

HAVE YOU CALLED YOU LATELY?

Part II

By: Maurice Dixon

A few years ago I wrote an article entitled "Have You Called You Lately?" Due to the changes in methods of communication since I wrote that article, it is time to update this subject.

Today we see and hear ads that ask us to call a phone number, or contact an e-mail, or go to a website. When we do that, sometimes I wonder why it is so hard to make contact. Have they tested their own system?

Today it is not only, have you called you lately, but have you tried other ways to contact your company or yourself?

Many companies today have an automatic answering system, and you need to know your party's extension. That party might be a specific person, or a department. Do you know what happens to your customer when they call your phone? How easy, or hard, is it for them to reach you, or a particular department such as customer service, repair, shipping, or maybe, most importantly, to place an order?

How many times does that call get transferred, and what happens when they it does get transferred? Do they get another automatic voice, and/or voicemail asking them to please hold or leave a message? How long are they on hold? How soon does a voicemail request get answered?

We ran a test on a client's customer service department, and found that 60% of the time our calls went to voicemail. When our requested return call was made, it was quite late, if returned at all. In this case there were several customer service people, and we found that there was not a good system for determining who should answer incoming calls in the first place, or who should return those calls. As a customer, I would certainly call someone else. By our doing this test, we were able to make great improvements in their voicemail program.

When you call your number, listen to your outgoing voicemail message. Is it friendly, spoken with a smile, brief and clear? Are there easy to understand directions? Maybe you are using a live person to answer the phone....."halleluiah"! If so, is that person friendly and does that person deliver the correct message to your callers? Is that person a designated person, or is it anyone who just picks up the phone when they've heard it ring a few times? All of these things become evident to you when you have someone, other than yourself, as a test, call your company.

I call a client on a fairly regular basis and they have an automatic answering system that tells me, "If you know your party's number, please dial the extension now". That's good, unless I don't know my party's extension and I have to dial the company directory..." oh no"! In this case, when I dial that extension, I also know how to shortcut the voicemail by pressing the star key. They didn't tell me this on their voicemail, but I happen to

know it. I suggested to the company that they include this suggestion in their outgoing message. And, they did...."hallelujah", again!

How about your own personal cell phone voicemail? Is your outgoing message short and sweet or long and aggravating? I found out that if you have a specific carrier you can leave a brief instruction telling your caller to press a certain button and it will get them right to your beep. You can say something like this, "Hi, this is Jane / Joe Salesrep. You've reached my mobile phone voicemail. Please leave a message and I'll return your call promptly. In the future, you can press (insert special key from below) to bypass this message and get right to the beep."

Here is the information that has come to my attention: if you have Sprint or AT&T, press 1, Verizon, press Star, T-Mobile, press Pound. This eliminates that entire long outgoing message, and sometimes your phone system even adds its own information. Have you called your own mobile voicemail recently to see how much gobble-dee-gook someone has to listen to before they finally get to your beep? Try it!

By the way, when you leave a voice mail message, please speak slowly, leave your name and number, repeat your number, and then leave your message. And be brief. If you are making a "Cold Call" have your message well prepared with a compelling reason to have your party call you back.

Here are some additional suggestions that might help improve your company's communications. First, your website - how often do you check it or change it? Does your website make it easy to place an order, contact your company, or a particular department or person? Are the graphics easy to read and understand? You might be in love with your website, so maybe you should ask an impartial person to take a look and give you a report.

One other subject comes to mind, and that is business cards. Some business cards are easy and precise, and make it really simple to contact the person. Others are very complicated, and more than once I have dialed the wrong number because it isn't clear whether it is a fax number, a cell number, a home number, or an office phone number. So, take a look at your business cards and see how well they communicate. All of these things must be "User Friendly" for you and for your customer's sake.

One last thing, don't hesitate to tell someone you do business with that their voicemail or website makes it difficult for you to communicate with them. "Tough love"!

That's it for now. If you have any thoughts on this subject just give us a call or check our website. I hope they communicate well and get our message through to you.

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