

First Impressions-Make Them Count

By Joanne Victoria

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FIRST IMPRESSIONS-Make Them Count

When is the first time that you give any idea of who you really are and what you really do for your potential clients, customers or prospects?

One important way is the telephone. You use phones everyday, but do you know the most efficient procedures for using this instrument as a marketing tool?

Every call you make and receive is a sales opportunity.

If you are a sole proprietor and the only individual who answers the telephone, use the call as a marketing tool for advertising your services. Whether voice mail or an answering machine, have your message state who you are, what you do and who you do it for.

Tell people how to contact you. You can provide your fax number, your pager, your cell phone, and your e-mail address as a method for communication.

If someone else answers your telephone, decide that the method used represents how you want the world to view you. Old ways no longer apply, especially if you are a service provider. Attorneys and doctors have their phones answered by label, i.e., "Doctor's office" or by the telephone number, "421-3456". Make it more user friendly so people will want to buy your services.

The first contact someone has with your office must be impeccable. Your voice should be friendly and the responses must be professional. No matter what you provide, it's all about sales.

The surprise comes when you're put on hold without even knowing why!

Callers should only be put on hold if they give permission. It may sound a little farfetched to ask a caller if they are able to hold, but it's vital. When someone says to you "Please hold", they are not creating a relationship; they are ordering you to do something you may not be able to do.

On the other hand, if someone says, "Are you able to hold?" you have a choice. Say 'Yes' and it's difficult to complain about being on hold unless you go into what is called "Ignore". Ignore is what I call being on hold for over a minute without someone getting back to you.

If you say you are unable to hold, you remain in charge of your time and environment. You can then choose to call back when it works for you.

It's also quite acceptable for a receptionist to ask a customer if they can be called back. This avoids 'Hold Hell' and the caller feels taken care of.

Change your message frequently. Some people change messages daily, others have a different routine. Your voice needs to be energetic and you have to hear that smile. Get a mirror, place it on your desk, take a deep breath, smile and then pick up the telephone.

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Joanne Victoria is a Northern California writer who works with independent professionals and professional practice and small business owners who want to build their practice and business and still stay true to themselves.

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