

# Voice Mails Mistakes You Need to Avoid

A close-up photograph of a hand holding a silver mobile phone. The phone's screen is black and displays the text "You have 1 New Message" in white. The phone has a physical keypad with various function buttons, including a call button, a message button, and a power button. The background is blurred, showing a person's shoulder and a white wall.

**You have  
1 New  
Message**

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## Voice Mail Mistakes You Need to Avoid

Voice mail is an inherent aspect of business, and if you make sales calls, you inevitably end up in voice mail hell from time-to-time. How you approach, deal with, and handle voice mail can make or break your sales career. This e-book will explore some of the most common voice mail mistakes sales people make. Avoid these mistakes and separate yourself from your competition while increasing your sales.

**You only have one opportunity to make a dynamic first impression.**

**Is your message memorable for the right reasons?**

**Do you have a voice mail campaign or do you just 'wing-it'?**

- 1. No pre-call research.** The biggest mistake you can make when contacting a new prospect for the first time is failing to conduct research BEFORE you place the call. I receive countless calls from people wanting to sell me a product or service and the vast majority have no idea of what my company actually does. This is evident when the caller leaves a message because they usually make a vague reference to my business and often state some aspect of their product that has no relevance to me. For instance, I received a call from a company selling telephone systems. The sales person left a message stating the benefits of their product in a call-center environment. Had this person actually done some pre-call research he would have discovered that I am a sole proprietor and do not have a call center.
- 2. Leaving a long message.** Business people are busier than ever before and do not have time to listen to a long, drawn-out voice mail message. I was sitting in an executive's office recently and watched with amusement as he listened to each voice mail for less than ten seconds before hitting the delete key. In every case, the person calling had not even gotten through their introduction before this executive deleted their message. You only have a few moments to capture your prospects attention so keep your message short, concise and on track.
- 3. Leaving too many messages.** A few years ago I contacted a company about buying a mailing list and the sales person sent me the information I had requested the same day of our conversation. He then proceeded to call me three times that week and several more times the following week with each message exhibiting a higher level of frustration. At the time I was engaged in a series of cross-country training workshops, and simply did not have the time to look at his information or call him back. However, after his sixth call in less than two weeks, I called him back and told him to stop pestering me.

While I respect the importance of being persistent, there is a distinct difference between this and stalking. A sales coach I know follows this pattern.

He leaves three messages during the first ten days of contacting someone. For the next three weeks, he leaves one message per week. After that, he leaves a monthly message. Each message is different than the previous one which means he never repeats his messages.

**Call your own voice mail and leave your message. Listen to it and ask yourself,**

**"Would you call yourself back?"**

**Take your time. Speaking more slowly increases your credibility.**

- 4. Not giving your prospect/customer a compelling reason to call you back.** Most of the voice mail messages I receive are generic and boring which means they don't give me a compelling reason to return the call. It is essential that your message convey some benefit to the company or person you are calling. The average business executive receives more than a dozen sales calls per day. What makes your call stand out from everyone else who is calling your prospect?
- 5. Speaking too fast.** It never ceases to amaze me how often a sales person races through their message and states their call-back so quickly that it is virtually impossible to understand. The most effective voice mail messages are stated clearly and a bit more slowly than normal conversation. This gives the other person time to record the information and to make note of your telephone number. People are too busy to listen to your message several times. Slow down and make it easy for them.
- 6. Mumbling.** This ties in with the previous point. It is critical that you make it easy for your prospect to understand you. If you speak too fast or mumble, you quickly reduce your credibility. If you have a unique name, take time to spell it for your prospect. I can't count the number of times a sales person has left a message but I couldn't understand his/her name. This makes it very difficult for the other person when, and if, they return your call.
- 7. Not repeating your telephone number.** Cold calling experts suggest that you state your telephone number at least twice during your call. The first is during your introduction and the second is at the end of your call. You don't want your prospect to have listen to your entire message again if they failed to get your number the first time. I absolutely hate being forced to listen to a long message only to try and get the telephone number at the end.

**A great actor NEVER sounds like he is reading from a script.**

**8. Not focusing on what is important to your prospect.** Most people who make sales calls focus on their agenda which is trying to sell something. However, this self-serving approach only alienates your prospect because it does not concentrate on their needs or situation.

**9. Making the call about you.** Remember, the objective of your message is not to talk about your products or services. It is to give your prospect a reason to return your call. Spewing on and on about your company's products, services, etc., will only cause the other person to hit the delete button. Avoid this by giving your prospect vital information that could help their business. This can include news about new trends, the results one of your clients has experienced,

**10. Call scripts are not used.** I have to admit, the first time I used a script, I was very uncomfortable and my results were not impressive. I have since learned that I made several mistakes when I used this script. The first was that I wrote it as I write, not as a speak. The second (and biggest) is that I didn't practise verbalizing it before I made my calls. The key to using a script is to not recite it from a sheet of paper but to state it in a conversational tone.

**11. No pre-call warm-up.** Before you pick up the telephone, it is critical that you take several minutes and warm up. Verbally run through your voice message a few times so it is clear in your mind. This prevents "ums" and "uhs" and makes your message more clear and concise. This small investment of time pay huge dividends because you will quickly present yourself as a professional.

**Become a resource to your prospects.**

**12. Failing to quickly capture your prospect's interest.** As I mentioned earlier in this e-book, the majority of executives are inundated with sales calls and most of the messages that get left are dull, boring, and un compelling. Jill Konrath of Selling to Big Companies states that you can capture your prospect's attention with a strong value proposition, business-related terminology and relevant success stories. Focus on business results and demonstrate how you can help your prospect (this does not mean rambling on and on about you and your company!).

## 9 Voice Mail Blunders Strategies and Tactics to Tackle Voice Mail

By  
Jim Domanski

**It is not surprising that so many sales reps complain about not having their voice mail messages returned.** Judging by the dozen and half voice mails I have received from sales people over the years the reason is obvious: they are lousy.

Sales reps complain about the impact of voice mail on their selling success but often they are their own worst enemies. Here is a list of common voice mail blunders and how you can manage them.

### Blunder #1: Leaving a VM Too Soon

The first tip in managing voice mail is NOT to leave a voice mail message.

The trick is to get a live prospect and that often means trying different times. Prepare a list of at least fifty or so prospects. Try calling them earlier (e.g., start at 7:30) or later (after 5:00) in the day. Don't leave a message, simply dial. If there is no answer hang up and move to the next name on the list. Cycle the list for about an hour with the objective of getting a live prospect. Try doing this every day for about two weeks.

### Blunder #2: Not Listening

When you do encounter voice mail LISTEN to what the prospect has to say. Some have bland generic messages ("I'm not in. Leave a message") but others might give you some clues about how to approach them. For instance, suppose the message says this:

*"Hi this is Pete Prospectis. Today is Monday, May 16<sup>th</sup> and I will be out of the office until Thursday May, 18<sup>th</sup>. If you'd like to leave your name, number and a detailed message I will get back to you as soon as I can."*

Note that Pete provided the date. It implies he interacts with voice mail so that when you do leave a message the chances are pretty good that he will listen to it. Because the message is detailed, one gets the impression that Pete is a detail person. This suggests you might want to be equally detailed in your approach.

But more significantly, Mr. Prospectis is out till Wednesday. There is no point in leaving a message at this stage because there are probably thirty other messages waiting for him. Even if you leave a good message there is a pretty good chance that it will be lost in the chaos of catching up.

Finally, and this is so critical, don't call Pete on Thursday! His day will be hectic after having been gone for three days. Think about it. Call on Friday when things have

calmed down. If you have to leave a message, do so but again at least you increase your chances of it being heard.

### **Blunder #3: Failure to Research**

Over the last month or so, I have received voice messages from vendors who assumed I was a long distance company, a service bureau, a telephone manufacturer, and a high tech firm. Simply clicking onto my web site will tell you what I do...and it's none of the above.

The sales reps wasted my time and theirs. But the sad thing is they are probably leaving dozens of other similar messages to the wrong targets. Of course, when they do not get a reply they get discouraged. They become victims of their poor preparation.

Learn a little about your prospect. It does not have to be a lot but enough to craft a message that is relevant.

### **Blunder #4: Providing Infomercials**

One of the greatest voice mail tragedies is leaving an infomercial i.e., a grotesquely long, delirious message that tells the prospect everything and anything. In effect, it's like a radio commercial over voice mail.

Think about this for a moment from the prospect's perspective: she is inundated with voice mails all day long. The last thing she needs is your product diatribe. I assure you that the prospect will tire by the third line and quickly erase your message.

### **Blunder #5: Poor Delivery**

As if infomercials were not enough, some sales reps compound the problem with poor delivery. I am talking about the "...aahhhs....ummmms...errr... duhs..." that are liberally peppered throughout the message. And I am especially talking about monotone deliveries that put the prospect to sleep.

You have about 5-8 seconds to catch your listener's attention and keeping it is even tougher. Understand this: about 15% of your message is communicated by the actual words you use i.e., the message you leave. The remaining 85% of the message is communicated by the tone of your voice. If you sound lifeless, unsure, hesitant, or if you speak too fast or too slow, or if you are too loud or too soft, you will lose the prospects interest.

So here's what you need to do: Jot down what you want to say. Write it in sentences or point form; whatever works for you. Then practice delivering it a few times before dialing. The message should flow trippingly and convincingly from you lips. There is no

excuse for a poorly delivered message.

## **Blunder #6: Insipid Messages**

I am floored by the messages that are left on my voice mail. Stunned. Shocked. Dismayed. Sometimes I am amused but rarely am I impressed much less interested.

The reason? The messages don't grab me by the collar and say "Listen." Instead, they a drab and speeches about their product or their company. Borriiinng! .

A good voice mail message has four components:

- your name,
- your company,
- a message that intrigues and entices
- a call to action

Here is just one example of an intriguing message:

*Mr. Wallace, this is Vic Vendor calling from Altace Inc. Mr. Wallace, I have a question on extended learning programs that I am told only you can answer. Could you please give me a call at \_\_\_\_?*

This is a powerful voice message. Note how the rep uses the prospect's name a couple of times. Using the name gets the prospect to listen more carefully to the words. Next, the rep creates intrigue and mystery with his message about being the only person who can answer the question. This flatters the prospect at some level and creates curiosity.

## **Blunder #7: Not Integrating Other Mediums**

If there is more than one way to skin a cat, there is more than one way to leave a message. Make your voice mail part of an overall contact strategy.

Voice mail should be just one of the tactics you use to garner interest and stand out from the crowd. Supplement your voice message with an old fashioned letter. Consider sending a fax. If you have the e-mail address of your prospect, send a brief message.

Use these mediums in combination. For example, you might leave a message telling the prospect to expect a "package" in the mail. This alerts her to keep his eye out for "something" which, in itself, is intriguing. Perhaps you could use a fax as a follow up message to the package rather than another voice mail.

The point is you have to be creative. Some prospects respond better to e-mail than voice mail, others to fax versus mail.

## Blunder 8: Lack of Persistence

One of the BIGGEST blunders is a simple lack of persistence. Of the all the voice mails I received over the last two weeks not one rep...not a single, solitary rep...has called and left another message!

Statistically, about 87% of sales reps give up after a single half hearted attempt. About 95% give up after a second message. Personally, I rarely listen to voice mails from vendors because I figure if it is important enough they will call back. They rarely ever do. That tells the whole story.

I recommend that sales reps leave four voice mail messages spaced three business days apart. I call it the 4/3 strategy. When you do the 'math' it reveals about two calendar weeks of follow up but spaced apart so that it is not too overbearing. I will supplement the messages with a fax or e-mail (if I have it) or a letter. I want the prospect to know that I will not give up easily; I will be polite but persistent.

## Blunder #9: Stalking

The last blunder is not nearly as common as a lack of persistence but it does exist and it is sinister and frightening in nature. It occurs when a sales rep calls and leaves a voice mail message (or messages) every day for days on end. Not long ago at a training seminar a sales rep bragged that he left 38 (yes, thirty eight) messages to a prospect.

That is not prospecting, it's stalking.

It's a waste of the sales rep's time and energy ...and you can bet it was not endearing to the poor prospect. (I'd be calling the police).

## Summary

Avoid these classic voice mail blunders. Yes, it takes a little more time and effort but that is precisely what will set you apart from all the other sales reps who are calling your prospects. Go to it.

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## About Kelley Robertson

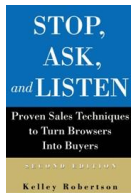
Kelley Robertson began his sales career in a men's clothing store in the mid-seventies. With no experience or training, he struggled to make ends meet and eventually changed directions by moving into the hospitality industry.

For over a decade he worked in a managerial capacity for several large chains and in 1990 began training employees, managers and owner/operators. During the next five years, he hired and trained close to 1000 service staff for sixteen new restaurants.



In 1995 he returned to retail to provide sales training for the retail division of Sony of Canada and helped the Sony Stores become one of Canada top retailers of consumer electronics. The training programs and resources he developed are now recognized around the world within the Sony organization and have been used by Sony Latin America as well as Sony Mexico.

He left the corporate world in 2002 to start his private practice and since then he has been helping companies across North America improve their business results. His client list includes organizations such as; Sony Canada, LG Electronics, Samsung, Vulcan Industries, Preferred Nutrition, Avmed Health Plans, Staples, and many more.



Kelley is the author of *Stop, Ask & Listen—Proven Sales Techniques to Turn Browsers into Buyers* and *The Secrets of Power Selling*. Kelley is a frequent contributor to magazines and his articles have appeared in dozens of publications and hundreds of websites around the world.



Some of the magazines his articles have appeared include; *Sales Promotion, Boating Industry Canada, Canadian Vending, Canadian Business Franchise, Graphic Arts, Luggage Leather & Accessories, Professional Door Dealer, Sleep Products, Staff Digest, and Tire News.*

As President of The Robertson Training Group and Fearless Selling, Kelley helps sales professionals conduct better sales conversations and close more deals. Visit his website, [www.Fearless-Selling.ca](http://www.Fearless-Selling.ca) for resources and self-study programs that will help you gain a competitive advantage.

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