

Is Voicemail *still* a viable tool for Small Business?

A White Paper

Is Voicemail Benefiting or Hurting Your Business?

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Foreword

Office Divvy is a Business Percolator working with Entrepreneurs, Startups and Small Business owners, offering two core-services, **Business Location** and **Professional Boutique Call Desk**.

Since 2008, we've talked to hundreds of startup founders, solopreneurs, sole-practitioners, and small business owners. Our primary goal was to understand the way they handle incoming calls during business hours. Based on our findings from these conversations, the common denominator was many small business owners acknowledged that a significant number of callers did not leave a voicemail if the call was not answered live and instead hung up. We realized there existed a need for compiling past research, data and some original thoughts in one place and published this White Paper.

If your business relies on phone calls from existing customers and new prospects to generate income, and your operation is without a fully staffed team (meaning you are a solopreneur, sole-practitioner, an owner-operator, or your phone team is not adequate for your call volume), whether you are in services, product sales, or consulting industries, we believe you will benefit from reading this document.

Acknowledgements

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Is Voicemail Benefiting or Hurting Your Business?

"You have reached an automated voice messaging system. Sorry we missed your call. At the tone, please record your message. When you have finished recording, hang up or press '1' for more options..."

Coca Cola chucked voicemail altogether in 2014. JPMorgan Chase did the same in 2015. You may be saying to yourself, those are two massive companies. What do their business decisions/practices mean to me and my small business? Perhaps you can relate better to this example: Pool Captain, a Palm Coast-based pool building and services company, turned off voicemail in 2016.

This is a trend of both small and large businesses alike—businesses with an eye on continually adapting themselves to changing technologies and a changing market.

So what gives? Why are so many companies laying down the axe on this once trusted tool.

Here's why: When it comes to voicemail, the **beep** that inevitably follows the message is one that we have all come to recognize as the sound of disappointment.

Reaching out, as a consumer, to a firm that holds the solution to one's problem (a solution that is a product or service), becomes useless once that call is not answered live during business hours and instead hits voicemail, slashing the cord between the caller and business.

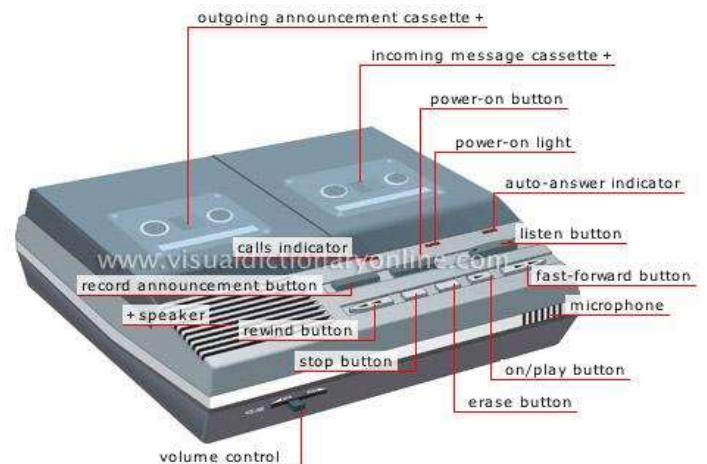


Figure 1 Voicemail is basically an updated digital version of your grandfather's cassette-tape answering machine borrowed from <http://www.recording-history.org/images/answeringmachine1.jpg>

Once exciting and useful, voicemail has now, in business at least, regressed into a *system of inconvenience*.

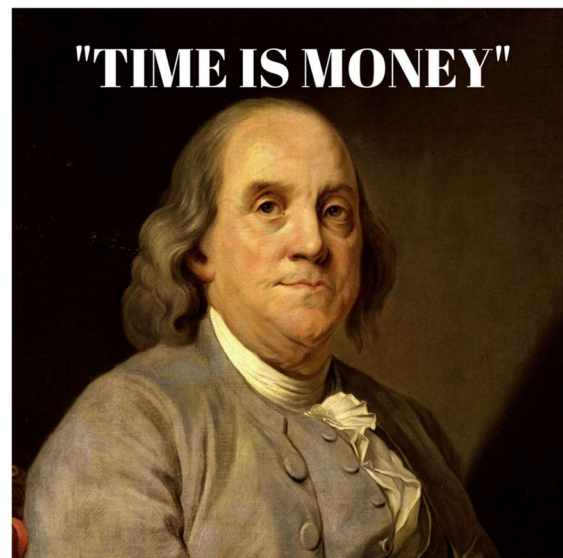
The shortcoming here is two-fold: Inconvenience from the perspective of the recipient and, more importantly, from that of the caller.

In this White Paper, we will focus more on the caller. But first, quickly, let's dive into the perspective of the recipient...

In this day and age, time is money - it's as simple as that.

Is Voicemail wasting your time? It is very common for a business to receive a voicemail, listen to it, only to find that the caller has either hung up without leaving a message, or left a message lacking the necessary information to move forward.

Data from uReach Technologies, which operates the voice messaging systems for various major cellphone carriers, shows that 30 percent of voice messages linger unheard for days and that 20 percent of people hardly even dial into their mailboxes. ⁱ



Do you have time for a game of phone tag? After receiving a voicemail, business owner or employee calls back, but now the caller is not available or they've lost interest. More than likely, that new prospect has already found another company to give their business to.

In this instance, *money* was spent listening to a meaningless voicemail. And it was spent calling back a potential customer without achieving the desired outcome: A business transaction. Opportunity cost plus actual cost—both *monies* that could have been spent with a return on investment or on the progression of critical tasks or projects.

The Harvard Business Review describes this as a “legacy system drag.” ⁱⁱ

Basically, by letting a call go to voicemail you are using an outdated system of communication and leaving the door open to confusion and frustration. Both undue burdens no business should bear if they don't have to.

We'll come back to this later with the Coca Cola example, and their bold solution to the problem. But for now, let's get to the meat. Voicemail as seen from the client point of view:

A call answered by a machine is a missed opportunity to deliver a positive, meaningful *human experience*.

Someone you have a relationship with may be able to tolerate reaching your voice message box and leaving you a message, but your prospective client is calling your business, not you. The people who should matter most to your business or organization are new prospects and existing customers or clients.

A volley of rings followed by an automated voice is the opposite of what they want. It's actually annoying. ⁱⁱⁱ

Think about what that means. This is their first impression of your business.

Here's the real business problem though:

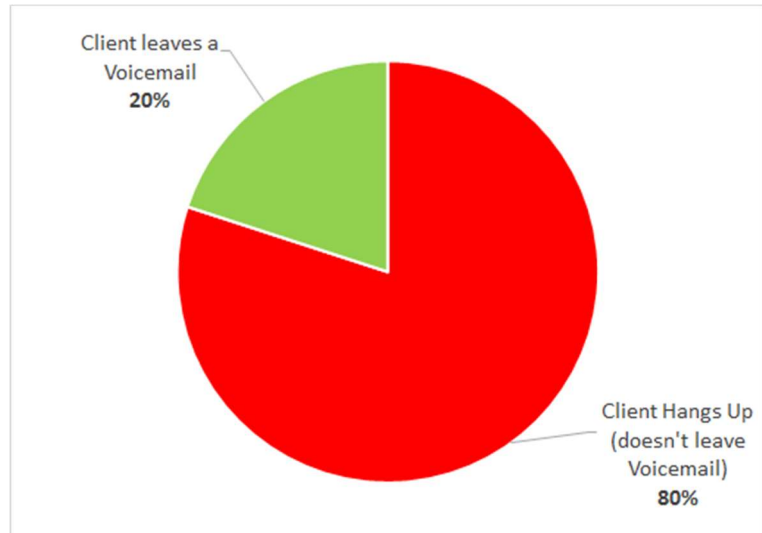
As many as 8 of 10 potential customers who call your company will not bother leaving a voicemail.

That's what the New York Times says... You do the math. 8 out of 10 callers... ^{iv}

If you're a business owner who cannot consistently answer your business lines *live* during business hours, you're leaving money on the table. You are losing up to 80 percent of what could be new customers to your business. ^v

Think about it, 8 of every 10 potential customers hung up because their call was not answered live. **Shocking, isn't it?** Can you afford that as a business owner?

The "Do No Harm" expression is not as simple as they'd have you believe. Of course, you're not intentionally doing harm to your business.



But, by not answering *all* of your calls live, and obstructing your potential customer, you're essentially signaling to your callers that *you'd rather hand this sale off to your competition* because you do not have the business infrastructure to handle your own calls. Or worse, you don't have time for them.

You're spending money on marketing for the sole purpose of having more people inquire about your services and to increase your client base and revenue. You are spending time, thought, and money to make your phones ring, but by not answering all the calls consistently, your competitor is thanking you for the new business you've handed them.

Ultimately, businesses that do not carefully consider their phone answering strategy may be shooting themselves in the foot.

But there are ways to go about fixing this. Here are three factors to consider:

1. Effective Communication:

Effective communication is fundamental to a business's infrastructure. It's the 21st Century and things move at a fast pace. For you, your competitors, your vendors and your customers, too. When it comes to communicating with your customer or client, tool selection is imperative.

A handyman knows when to use a power drill instead of a screwdriver, a paper cutter instead of a pair of scissors, a chainsaw instead of a handsaw. These choices enable you to accomplish tasks in faster and less energy-consuming ways.

Now keep in mind, voicemail was first introduced in the 1980s.^{vi} That's probably why a June 2015 Reuters story said, "**voicemail is going the way of the typewriter.**"^{vii}

Sure, typewriters still look cool today, and they're still functional, *technically*, but they fail to be the most productive way to produce a written document—in the same way that voicemail now falls short of being an effective system of communication.

The sole purpose of a business is to provide a solution to a customer's needs with a positive financial outcome in return. Is it possible to make a sale via voicemail, especially if you are in a transaction-based business? If you answer yes, perhaps you should be writing your own White Paper. 😊

Consider this:

USA Today collected data in a 2011 study which revealed the number of voicemail messages left on user accounts dropped by 8 percent. Retrieved-voicemail fell 14 percent among recipients users in the same period.^{viii}

These statistics serve as confirmation that the usage and practicality of voicemail is fleeting—expiring with the 1980s and 90s timestamp from when it was first introduced (and indeed offered something useful and exciting).

2. Elevating the Customer Experience

As any business owner examines the steps they're going to take to advance their company, the customer experience should always be at the forefront of their thinking.

For accomplished businesses, *everything* revolves around the customer experience. According to experts, speaking to someone on the phone is akin to the comforts of snuggling up in “a warm blanket.”^{ix}

As businesses grow, expand, and forge ahead, aspects that were once ubiquitous within the establishment tend to be minimized, taking a back seat to other demands.

It is important to **deliver consistency in all phases** of your business; disproportionate growth in one area disrupts the whole company and creates chaos.

It is more detrimental than beneficial to grow your businesses and services without the ability to *scale* them properly, by underrepresenting your ability for customer service.

With the rapid succession of technology in today's society, the client experience is not exclusive to only in-person interactions. Indirect connections are just as vital.

The businesses that believe non-personal interactions (such as ones through your website, social media channels, or on the phone) are unimportant or irrelevant are the same businesses people **do not refer** to their family and friends, simply because they *appear not to care* or are *just out of touch*. Indirect connections are often a prospective client's first look at your business.

If their initial experience with your company is landing on voicemail, ask yourself: *How does this reflect on me?*

3. Eliminating Voicemail

We mentioned Coca Cola earlier... Good ole' Coke came up with their own bold solution to the voicemail predicament... **They eliminated it!**^x

In November of 2014, Coca Cola spokeswoman Amanda Rosseter and Chief Information Officer Ed Steinike issued a statement explaining the real reason behind the abolition.

"The main driver behind this project is not cost savings, it is changing the tools and methods in which we communicate as a company."

It's about simplifying the work for everyone. If businesses want to be successful, they need to learn how to stay ahead of the curve, and be willing to disrupt their normal methods when appropriate. Coca Cola's move was ingenious: They adapted their business to match the behavior of today's customers.

Eliminating voicemail is simply one way one company decided to handle this situation, but that may not work for every business. For instance, based on our own data of the more than 500,000 calls received at our Call Desk, we see that most callers treat voicemail differently when reached after-hours: They're more tolerant (hang-up ratio falls to 2.5 per 10 calls).

Conclusion:

Voicemail doesn't really help your business...

Perhaps it's time to hang up on voicemail and free yourself of its constraints, letting your business reach the pinnacle of its productivity. Perhaps James Siminoff, the founder of PhoneTag, put it best when he said, "Voicemails are totally trapped info." ^{xi}

But wait... So voicemail is not a good option when you cannot answer the phone live? **But what then?**

This is where Office Divvy comes in.

At Office Divvy we have a High Touch Call Desk solution that precisely deals with everything voicemail can't.

What is high-touch phone answering?

High-touch is key. *High-touch* is human. Calls are answered live and then connected. If not, messages are sent. All of this, executed by a highly trained and customer-centric team. The emphasis is on effectiveness, respect, and listening for ways to add greater value for the caller. This is what we mean by “high- touch phone answering.”

If you search “High-Touch Phone Answering” in Google, you’ll notice Office Divvy ranks very high in results. That is because we’re a national thought leader in this field.



We have finessed our call desk operations to such an extent that it allows our call desk team to operate as an extension of our clients’ own teams.

Having a call desk to operate with a deep understanding of the client’s company culture, its founder’s vision and voice is a tremendous asset for any Startup or small business.

By following our client’s business rules with real understanding of best practices as well as expertise in human-experience, our Office Divvy call desk positions our clients’ companies to deliver customer loyalty and satisfaction. All while saving them thousands of dollars monthly.

It's easy to lose touch with an intimate customer experience—especially if you’re just starting out and your company’s team size is inadequate for your volume of business, or if all other aspects of your company are growing rapidly. The operation becomes about the daily grind, about fighting fires. So when businesses attempt to solve this problem,

they are dealing with one of the most inevitable pain-points of entrepreneurship, that is, learning how to grow not only their business but how to scale it.

Our team at Office Divvy ensures that each and every client is equipped to handle every customer call that comes in. The business owner no longer has to stress over the hassle that comes with an increase in call volume. That means no worrying about resourcing a full-time call desk because of lack of funds, know-how, telephony infrastructure and architecture, accountability or training.

"We refer to our call desk as the anti-call center. Delivering a quality human experience, one call at a time, with the company's goals in mind is how we approach our service. The level of listening we apply during the call and how we action the call is like nothing we've seen anywhere." says Office Divvy cofounder Lisa Ekinci.

Today, Office Divvy's call desk is answering phones for more than 90 companies in multiple states, processing over 100,000 calls annually on behalf of our clients.

Not only does Office Divvy's call desk traffic calls and take messages (i.e. virtual receptionist), but they often perform tasks much like an in-house team would: CRM entries, inbound sales, appointment scheduling, or customer service.



Office Divvy's **backup live phone answering solution** is intended for individuals and companies who desire to answer their own phones (themselves or with their own team), but want the option for calls *they miss* to be live answered seamlessly. This replaces voicemail with live answering which is followed by the actioning of those calls as per the company's own rules.

Visit our website at Officedivvy.com/Call-Desk to learn more or call 386.445.4153 for a free demo.

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