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Never Miss a Call Again

A spectrum of new technology offerings makes it a whole lot easier for clients and prospects to reach you at any time of day.

By Mike Antoniak

How accessible do you want to be? That's becoming an important question to consider, given the array of new communication services that can pretty much guarantee every caller and voicemail message finds you right away — wherever, whenever. In fact, you don't even necessarily need your phone to be notified of the new call.

These services can give you a competitive advantage in a day when customers want an immediate response. When customers are ready to buy or sell, their business often goes to the first practitioner to pick up the phone or respond to their message.

Check Voicemail on E-mail

Tired of continually dialing in to check your voicemail? Several Web-based services let you use your computer or PDA to find out if you have a message; some are free. Here are a few offerings worth considering:

- * Callwave Visual Voicemail. One such free service available in two versions: Visual Voicemail and Visual Voicemail Widget. Visual Voicemail for e-mail re-routes mobile phone messages to your e-mail inbox as audio files you can play, pause, save, or delete. Visual Voicemail Widget gives you that same option in a Web environment and will also alert you to new messages, via a text message sent to your handset.
- * GotVoice. This service, offered in three versions, converts messages into MP3 files then forwards them as e-mail attachments. The basic service is free and checks your messages three times a day. (GotVoice Premium Service, \$9.95 per month, checks and sends voicemail up to 24 scheduled times a day and can deliver an RSS feed with voicemail enclosures.) GotVoice also gives you options in how you can handle outgoing calls and messages. You can send voicemail messages without having a phone ring, broadcast a voice message you record from your computer, or call multiple recipients simultaneously.
- * SpinVox. This service, which offers free trials for a limited time, delivers the same convenience, but takes a different approach. Its Spin-my-Vmail service converts voice messages into text before forwarding them as e-mail or a text message. Other SpinVox programs include Spin-my-broadcast for converting your voice message to text for delivery to groups. Spin-my-memo lets you dial into the service and record a memo for yourself that is also converted into text for delivery to your e-mail.



'Find-Me' Services

The services mentioned above will give you a good introduction to accessing voicemail on your computer, but you may want to upgrade to fee-based "unified messaging" services, which are increasingly becoming popular.

As the name implies, unified messaging is a system to ensure that however people try to reach you, they — or their message — will find you. That can include "find-me" functionality that routes and reroutes calls until you pick up the line, as well as e-mail messaging systems like those described above. Here are a couple examples of unified messaging:

- * RingCentral. Subscribers get a local or toll-free number that serves as their virtual call center, and extensions can be assigned for employees or team members. The result: your team appears united to customers, even if you're working in different locations or offsite. The number can be used for phone calls or faxes. Subscribers can manage messages by e-mail, phone, or the Web. A free trial of the service is available, and pricing begins at \$9.95 per month.
- * FreedomVoice. The service sets up subscribers with toll free numbers and standard features, such as multiple voicemail boxes, notification of messages, and follow-me call forwarding — which tracks you down on your cell phone or any other number you've provided to deliver the call to you. Three versions are available: Lite (\$9.95 per month), Pro (\$19.95), and Xtreme (\$29.95). The premium package includes a Web interface for managing calls, group messaging, and fax and voice messages to e-mail.

Online Leads to Your Phone

A number of communications solutions also have been developed specifically for the world of real estate. Some solutions integrate communications tools into a Web site. Here's how it works:

On your Web site you prompt customers to fill out a contact form to receive more information.

When a customer fills it out, you're instantly sent a phone call or text message with the prospect's information. Two examples:

- * Rapid Response. Lead information captured in online forms is sent to you immediately via a phone call and text message. For the phone call, the lead information is translated into speech. The service also can automatically dial the prospects' phone number for you.
- * AgentXsites. This product from a la mode Inc. automatically forwards a text message of a lead's name and contact information to a mobile handset as soon as a customer submits a contact form.

Make It Easier for Them to Call

Adding "click to call" capabilities to your Web site or e-mail is another approach becoming more popular. These services provide a hotlink icon that you can embed in your Web site or e-mail signature. When a site visitor or e-mail recipient clicks on this icon, they are asked for their phone number and a phone call is automatically routed to your phone or a series of phones until you're reached. Here are some companies offering this service.

- * Jaduka. The Click-and-Connect plan is free for the first 60 minutes of calls. Pricing starts at \$4.99 for each additional hour.



- * Callbutton Realty. A text-to-speech conversion feature announces the caller's name and says what listing they're interested in. Pricing starts at \$29 per month and is based on the number of calls.
- * RealPing. The concept goes a step further, combining the automated "click to call" with an interactive Web display. After you're on the phone with your prospects, you can select which Web pages you'd like to display on their computer monitor. When the call wraps up, an exit page displays, thanking them for the call, inviting them to e-mail you, and presenting them with your contact information. The service carries a \$49.95 fee and a monthly subscription, starting at \$16.99 per month.

No Excuses!

I'll ask the question again: How accessible do you want to be? With so many choices, there's little room for excuses that you missed that call. These latest tools give you new ways to stay connected with prospects and clients, so you'll never again have to miss a business opportunity, whether you're at work or at play.