

Business Voicemail Goes Unanswered

Most callers would rather hang up than leave a message.

By Leonard Klie - Posted Nov 1, 2014

With Web- and mobile-based communications taking over as the dominant means of contact for many customers, voicemail is on its way out. Quite simply, consumers have found better ways to stay in touch.

Recent statistics from *Forbes* magazine show that 80 percent of callers sent to voicemail do not leave messages because they don't think they'll even be heard.

Other surveys show different numbers. Speech technology vendor Nuance Communications recently conducted a survey with Research Now and discovered that 95 percent of those polled find text messaging more convenient than voicemail.

Adam Boalt, CEO of LiveAnswer, a provider of phone support services for small and midsize businesses, puts the voicemail abandonment rate at between 50 percent and 75 percent, depending on the type of business.

"Everyone is looking for instant gratification, and if you can't provide that...a lot of times they'll simply hang up," he says. "Companies are losing a lot of business opportunities because people are not leaving them messages. "

It's as much a truth with residential phone service as it is with business communications, though those numbers are much lower. Voice over Internet Protocol (VoIP) phone service provider Vonage reported in April that voicemail deposits among its residential customers had dropped by 8 percent since October 2013, and retrieved messages were down 14 percent.

In both the consumer and business world, it's becoming more common to hear voicemail prompts that warn callers that their messages might not be heard for a while and suggest that they send a text message or email instead.

According to Nuance's research, most voicemail messages languish for at least eight hours before they are heard.

To get voicemail messages to their intended recipients faster, many speech-to-text providers now offer voicemail transcription services. Nuance is one such company, and Dan Faulkner, its senior vice president of mobile, says the service is widely popular. "We find that the voicemail-to-text service is incredibly sticky," he said in a recent interview with *Speech Technology* magazine. "When people get it, they don't listen to voicemails anymore."

But even that has its limits. "Voicemail transcription still requires customers to leave a message, and they're just not doing that," Boalt says.

That's why he suggests having a live person available to answer the phone. "Less than 1 percent of the people will hang up on a live person," he says.