

Dealing with Voice Mail

Answer the phone...answer
the phone...answer the
phone.

**...the new virtual
gatekeeper**

By Susan Clark



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Is it possible to get through to prospects (or clients) on the phone anymore? There are times when I have a potential lead or referral that may want to use our services in implementing ACT!. Sometimes I try several times to get through on the phone, but can only seem to get voice mail.

It seems that voice mail has become the virtual gatekeeper of choice these days. I've been to offices and watched as the phone rings without any perceptible acknowledgement from the recipient. They don't even turn their head to check the Caller ID or move in any way that indicates that they are aware of the ringing. They just let voice mail handle the call and they continue to click away at their keyboard (IM-ing?).

When I am on the other end of that call and I hear the familiar "start your message" beep, it is so easy to panic and leave a lame message (or no message at all). Why don't we leave messages anymore? I used to tell myself that I'm not in the office that much so they can't call me back. However, I think it is the same issue that most people face when they need to write a letter and they just stare at the blank page... communication block.

I could send an e-mail to introduce myself (if I have an e-mail address for them), but these days there are so many ways to get caught in electronic gatekeepers (SPAM or Junk filters). It's hard to be sure that your e-mail messages are actually making it through.

So I've created a quick way to handle situations like this. I created a message that I can leave that gets the prospect's attention (and increases our chances of making a connection). With a little thought, you can create your own voice mail message that you (or your staff) can leave. This is a good task to collaborate on with your staff.

- Start by setting aside a couple of hours to work on this all important task.
- Determine what you want to accomplish with the message (have them call you, go to your Web site, take your next call, etc).
- Then put yourself in your prospect's shoes and think... "What's In It For Me?".

While you are in your prospect's shoes, determine the reasons why prospects might not call you back (other than they haven't had time or they don't know the answer to your question yet). Could it be you haven't really given them a compelling reason to call you back? For me it is usually because they either decided to hire someone else (which I can't do much about at that point) or they want to do it themselves instead of hiring a consultant. So my goal is to give them some reason to doubt their decision to handle it themselves.

Start your message with a benefit

Plan to start your message with a benefit, or discuss an industry-wide problem that you have solved, or drop a name that the prospect knows that gets your virtual foot in the door. Most people will start with their name, but I'm thinking that unless you are world famous, your name is not going to be perceived as a benefit to this prospect. So, think of something you could say that might grab their attention before they hit the delete button

on their voice mail. If possible use their name or their company's name somewhere in the statement.

After you've delivered your initial interest grabbing statement, then you can give your name and phone number. Follow-up your contact information with a second benefit statement. Can you give some new ideas? Offer more benefits to using your services? Then leave your contact information again.

Regardless of what I say, I always end the message indicating that I have sent an email (or note) with my contact information, and I remind them to check other Inbox folders in case the message was diverted (as in SPAM or Junk Mail...but I don't want to use those words). I have both e-mail and Word templates restating my benefit statements and including my contact information already created in ACT, so the follow-up is effortless...and I've made two attempts to get through their gate keepers (voice and either email or snail mail).

After you've written your voice mail message, say it out loud. Try to leave it on your own voice mail so you can hear how it sounds. I guarantee you will want to revise it to make it sound more conversational. Keep working on it until it sounds natural and it doesn't sound like you are reading it.

Now you're set. If you have trouble remembering your Voice Mail statement, add it to the top of your "Voice Mail Follow-Up" e-mail (or Word) template that you've already created in ACT! Then you can merge the template, leave your message on the contact's voice mail, delete the voice mail verbiage from the top of the template, and send (or print) your follow-up with your contact information.

Don't forget to schedule a follow-up action!

The Author



Susan Clark literally *wrote the book* on ACT! Software: She's the nationally known and respected author of *The Official ACT! Quick Study Guide* (now in its 6th edition) which sells on ACT!'s home page. She is currently providing workshops in several major US cities on how to implement follow-up marketing programs with ACT! Her company, Cornerstone Solutions in Houston, TX, has one of the largest teams of ACT! Certified Consultants in the world, is one of the top ACT! resellers in the nation, and Susan founded the Houston Area ACT! Users Group.

Susan's been recognized for just about every honor an ACT! expert can receive. She is a Sage Authorized Premiere Trainer and her courseware is used by many consultants in their training classes nationwide. Susan is actually considered an ACT! Consultant's "ACT! Consultant" because Sage (ACT!'s corporate parent) hires her when they need to train and certify new ACT! consultants. She was voted onto ACT!'s Advisory Board (1 of only 9 in the world) by 400 of her peers in the ACT! community. (The Board meets with ACT!'s US president and top software developers to help guide the future of this #1 selling product.) She also still facilitates the Houston Area ACT! Users Group. You can reach Susan at 713-661-5095 or clark@cornerstonesolutions.com