

## Auto Attendant Best Practices

The technology of an auto attendant or virtual receptionist eliminated the need to pay an employee to handle this important task at your business. It's a big money-saving and time-saving tool.

What is an opportunity for your business to be more efficient, however, can be a pain in the neck for your callers and could project a negative image for your company.

You have only one opportunity to make a good first impression on your customers and prospective customers. Since the auto-attendant is the first contact most callers have with your company, it's vital that you make this customer experience a positive one.

Delivering that positive experience requires two primary elements:

1. Make the instructions fast, clear and easy for callers to follow
2. Direct calls efficiently to the right party

### **Ensure that your business makes a good first impression.**

There are many elements to consider when setting up your system to achieve these goals. What follows is a guide that can help you set up your auto attendant to be efficient, friendly and make a good first impression.

### **Serving the needs of all callers.**

- Create a greeting that serves both first-time callers and frequent callers. Depending on your company size and structure, you can use one of the following options after the greeting:
  - Over six extensions: "If you know your party's extension, please dial it now. If not, please dial XXX for a directory by name, or press XXX for the operator."
  - Under six extensions: "If you know your party's extension, please dial it now. If not, for sales dial 1, for support dial 2, for accounting dial 3..." and so on. Put the most frequently used extensions first.
- Always include an option to reach a live person.
- Keep the message as short as possible. Try to keep it to 30 seconds or less.
- Avoid causing technical problems by assigning menu option numbers that use the same number(s) as extensions. Refer to your system's manual for details on this.
- Remember, not every caller has a touchtone phone. Do provide an option for callers to just stay on the line to have their call answered.
- Send callers to a voice mail system if no one is available and make sure messages are checked frequently. The faster messages are returned the better the impression your company makes with its customers.

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#### **Making the recording.**

- Write down a script before making your recording.
- To make the recording, select an employee who has a clear and friendly voice and can make sure the message flows smoothly without hesitations or breaks. Have him or her rehearse the message several times before recording it so they are sure to sound relaxed and to reduce errors and re-recording.
- Let the caller know you appreciate hearing from them and confirm that they've called the right number. Start the recording with a "Thank you for calling [business name]."
- Take advantage of the opportunity to enhance your brand recognition by following the opening line with your company's tag line.
- Use your auto attendant to announce special sales or events — as long as the message doesn't interfere with the efficiency of the caller reaching the right party.

#### **Keeping your message current and relevant.**

- Set up your system to change the message after hours, on weekends and on holidays. Be sure to provide actual operating hours during this time.
  - Sample after-hours message: "Thank you for calling [Company], [Tag Line]. We're sorry we can't take your call but you've reached us after hours. If you know your party's extension you may dial it now to leave a message. Otherwise, please call back during our normal business hours from 10:00 a.m. to 7:00 p.m. Monday through Friday and 10:00 a.m. to 6:00 p.m. on Saturday. You may leave a message in the general mailbox by dialing X. We will return your call as soon as possible. Goodbye."
  - If your business serves customers 24/7 but your storefront or office is not always open, be sure to include the number at which you can be reached after hours after the message greeting.
- Tell callers if the system options have recently changed to prevent them from automatically pressing the wrong button(s). It's a good idea to keep this message active for about a month after the change.
- Give your business more personality by adapting your message to seasonal events by wishing callers a Happy Independence Day, Happy Holidays, etc., a week prior to national holidays.
- Adjust your message when your business is closed in addition to normal closures. If, for instance, it is to be closed over a holiday that is not universal, such as President's Day, this needs to be part of your message the week prior to the closure. It's never good to frustrate customers who call on normal working days and find your business closed.

Every contact your customers have with your company affects how they feel about you, their loyalty to you and their willingness to recommend you to others. Following these auto attendant guidelines can help you make sure your customers and prospects get a good impression every time they call.



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