



10 Principles of Radio Advertising that Apply to Effective Voice Mail

By, David E. Hauer

Here are some principles from the “science” of radio advertising that we think can make your voice mail “commercial” more effective.

1. Immediately link specific benefits directly to the listener’s needs.

Remember, you only have a few precious seconds to create interest. Attention spans are short in general, and even shorter when people are listening on the telephone. Hence the listener should receive the most important details early in the message when his or her listening is at peak efficiency. For example, if I’m selling tax free municipal bonds, I want to be able to relate the specific benefit of tax free to the buyers need to save money on taxes right up front before I speak about anything else.

2. Picture your target market.

Think about whom you are calling. Radio advertising always identifies the target market and then communicates as if that customer was standing right in front of the announcer. That’s what your voice mail message should do, too. It should convey all the personality and enthusiasm you invest when a person is right there in front of you. Too often we forget that the person replaying his or her messages later will be listening as though you were communicating the information in person. If your voice mail message sounds mechanical, unenthusiastic and lacks conviction, this will obviously have a negative impact on the information being communicated. Too many voice mail messages sound like recordings themselves - almost as though one machine was talking to another machine.

3. Provide the listener with an outline of your message.

If you have several points to communicate and some are more actionable or more important than others are, tell the listener up front. This will help position your thoughts and manage the listener's expectations. Radio uses this technique when the product being sold has information that the consumer needs to know but is not the compelling reason to buy the product.

4. Summarize your single most important point at the end of the message.

Assuming the listener has been sufficiently interested to stay tuned to this point, summarizing your key point will be the last words he or she hears before hanging up. This can be very helpful towards message retention. How many commercials have you heard that say at the conclusion, "so, remember..."

5. Stand out.

You must be able to break through the threshold of awareness by using any intelligent means at your disposal. Humor or irreverence, if appropriate, can be an excellent tool to distinguish yourself from the host of other calls that the listener might have received. In advertising, we refer to overused words or phrases like "great" or "new and improved" as "invisible" copy because no one pays any attention to these phrases. In your voice mail message, using unusual words or phrases that are not "invisible" from over use is another way to sound different. Before making the call, think of how your message can be worded to maximize the chance of breaking through the threshold of awareness.

6. Use the person's name in your message at the very beginning of the communication.

This goes a long way to personalizing the message. It also helps you to visualize whom you are talking to so that your voice is more user friendly. Don't be afraid to use their name several times during the course of the message, either. Radio doesn't have this luxury so it does the next best thing by describing the prospect (e.g., "So, if you own a car..." or "Remember, if you have a problem with weight...")

7. Leave your phone number at the beginning and at the end of the message, if possible.

Leaving your number at the beginning prevents this information from getting lost if the listener does not stay with your message to the end. In the event that the listener does stay to the end, leaving your number at the close provides the information without having to listen to the entire message again.

A radio commercial can leave a phone number to call as many as 6 times in a 30 second spot because it assumes that the listener is not walking around with a pencil and paper immediately at hand.

8. Don't read from a prepared script.

This might work in radio advertising but, unless you are a professional voice-over announcer, you are destined to sound like a bad actor. Rather, write down some key words or phrases you want to say and then deliver the message extemporaneously. It will almost always sound more convincing and genuine.

9. Sound confident.

This may sound like a “no brainer” but, after making several calls in a short period of time that result in voice mail, you often begin to sound defeated. See for yourself the next time that you are in this type of situation. Fight the tendency to sound like you are frustrated and come on sounding confident that your message will be just as well received as if you were actually speaking to the person live.

10. Use short sentences.

It is easy to sound unfocused and meandering when there is no one on the other end of the phone with whom to interact. A way to fight this tendency is to use short, punchy statements that won't confuse your listener. In advertising, this technique is called “headlining” and is used to ensure that the radio message isn't confusing. Imagine trying to pay attention to the average lawyer's run-on sentence if you were trying to understand it from a message on voice mail.

Effective voice mail selling, like good radio advertising, needs thoughtful planning and skillful execution to break through the listener's threshold of awareness. You have a precious few seconds at the beginning of a voice mail message where you are guaranteed an audience. Take advantage of this phenomenon by applying all the communication techniques at your command to keep that voice mail listener tuned in, turned on and acting on your advice. The results may be astounding!