

# First Impressions Count!

By Anne M. Obarski

First Impressions Count!

Anne M. Obarski  
anne@merchandiseconcepts.com

Merchandise Concepts <http://www.merchandiseconcepts.com>

It's not what you say it is how you say it? I am sure you have heard that statement before. In the communication industry that is so true. What makes one TV newscaster more enjoyable to listen to? Which talk show host do you like to watch?

Our communication styles are all different but there are some techniques that can help us be the one our audience wants to listen to.

Voice mail messages:

Most of us have at least one phone that we have produced a message on that we want our listeners to hear. Some of the messages are funny, some are businesslike and some are pre-recorded.

If you are a business owner, your message should represent your company and it's brand. Branding is what successful companies do best.

When I say Intel, you should automatically hear the four tones associated with Intel Pentium processors. If I say, Aflac, and you have seen their "duck" commercials, you might start mimicking the duck, saying, Aflac,Aflac. "You've got mail" is AOL, period. "We want to see you smile", McDonalds.

So what do your customers hear when they call you. If they get a voice mail message, how does it represent your company? Is it friendly, upbeat, to the point? Or does it sound like the person who recorded the message was forced to do this pathetic job. Do yourself a favor, call your own company and ask yourself, "Does this sound like a company I would like to know more about?" Does this message peak my interest and communicate professionalism.

If you are unsure if it does either, try re-doing your voice mail messages with the following 2 techniques in mind.

1. Develop a 30-second commercial.

Make it intriguing enough that people calling will want to leave a message and genuinely want to talk to someone. If the caller gets off the phone with a smile on their face or better yet, repeats your message to someone else, that is a good thing!

A speaker friend of mine has a very nice message that says, "As you can imagine my business frequently takes me out of the office. I would like to talk with you about my seminars and consulting on the art of living well, so please leave me a message....."

You have learned two things from this message, one she is a busy person working with many clients. Even if she isn't busy it gives the impression she is. The second thing you learned is that she speaks about the "Art of living well". I think I would call her back just to learn a few tips, wouldn't you??

My husband, on the other hand hates leaving messages of any kind, for anyone. If he has to call the house he leaves a message like this, "Someone call me back pleeeeeeeaaaaaaase."

No hello, no hope you're having a good day, just a very impatient sounding message.

When I get that message, I realize I need to make a return phone call, but I will admit it is out of necessity not desire. Everyone knows how to leave a message; the question is do you know how to leave it in such a way as the other person makes it a priority to call you back!

What can you say in your message that will communicate to your clients and potential clients that you are the one they should be doing business with?

Spend quality time perfecting it and then practice it over and over.

This same message should be the "commercial" you say when you attend networking functions or simply for the times when someone asks, "what do you do?"

2. Say it like you mean it!

"I love you"! Three simple words but when individually spoken with a different inflection, can be received differently by the listener.

Try emphasizing the word "I" first. I love you. That sentence makes you feel as though there is at least one person in the world who does!

Try emphasizing the word, love. I love you. Umm! That is romantic! Lastly, emphasize the word, you.

I love you! No question about who you love.

Then there is the person who says those three words in a very monotone, non-expressive way. I love you. This person has said those same three words for 30 years and if the feeling changes they'll let you know.

So how do you get the expression in your voice? You practice the following vocal skills.

1. Take a deep breathe just before you start speaking and start speaking on the exhale. This gives you full lung capacity and a solid sounding voice.

2. As you practice your "commercial", decide which words need emphasizing and where you should pause. Give "life" to your words.

People can make a decision of whether or not they want to do business with a company based on how someone answers the phone. All employees, no matter what level, should be taught how to answer the phone properly. There should be a unique and required way to do that, and it should be a part of an employee-training program.

Answering the phone is different than greeting a customer face to face. When you greet someone face to face, you notice body language, eye contact and feel energy. When you answer the phone, the energy and excitement must be created. The way to create that is with voice inflection and a unique opening greeting.

Let's look at this example.

"Thank you for calling the ABC company, how may I direct your call?" Simple, straightforward and informs you that you dialed the correct number. Nothing unique, nothing to make you say, wow! If there is no inflection in the person's voice who answered the phone, I may feel like an interruption in their day or worse yet, that I have reached the evil "gatekeeper" who has no intention helping me get to the correct person for fear I may "want" something of them or their company!

Let's get creative. "Good morning, this is Janice, your information resource at the ABC Company. How can I make your call more efficient today?"

Now choose where to make the inflections. Start with a deep breath and a smile on your face! " Good morning, this is Janice, you information resource at the ABC company. How can I make your call more efficient today?"

By creating a unique greeting with increased inflections the caller senses the energy and desire to be helped through better communication skills.

To finish the process let's assume Janice has to forward the call. Janice can win the caller over by saying, "it would be a pleasure to transfer you"!

Is the communication process over at this point? No! The next person who answers the phone should communicate the same positive communication skills that were established by the person who initially answered the phone. As mom always said, "first impressions count"!

Leaving a message that gets returned:

Leaving a voice mail message for someone is a daily practice. I find that many times, it is not my first choice. I want to speak to a live person. I dislike it when an operator is clearly screening someone's calls and says, "They aren't in right now, would you like their voice mail?" I think it is normal to say to yourself, "Now what do I say in less than a minute that will peak their desire to call me back?" How do you do that? Here are 3 tips!

1. Sound very disappointed that you didn't get to talk to them personally.
2. Tell them very briefly why you would like to talk to them, but leave something out.
3. Lastly, say, "I really have something additionally I need your input on but I need to hear your answer, personally.
4. Give accurate times that you can be reached, but also mention if you don't hear from them in a few days, you will try back again.

What is the impression you make on the phone and in person? Is it one of professionalism? Is it one of sincere interest in the other person? Is there genuineness in your voice? Remember that it isn't what you say as much as it is how you say it.

Anne M. Obarski is the "Eye on Retail Performance". She is an author, professional speaker, retail consultant and Executive Director of Merchandise Concepts. Anne works with companies who are performance, profit and people focused and helps leaders see their businesses through their customers' eyes. Anne's mystery shoppers have secretly "snooped" over 2000 stores searching for excellence in customer service. Reach Anne at [www.merchandisearch.com](http://www.merchandisearch.com) or <mailto:anne@merchandisearch.com>

[Get-Articles.com](http://www.get-articles.com) : 1000's of reprintable business and internet marketing-related articles.

[Submit your article for reprint.](#)