

## AdvanceMe's Tip of the Week: March 26, 2008

### Hold the Phones: Proper Phone Etiquette Builds Businesses

In many businesses, the first customer interaction comes through the phone. So what kind of first impression are you making?

- **Train Employees.** It seems simple enough, but you should make sure that every employee is answering the phone in an appropriate manner. This includes having a positive tone, being polite and helpful, and identifying the business properly. It might also include answering before a designated number of rings or stating something about a current promotion. Something as simple as, "Thank you for calling ACME, this is Jim speaking. How may I help you?" would help to avoid possible problems. Write down the proper greeting and post it by every phone. Have a direct conversation with each employee to make them aware of this greeting and its importance. Make sure that proper phone etiquette is understood as a job responsibility shared by anyone who uses the phone. In time it should become a force of habit—but this is one habit the business owner must carefully cultivate and occasionally monitor.
- **Answer Your Voicemail and Messages.** If a customer leaves a voicemail or a message on your business' phone, make sure to respond promptly. Even if it is only to say, "We don't know yet, but we're working on it for you," you will make the customer feel better knowing they are not being ignored.
- **Consider an Answering Service.** Most customers tend to respond better to human interaction, so you might consider a professional answering service to handle after-hours calls. Another possibility (depending on your business type) might be to forward after-hours calls to a different phone, like a cellular or a home phone.
- **Keep it Simple.** If a customer is calling your place of business, they obviously have something to say or to ask you. Don't make them wait through a scripted sales pitch that takes 2 minutes—keep the greetings simple, and let the customer talk. This is also true for your recorded messages, or if you have a phone tree and offer multiple options for each call. If a call is going to be automatically routed to a recorded message, eliminate or limit the number of rings prior to connection.

Depending on the size of your business and the number of people who might answer the phone, it sometimes makes sense to occasionally call to see what your customers would hear. Spot-checking is part of the owner's job and will help to ensure consistency.

In a small business, a customer's first impression can literally mean the difference between success and failure. Answering the phone properly when they call you is a very simple way to start off on the right foot.

---

**THIS IS NOT INVESTMENT, TAX OR LEGAL ADVICE. Consult with a financial advisor, accountant or attorney before making important decisions in these areas.**