

How to Turn Your Answering Machine Into a Selling Machine

You can't totally eliminate a caller's disappointment with getting your answering machine instead of a live person, but you can certainly improve your customers' call-in experience by offering useful information and, of course, rewarding them for calling. For a marginal cost of zero, your humble answering machine can help generate *continuing business from an ever-increasing population of regular customers*.

Instead of having a message your callers have heard a million times before ("Sorry we missed you..." or, "Your call is important to us..."), how about something like this:

"Hi! I'm Evan Smith, owner of Valley Nursery. Our business hours are 9am to 5:30pm, Tuesday through Friday and 9am to 4pm Saturday and Sunday. We're closed Mondays. To leave a message, press 1. For driving directions, press 2. To make up for missing your call, I'd like to offer you a gift. Visit ValleyNurseryDeals.com to print a discount coupon for our current special offer. We have a new discount deal every week, so check back often. Thank you for calling Valley Nursery."

By simply changing the outgoing message on his answering machine, Mr. Smith has turned caller disappointment into a low-key but powerful sales opportunity by:

- Extending his personal gratitude and enhancing credibility by addressing callers himself;
- Clearly stating their hours of operation at the beginning of the message;
- Offering driving directions (hardly anyone does this); and last but certainly not least
- Rewarding them with a discount coupon.

This personal approach enables Mr. Smith to deliver a competition-killing message to his callers, which is this: "I love my customers!" *The psychology of this is 100% positive.*

Now, Mr. Smith's answering machine is earning its keep as a productive component of his overall plan for increasing sales. By encouraging his callers to visit his coupon page, he's giving himself many more selling opportunities. As you know, by linking to other pages, he can display LOTS of information and images. Since he's in the type of business where every photograph can be a miniature sales brochure, he should display plenty of photographs of great garden ideas, including everything from low-cost makeovers to high-end projects. He can also offer all types of how-to articles along with testimonials from happy customers. And, the weekly discount coupons provide incentive for taking prompt action.

To limit the number of discount coupons floating around out there, Mr. Smith changes the expiration date on them weekly so they're good only for a limited period. This also adds urgency to the discount offer, which is always a good idea.

By recording this new outgoing message, Mr. Smith's answering machine continually trains and encourages every caller to regularly visit his deal page and print the coupons. On the coupon

page is a photograph of the front of his business, his address and phone number, driving directions and, if necessary, parking suggestions. He wants to make sure he's not violating business rule number one, which is to *assure that doing business with him is as simple and easy as possible*.

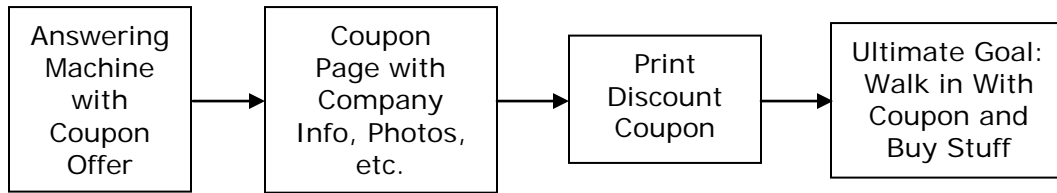


Diagram of Valley Nursery's Answering Machine Strategy
(Keep them moving toward your front door!)

After thinking about employing this technique he realized, that when it comes to enticing new customers into his business, his answering machine will be much more productive than his business card will ever be... which gave him another idea. What if, instead of having business cards in a passive display next to his cash registers, he prints bookmarks and has his employees give one to every customer as they leave. Bookmarks are handy and are far more likely to be kept and used than a common business card. On the bookmark is all the usual information, of course, but it also contains the main call to action which is his standing invitation to visit ValleyNurseryDeals.com to view and print the weekly discount coupon.

At this point, both his answering machine and his bookmarks are training his customers to pay regular visits to ValleyNurseryDeals.com. Over time, he may develop other ideas for steering people to his landing page. When you think about it, he's limited only by his imagination. Maybe he'll test some radio ads in the spring or target certain neighborhoods with a post card mailing, but for now, he's doing a heck of a lot of sales promotion on a tiny budget.

When he first had this idea, he realized his discount coupon page would become the centerpiece of his new strategy for growing his business. His prospective and existing customers will be going to this page all the time. This made it critically important that he make it as easy as possible for them to go online and find it very quickly. That's why he reserved another domain name dedicated to his coupon page. The separate domain name enables his customer to bypass all the usual website content and go straight to his coupon page.

He can have a multi-page PDF document or link separate PDF pages together. Again, he's limited only by his imagination. The goal, as always, is to make it as easy as possible for his customers to view and print the information and motivate them to take action.

Note: PDF pages are ideal for the purpose described in this article and illustrated in the diagram above. A PDF, connected directly to a domain name, can contain one or more pages. Also, separate PDF files can be linked from the opening or home page with a list of links that function just like a menu system on a conventional website. The main difference is that PDF pages are easy to create, can be saved on the visitors' local hard drives and/or printed exactly as they appear online.

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