These tips also apply to your cell phone voice mail.

1. I'm not at my desk right now

Duh? That's a hot lot of news. What a boring statement. Live a little. Let your callers know where you are—not where you're not. Tell them, "I am in the office all this week" or "I'm in a sales meeting till 3 p.m." Let them know if you do or don't check messages.

2. Your call is very important to me

A big time waster. The caller is thinking, "Well, if I'm so darn important, where the heck are you?" And then again, think about it. Maybe the call isn't so important to you. You just don't need this phrase.

3. I'm sorry I missed your call

How dull. Of course you are. (Although, there are probably some that you're not sorry to have missed.) Leave this phrase out! It's a given. Use the time and space for something more valuable. Like where you are and when you will return! Or who they can call for the information.

4. I'll call you back as soon as possible

Not interesting and not fun. And based on Telephone Doctor surveys, probably not true. The truth is that most people aren't returning their phone calls in a timely fashion. If you're telling your callers you'll call them back, make sure you do. If you think you may not return the call, then try this: "Go ahead and leave your phone number and I'll decide if I'll call you back or not." (Just kidding!) Unreturned phone calls rank high on the frustration list. "As soon as possible" is not an effective phrase. All you need is to say, "I will call you back." (Then do it! Or have it returned on your behalf.)



5. No escape

Remember to tell callers to hit zero for the operator if they need more information. Or better yet, give them another name and extension. Although, for the most part, that voice mail may come on also. (Then you're into what we call Voice Mail Jail!) The main point is to offer an alternative if you're not there. Plus, you've bought some time to say something more interesting or helpful to the caller. (Escape may not apply to cell phones.)

Voice mail, per se, has three parts—the automated attendant, the greeting your callers hear, and the message you leave for someone on that person's voice mail. The Automated Attendant, or as many refer to it, "The Groaner," is the voice that is a large part of the frustration—especially when you're not able to get out of the system. (i.e., no escape).

Who would argue against the fact that the first voice you hear when you call a company sets the mood and the tone for all future interactions? Then why on earth would you leave a robotic, monotone, dull voice to greet your callers? The voice (or digital chip) that came along with your system has a number of options for you. You can record it yourself or you can have one of your employees with a great upbeat voice record it. Or you can find a professional in your area that will be happy to help. The point is that you want a voice that says, "Hey, we're so glad you called." You want a greeting that is warm and friendly.

The Greeting on Your Voice Mail

A reminder: People want to know where you are, not where you're not! It's pretty simple. Leave an escape for the caller. Some place they can get information if needed. As for recording the day and date, you might want to think twice on this. Not that it's wrong or bad. But there are too many ways to slip up and not record each day, thereby making your recording outdated. And an outdated greeting is high on the list of voice mail no-no's! You sound foolish, and the caller wonders what else you might not be doing if you're not updating your greeting. Play it safe and do not use a day and date.

Messages

And that leads to the message that you leave for someone. It's your electronic business card, and it needs to be great. There are three kinds of messages to leave: a poor, an average, and a great one. The message you leave for someone needs to be great. Here's a sample of each. Which one are you?

Poor: Hi, this is Bob. Gimme a call.

Average: Hi this is Bob at Acme Widgets. Call me at 291-1012. (Said wayyyyyy too fast. You know exactly what I'm talking about!)

Great: Hi Nancy. This is Bob Smith at Acme Widgets. I'd like to get with you to talk about the plan for the meeting on the 27th. I'll plan on having lunch brought in at our office. I'm excited to get with you on this. I'm at 314—that's central time in St. Louis, Missouri—314-291-1012. Again, that's 314-291-1012. Look forward to it, Nancy. If I'm not in, ask for Judy at extension 42 and leave a message with her for me there. Thanks.

Don't make it any more difficult than it really is. Voice mail can and should be a productivity enhancer. The automated attendant was not installed to replace people. It was installed to 1) answer on the first ring, and 2) expedite a phone call. And it does do both. That said, it's still a big frustration in the business world. Make it less frustrating for your callers! ■

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