

LESSONS LEARNED | BY GERSON ROSENBLOOM

# Phone Handling 101

**D**o you remember dial phones? In this day and age of digital phone systems, VOIP and other technologies that will have probably changed by the time you read this, it's hard to remember a time when we had one phone line coming in the store. But whether you have one line or hundreds, the most basic principles of phone handling remain the same.



**'The moment a person connects to your phone system, their total impression is based on what transpires.'**

No matter the realities of how your company operates, the moment a person connects to your phone system, their total impression is based on what transpires. Even though your incoming calls may be peppered with solicitors or other unwelcome callers, you should assume that each call represents an opportunity.

In my current position, I make hundreds of phone calls per week, the vast majority of which are to music dealers. Some dealers are very professional and efficient in handling calls, but I've run into some issues that make my hair curl. We learn from other people's mistakes, so I thought I'd share the most critical blunders that I've heard over the phone.

**The perpetual voice mail.** This is so common that it's scary. I call a dealer during business hours, only to get a voice mail message stating that everyone is busy. I understand sometimes you get overwhelmed and can't get to the phone. But some dealers are *always* too busy to pick up. There was one dealer that I tried more than 30 times before I reached a live person. I understand times are tough, making it difficult to hire more staff. But this is a chicken-and-the-egg scenario. If you can't answer your phone, maybe your sales are off because you don't have enough help to handle the business.

**Unanswered phones.** Worse than perpetual voice mail is no voice mail at all. I hardly know what to make of it when I call a dealer and the phone rings 10 times without being answered. My guess is that customers just move on to the next dealer.

**Lost messages.** I'm astounded by how often I don't get call-backs. If you're lucky enough to have a customer who's actually willing to leave a message, you'd better be sure to call back pronto.

When writing this piece, I conducted an experiment. I blocked my caller ID and left messages with different fictitious names. With one dealer, I actually had six messages with six different names go unanswered.

**May I speak with the president please?** It's easier to get through to President Barack Obama than some music dealers. I don't get it. Some people are simply inaccessible, even after you get past the voice mail system. The other day, I actually had someone ask me, "Is he expecting your call?" Get over it. I was just one of 500 things he wasn't expecting that day.

**Is this Minnie Mouse?** Every person has his or her calling in life, and some people aren't meant to answer phones. Every so often, I run into someone who's difficult to understand. If you own a company, you owe it to yourself to call in once in a while and listen to the impression you're giving your customers.

If you're able to identify with any of these maladies, I suggest that you take immediate action to remedy them because my research suggests they're not isolated incidents. I'm seeing something of a plague that's undermining the effectiveness of one of our most powerful sales tools. **MI**

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