

Is An Answering Service A Good Idea?



Source: www.TurfMagazine.com

What is the best way to handle incoming calls from potential clients when you are busy working in the field? Is an answering service the answer? Or is it better to hire an administrative person to field the calls? Turf members of discuss the pros and cons and suggest other ways to handle those calls.

Question:

inzane:

I am going to be looking for an answering service for next spring. It has been hard to manage calls on my busy days, so many calls go to voice mail at times, and I know this is hurting me because I'm missing out on potential sales. I have been trying to get to a point where my wife can leave her job and stay in the office and answer the phone, however that may not be an option anytime soon. I'm wondering if any of you who use an answering service can give me an idea of what the costs are and how they have worked out for you? I'd really like to find a service that will be able to take in the leads for me and qualify them based on what services they are looking for. During spring and summer, there are days where I can sit here and take call after call from customers wanting mowing, and at the end of the day I'll sit here returning all my calls to tell people I don't mow. Between that and all the junk calls I get all day long, my voice mail fills up quick when I'm not able to answer the phone, and sometimes the important calls are getting lost. I guess I could also try to find an app for my smartphone that might help better manage them.

Answers:

gusbuster:

There are so many different choices out there nowadays compared to just a year ago.

When I didn't have the time to answer calls, I had a live operator who talked to the client and then paged me the number. A couple of years later, I had a paging system, so you could get a short blurb about what the client wanted. Now, with smartphones you can get an email, text or phone call when a client calls.

It really doesn't matter if it's a live person, as long as you return the call in a timely manner. If you can't call them back ASAP, try an hour or two later or the next evening. That's how you keep current and potential clients happy.

RSK Property Maintenance:

An answering service is the same as them leaving a voice mail, but they talk to someone. No different really. Someone answers the phone, but they are still leaving a message and you are still returning a call. I wouldn't do it. It's a waste of money in my opinion. I have several friends who make \$300,000 to \$500,000 a year, some even more, and they don't use an answering service, just a personal cell phone number or home phone, and they return calls when they get to the phone and do estimates at night. It seems to work well, and there's no middle person involved.

grandview (2006):

I've been using one for a couple of years. I like it because people who are interested will leave their name and number, but tire kickers don't. If they take a message, it gets emailed to me with info. Even now my business number is forwarded to my cell, and if I don't pick up then it goes to the service. And it knocks down a lot of sales calls, too.

Kawizk62003:

I have been using ear buds, the iPhone ones, the last few weeks. I started using them for music when I was aerating, as it made it easier to jam out and get the jobs done. When the phone rings, I can shut off whatever machine I am using and answer the phone. It hurts productivity a little, but I have made the sales. I only get two or three calls a day though. If it was ringing off the hook, I wouldn't do it. Then again, if your phone is that busy, there should be enough work to hire an office person.

inzane:

Well, \$100 or so a month for an answering service sounds a lot better than hiring an office person to pay by the hour just to answer the phone. It just depends on how the answering service handles the calls and whether or not it would be worth it, so I'll be trying it for a month or two next spring to see what happens. I prefer my phone to be answered by a person. I think if they sound like part of the business then the potential client will be more likely to leave the info I need to provide an estimate. I noticed with my headset I spent less time working and listen to tunes, and more time answering calls. I leave it in the truck now because I have no time for that. I return calls when I get back in the truck.

The mistake I made was not calling back customers who wanted services I didn't do, so I ended up with an ugly one-star review on a big review site because of that. It doesn't look good on my part, and I probably deserved it because I was trying to be a professional lawn service and should have at least called somebody back who took the time to call me. I'm trying to compete with Scotts, TruGreen, etc., and they are calling and getting a voice mail. That's probably not going to help my game at all. I keep thinking that a good answering service may help with weeding out the calls and getting the leads to me that I need to grow my business and cutting down on calling people back just to let them know that I don't do this and don't do that. While the answering service is probably not the "best" thing to do, it would seem to be better than how I'm doing it. I'm also holding out maybe one more season so my wife can stay home and answer the phones and deal with that side of the business.

CNYScapes:

I am also considering an answering service for this spring if I don't hire someone. I looked into a few and it looked like they started at \$150 a month, and that was not for very many minutes. I think it may have been 150 minutes. I can easily see exceeding that during peak season. It could get higher than the cost of a secretary.

grandview (2006):

Mine starts at \$70 a month for an hour, and goes up and down each month.

whiffyspark:

I don't have a limit on minutes. It's based on how many incoming calls you have each month, but if you go over there's no charge. It's not a "big" company, but it's much better. They actually have a login for me and can add the client, schedule, charge cards, etc. Not all answering services are the same. Mine is basically a virtual office. Mine will even make outgoing calls for me, and I can have them call customers, vendors, etc.

greenfire:

An answering service is way better than voice mail. Half of the first-time callers will hang up before leaving a voice mail, and therefore losing sales. If someone answers 24/7 the caller will be impressed and will leave their info because they will be asked for it by a person. Other benefits are that you are getting an email with all the details spelled out. No listening to the voicemail three times trying to figure out what the person is saying. You will also have their preferred contact method, phone numbers, etc., spelled out. Also it's easier to organize/prioritize your messages looking at them on a screen. In short, the answering service is going to take care of all the clerical details. If you only get two or three calls a day, it's probably not worth it. I'm talking about a higher volume.

Joe Shooner:

I could go either way. I am probably more likely to leave information with an

answering service. Almost anyone with a little bit of comprehension will realize it's an answering service. Trust me, you can tell if you're calling an answering service phone room versus calling the office manager/receptionist. In that vein, I personally get annoyed when I get an answering service, because even though it is a real person, that person will basically never be able to help you, and that's not ideal. If you are never going to answer your phone, it's better than voice mail, but I don't think anyone should believe that the caller is fooled.