

VOICE-MAIL GENERAL POLICY

PURPOSE

To establish procedures for City departments and individual employees using electronic voice-mail to answer incoming telephone calls.

BACKGROUND

As a service organization, the City must be responsive to the needs and requests of its residents and customers. The telephone is often the first, and sometimes the only contact members of the public have with the City. It is important that telephone inquiries be handled promptly and courteously by City staff. However, the City of Newport Beach is striving to increase its effectiveness to accommodate ever-increasing service demands with fewer City employees. Voice-mail and automated telephony applications can increase efficiency and effectiveness by eliminating "telephone tag," busy signals and unanswered lines, and can provide speedier delivery of routine information.

Unfortunately, sometimes voice-mail can be impersonal, and at times frustrating for the caller, especially if the system has long complicated messages and unending loops. This policy sets forth the procedures and guidelines to avoid these common voice-mail problems.

DEFINITIONS

- A. Voice-Mail. An electronic system to receive, send, transfer or store telephone calls using individual "mail boxes" for each employee or department. It is the goal of the City to respond to voicemails within 24 hours of the date received.
- B. Automated Attendant. An automated voice mail application that routes call to personnel within a department or provides scripted information in the absence of a staffed receptionist position.
- C. Interactive Voice Response (IVR). An integrated computer controlled, unattended voice application capable of providing valuable information based on caller input 24 hours per day, seven days per week. Types of information currently available include checking plan check status, scheduling permit inspections, and paying bills and fees using a credit card.

- D. Automated Citizens Information System. An unattended IVR based telephony application designed to provide primarily static information to callers as well as to staff members. Pre-recorded information includes answers to most frequently asked questions (FAQ's) and offers FAX back on demand functionality.

GUIDELINES

Use of the voice-mail system by City employees shall be governed by the following guidelines:

- A. Most City department and division general telephone lines should be answered by a receptionist during City business hours.

Only under unusual circumstances shall these lines be routed through the voice-mail auto attendant application. If the assigned receptionist is unavailable at any time during City operating hours, the department shall make an effort to assign a back-up receptionist to answer incoming calls. In the event that this is not possible, calls may be routed to the voice-mail auto attendant application. The application will route callers to the appropriate person and will further provide an option for the caller to be directed to a live answering person by selecting "0".

All exceptions to this policy shall be approved by the City Manager or Department Head prior to implementation. Exceptions to this policy are the following:

1. ACIS. The Automated Citizens Information System provides unattended pre-recorded information 24x7 and is updated when necessary by the Telecommunications Division and/or the responsible Department or Division.
 2. IVR. The Interactive Voice Response system provides unattended access to applications such as plan check and permits status, inspection scheduling, account balances, and facilitates credit card payments for fees and services.
- B. Calls transferred to or made directly to an employee's direct phone line shall be answered promptly, if at all possible.

Employees shall attempt to answer phone calls as they arrive and shall not use voice-mail to screen calls. Employees otherwise engaged in meetings or priority

work may use voice-mail to answer calls, with the intent to return the calls as soon as possible.

- C. City employees shall retrieve voice-mail messages frequently and promptly.

Employees shall listen to their voice-mail messages at regular intervals throughout the workday. Remote retrieval when an employee is outside City Hall is also possible and shall be used when out of the office for extended time periods. If an employee is traveling or on leave, he/she shall record a voice-mail message informing the caller when the employee will return to work.

- D. A caller shall not be transferred to a voice-mail box without his/her specific consent.

Receptionists answering general City phone lines shall not automatically transfer callers to an individual's voice-mail box without the caller's consent. No individual employee telephone extensions shall automatically be forwarded to an individual's mailbox, except as provided for under Guideline A above. Callers for an unavailable employee shall be asked if they want to leave a message with the person answering the call or if they want to be connected to that employee's voice-mail message box.

- E. All callers transferred to City voice-mail shall have the option of transferring to a live operator at any time during the voice-mail message.

All voice-mail messages should end with the following option: "If you need to speak to someone immediately, please press '0'."

IMPLEMENTATION AND OPERATION

Overall control and administration of the system is the responsibility of the Telecommunications Division of the Administrative Services Department. The Telecommunications Division shall assist each department with the design and installation of their individual programs, consistent with the following:

- A. Each department shall develop implementation plans, including assignment of mailboxes, call routing and sequencing, message scripting and employee training for review and approval by the Telecommunications Division. Plans shall be phased in during a test period of at least one month.

- B. All messages on any voice-mail device shall be scripted consistent with attached examples. Whenever possible, messages will be recorded by a selected narrator with special voice skills.
- C. All employees shall receive both initial and on-going training in the use of voice-mail.
- D. The Telecommunications Division shall produce periodic management and usage reports on the use of the system, including a summary of any complaints or problems.
- E. Additions, deletions and changes to the system must be requested by department directors or their designee and approved by the Telecommunications Division. However, individual mailbox messages may be altered in accord with the attached examples.
- F. The voice-mail system is the property of the City and is to be used only for City business. As such, all voice mail is subject to monitoring and discovery.

[Attachment - Examples of Voice Mailbox Greetings]

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