



Alternate Access Quarterly Newsletter

Volume 11, Issue 2

April—June 2011

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Alternate Access will be closed on the following holiday:

July 4, 2011

The VoIP Communication Triumvirate: Planning Ahead for a Positive VoIP Experience Part III – Your Phone System

We complete this series by exploring the steps you can take at each stage of the life of your phone system to ensure the highest return on your investment.

Get the Most Benefit Out of your Phone System

Your phone system is a strategic asset for your business. Make that asset work for you by following two requirements:

- 1) Set up the system to take advantage of its capabilities.
- 2) Use the capabilities of the system.

There are several steps you can take to ensure that your system is set up to optimally use all capabilities. At the outset each user should properly record a professional greeting and voice title. Also, it is best to set a company standard for passwords and require all users to set their unique passwords based on the standard.

Finally, when you purchase your system, your vendor should set up an auto attendant, work groups and call routing paths for you to ensure calls land where needed. Alternate Access provides this service to all new customers. If your needs change over time, be sure to update your routing structure (Alternate Access can help you or do this for you) so that it is most efficient for your business needs.

Alternate Access also offers its customers a variety of resources to further their phone system knowledge. For instance, we offer new user and refresher training courses for the phone and graphical user interfaces of our phone system products. These courses ensure that you and your staff are using the system's full capabilities from day one, and are helpful if you have new employees coming on board who need to be trained.

We also distribute a monthly e-newsletter to all customers, providing tips that offer suggestions to use their VoIP phone system more efficiently to enhance customer service, increase employee productivity and reduce operational costs. Also, most of our phone systems offer additional knowledge resources, such as "Tip of the Day" features or online help components.

Whatever type of resources are available to you, encourage your staff to share their knowledge with each other. The more you use features of your phone system, the better it will serve your specific business needs.

Finally, listen to your staff and customers. Sometimes it is the silence that tells us what we need to know. If callers are getting through to the right person efficiently; if your staff

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Using Your Phone System to Drive Customer Loyalty

Recent studies have indicated that people will spend 9% to 10% more with companies that they believe provide excellent customer service. That extra expenditure can add up to make a big difference in revenue, especially in today's economy. So it makes sense that every business would strive to deliver excellent customer service.



The downside is that while up to 80% of businesses believe they are doing just that, only 20% of their customers share that opinion. Alternate Access can help you gain an edge in creating and maintaining customer loyalty. Our VoIP phone systems can help you enhance customer service, providing today's customers the instant assistance they crave – and making you a customer service superstar.

Customer Service Starts with Easy Navigation

It may seem like common sense, but a properly implemented auto attendant is the first step to providing excellent customer service. Even if your business uses a receptionist to answer all incoming calls there are times when, during evenings or when call volumes peak, customers will reach your auto attendant. When they do, your auto attendant should help them locate the correct person or department quickly and easily.

At installation, Alternate Access verifies that your auto attendant provides easy options for your customers. We also encourage you to make sure all employees record their own voice titles, so that they can be located in your company directory via either first or last name. A proper voice title, recorded in the employee's voice, also confirms to the caller that he or she has reached the correct person.

Your auto attendant can be the first impression your business makes. Helping customers easily navigate your business lays the foundation for an excellent customer service experience.

Customers Crave Accessibility, So Make Your Business Accessible

Depending on the Alternate Access phone system, users have the ability to use call forwarding and/or call routing to enhance their customers' experience. Both increase the success of first-time connections with callers and reduce instances of phone tag.

Call forwarding sends all of a user's incoming calls to another phone number, which is a great way to avoid missed calls when working in the office but at another desk. Calls come directly to the number to which you are forwarding, such as the conference room or another desk. Calls can also be forwarded to phone numbers outside of the office, such as cell phones.

Call routing is available on select phone systems, and allows users to maintain the call-handling capability of the system no matter where the call is routed. It also offers the option to have the system locate a user at more than one location. Like call forwarding, when a call is routed to another number, it also goes directly to the new location. In this case, however, if the user needs to transfer the caller back to someone in your office, that can be accomplished as well.

Additionally, some systems include functionality to create a routing list that directs the phone system to call a user at multiple locations, including a desk phone, mobile number or other external numbers, simultaneously or in sequence. Callers can be given the option to wait while the system locates the user or to leave a message at any point during the search.

Certain businesses may also consider implementing skills-based call routing to up the customer service ante. Skills-based call routing enables managers to automatically send callers to an available employee or call center agent with the right skills to best handle that caller's needs. For example, Spanish-speaking customers could be directed only to employees who speak Spanish. Or, all calls from specific customers could automatically route to the corresponding account managers. The caller reaches the employee most capable of quickly and correctly handling them.

Using some or all of these features gives customers the feeling that your business is more accessible, as well as putting them in contact with the "expert" at your business that can manage their needs or requests quickly.

Customers Feel Like VIPs When Information Is at Your Fingertips

Nothing takes the place of being prepared when a customer or prospect calls you. Alternate Access phone systems enable users to see the caller ID information for incoming calls, either via the phone screen or a computer screen pop. That information alone may allow employees to pull a file needed for the customer or to alert another employee that their expertise may be needed during the call.



In some cases, Alternate Access has implemented custom projects integrating CRM and accounting applications with our customer's phone systems to help provide their customers a top-notch experience. By linking a phone system solution to a CRM, additional screen pops that provide vital information about the caller to the agent or employee can be available. Screen pops are

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returns calls on a timely basis; if your sales people are making or taking the requisite number of calls—then you can be assured that your communication asset is working for you.

Assessing Older Systems for Life Expectancy

If your phone system server is over 3 years old, it may be time for an evaluation to determine how soon a complete system upgrade is required. Like all technology, as your phone system ages the chance of system failure increases, markedly. Furthermore, the telephony boards in many older systems are being retired, making the boards and their replacement parts no longer available. So, if these boards fail for any reason, you may not be able to replace or repair them in a timely manner – or worse, at all. Why get stuck? Avoid costly repairs and the potential of extended downtime. Be proactive in selecting and implementing new technology before you are caught in a jam.

Of course, if you are facing an upgrade, you will want to choose a system and supporting hardware that meets your business needs today and provides room for future growth. Alternate Access takes the time to learn your business needs, and our staff will help you select the best phone system to reach an optimal return on your business investment – whether you are a small operation in a single office, a multi-site business requiring interconnectivity, or a bustling call center with 100 agents.

Realizing How VoIP Enhances Your Total Business

VoIP phone systems in general offer a breadth of functionality that traditional phone systems do not. Features that cost extra on traditional systems, such as unified messaging, are integrated into VoIP systems – providing users increased

functionality at a fraction of the cost.

Businesses with VoIP also experience greater flexibility in how they access their phone system. Whether working from your company's headquarters, your home office, a laptop softphone, or a cell or other phone while traveling, VoIP gives you access to your system's functionality wherever you are located.

A VoIP phone system will impact all areas of your business – from the receptionist to the sales team to the most top-level executive. So, no matter the age of your system, follow the recommendations in this article to make sure you are getting the biggest bang for your buck across the board.

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especially helpful, but not limited to, call centers, where they can indicate whether the caller is a first-time customer or a repeat customer, what products the customer has purchased in the past and even whether they have an account balance with your company.

Having useful customer information at your fingertips helps you anticipate a customer's needs and assist them more quickly and professionally – leaving them satisfied with your business and more likely to return.

Following these best practices will help ensure your customers reach the right person the first time – every time! To learn more about how an Alternate Access phone system can help your business drive customer loyalty, contact us today at 919-831-1860.