

# 11

# Reasons Why Property Managers Should Use an Answering Service



# When problems arise, your tenants want solutions – now.

**W**hen the doors of your office close at the end of the day, business does not stop. In fact, in the field of property management, the action typically picks up when your residents come home from their jobs to find problems. When they begin to cook and the oven won't heat, when they put a load of clothes in the washer and water leaks out, when they flush the toilet and ... well, *you know*.

When problems arise, your tenants want solutions – *now*.

Residents in the midst of a crisis are already upset; they do not want to tell their story to a voicemail system and wonder if and when anyone will hear their plea for help. They do not want to send a text and wait for an answer, and they certainly do not want to go to a website and type in a message. They want to talk to a person – *now*.

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Many property owners and managers respond by having their maintenance engineers carry pagers or smartphones. By doing this, they can receive texts from residents if something goes wrong and quickly respond. This works sometimes, but not all the time. Your maintenance people will still receive non-emergency messages (which they *hate*) – but more importantly, there is often no documentation regarding the message, so it does not protect your community.

## Below are 11 of the best reasons for trusting your business calls – daytime and after-hours – to a telephone answering service.

# 1

## Callers Want to Talk to a Person



Recent statistics from *Forbes* magazine show that 80% of callers sent to voicemail do not leave messages. No one likes voicemail! People feel voicemail messages will never be heard or returned and leaving them in limbo like that can cause frustration and anger. Answering services provide the human connection your callers are looking for.

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Surveys indicate that when people are upset and are calling for service, their anger escalates when they cannot reach a person immediately. As a property manager, you don't want to make a bad situation worse. The sooner an upset caller reaches a person the better the resolution of the call will be.

Additionally, when elderly people are faced with voicemail, they often become confused by the instructions and hang up before leaving a message. The younger generation prefers texting (which answering services can also supply) and when they hear voicemail, they too end the call. People between the ages of 30 and 70 simply prefer to avoid voicemail. People outside of that age bracket can't or won't use it.

The bottom line? Make it easy for people to reach you and make sure that a compassionate person is answering your calls.

Consider this scenario: A 72-year old man living in one of your buildings heard that a neighbor on the ground floor is moving and he would like to take that apartment. It will be easier for his wife, who has trouble navigating

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the stairs. But even with his hearing aid turned all the way up, the older gentleman is still struggling to hear as he tries to leave a message for the leasing manager. He becomes frustrated trying to jump between hearing the recorded instructions and responding appropriately on the keypad. It's daunting. The constant back and forth between pressing the phone to his ear and then lowering it to see the keypad causes him to miss the next instruction. When his efforts take him to the wrong voice mailbox, this building frustration turns to anger, and when there is no way out of voicemail jail, anger turns to rage! Rage pointed at the community manager he is trying to reach. "Why would you DO that to someone who is trying to do business with you?" he wonders.

## Have a person answer your phone 24/7. Almost everyone will appreciate it.

# 2

## Provide a GREAT Impression



### Make a Good First Impression

Did you know that the average apartment community pays more for landscaping in a year than they do for their answering service?

Obviously, the way your community appears when guests come to visit is crucial. However, for most potential renters a first impression will not happen during a Sunday drive, it will happen when your telephone is answered. As a property manager, you need warm, caring people who are knowledgeable about your community and its protocols available 24/7 to answer calls and impress your callers at any time, day or night.

A quality answering service can provide specific message templates for different times of day, depending on the information needed for your team. All of the information an agent needs to sound knowledgeable, answer questions, and capture information about your callers will be provided in your account profiles and message templates. The people answering your phones can even sound like they are right in your office.

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Did you know that the answering service industry makes ongoing testing available to all services to purchase? This ensures quality standards are met. Additionally, calls are recorded and monitored for quality assurance

and accuracy in-house, on a regular basis. Answering services will protect your reputation as carefully as we protect our own. We are business partners.

## **An answering service can make a difference.**



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“Thank you for calling XYZ Property Management Company, this is Tiffany speaking. How may I help you today?”

The warm, lilting voice sounded just like a smile. The words were not rushed. The welcome was clear. It was an award-winning answer, exactly the way everyone wants their business represented!

Many answering services take part in a secret shopper program that scores calls answered by their agents. There are five main categories and 60 points of criteria that each call is judged on to earn the ATSI Award of Excellence (Association of TeleServices International) and agents work hard to meet those objectives on every call. Other answering service providers purchase a program that monitors thousands of calls and identifies areas in need of attention and improvement.

Today’s professional answering service agents take great pride in their work, knowing that they are not only representing the company they work for but every company for which they answer.

Easy access to Account Profiles provide detailed information about our partners in business and allow answering service agents to be knowledgeable and confident when answering calls. In fact, callers frequently have no idea they are speaking with an answering service because information is delivered, and questions are answered, so effortlessly.

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# 3

## Never Miss a Call



Did you know approximately 34% of calls that come into an office *WHEN IT IS OPEN*, are not answered?

Your staff might be on another line, accepting a delivery, getting keys for a painter, or even in the restroom when the phone rings. Ultimately, the caller hangs up. Was that call from a tenant with a problem? A person who wants to lease?

Remember: *EVERY* call is important, so have your phones set to roll over to your answering service during the day if no one can answer so you never miss a call.

Calls tend to come in spurts – especially if there is an emergency. Your answering service can handle multiple calls simultaneously, giving your residents and callers immediate attention. Calls never go unanswered, there are no long waits, and no one is ever asked to hold.

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Agents can also update callers on any situation occurring on your property, freeing your in-house staff to do the work they need to do. Is the electric out? Your service can give out regular updates as to what took place and when restoration will occur.

*Pop! Pop – Pop!*

The calls come into the answering service, “I think I heard gunfire!” says Mrs. Lincoln in building 3, apartment 201. “I’m afraid to look outside! Send someone, please.”

A second call comes from Mr. Brooks in building 1, apartment 211: “I heard a loud noise and all the lights went out,” he says.

At the same time another answering service agent takes a call from Mr. Alfred in building 1, apartment 314. “It looks like a squirrel ate through a wire and took out the transformer in the west corner of the parking lot,” he says. “There’s a lot of smoke, but it doesn’t look like fire.”

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The maintenance engineer on duty is given all three calls. “If any more calls come in, please tell people we have help on the way, but the electricity might be out for a couple of hours,” he says. “Oh, and will you call these folks back and let them know we’re on it?”

Over the next three hours, the answering service calls the three people who reported the incident, calming the fears of Mrs. Lincoln and allowing the engineer to use his time to contact the electric company to put up a blockade. The service also answers 19 additional calls (taken by three different agents) in the next 15 minutes, and gives out the information about the transformer, immediately updating information and demonstrating the proficiency of the management company. The maintenance man, in turn, is free to take care of the problem without his cell phone going off every few minutes. The time saved? Priceless. The total answering service time for the entire incident (26 calls) was under 30 minutes.

# 4

## Important Legal Documentation



Did you know that when you are using an answering service you are protecting yourself legally?

No more “he said, she said.”

When you need proof that someone called at 3 p.m., not 9 a.m., answering service equipment can provide that documentation.

Every call that comes in throughout the day is documented with the time it hit the service’s switch, the time it was answered, and the time the call was disconnected.

Furthermore, answering services can provide proof that a call DID NOT come in. This helps to eliminate claims that calls were made to the office and ignored. And that may be even more important than showing when they did come in.

Call recordings can also serve as backup. If the conversation was recorded, internal clocks show exactly what time the call came in and when it was dispatched to your team. All information is stamped on your message. This written information will stand up in a court of law and cannot be tampered with by anyone. Call recordings can be sent to you via email file whenever you need them.

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"This is Pete from XYZ Property Management! Do you have messages from six months ago?" The caller's frantic voice made it clear that this was no idle question.

"Yes, we do," the agent replied.

Pete's relief was palpable, "How do I go about getting them? And do they have the computer time and date stamped on them, as they are when I normally receive them?"

Again, the answer was "yes."

There had been a fire in one of the apartment buildings that did considerable damage. The resident in the unit where the fire originated told authorities that he had been smelling gas for days and had called about it several times, but no one came out to check.

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**Imagine, however, if there were no records available showing he DID NOT call. Even though the authorities might have believed he was not being truthful – proof would have been nonexistent.**

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Answering service reports showed that no calls were received during the times indicated. But two weeks prior, the service had received ONE call from the same resident, at 7:14 p.m. *That* message stated that his rent would be a couple days late. No other calls came from that number after that date.

When faced with the reports, and other evidence, the resident confessed that he did not have the money to pay his rent and started a "small fire," hoping to cite negligence and avoid needing to pay. He was eventually convicted of arson. Imagine, however, if there were no records available showing he DID NOT call. Even though the authorities might have believed he was not being truthful – proof would have been nonexistent.

Telephone answering services regularly help property management partners prove that they acted appropriately in cases that have gone to court.

# 5

## Capture Every Rental Inquiry



Impulse buying often takes place when people are looking for a new apartment to lease.

Rental inquiries come in 24/7. Whether a couple is out for a drive, doing errands, or visiting a friend, if they are even a little bit unhappy with their current living arrangement and they see your community and like it, they might grab their cell phone and key in your number. But if it's after hours and they are sent to voicemail, they are just as likely to forget about it as they are to pursue it.

If, however, the couple reaches a warm, interested answering service agent, they are far more likely to leave their information, allowing you to follow up.

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**Capturing even one rental call can easily pay for your answering service for a year or more.**

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You can instruct your agent team to capture the caller's name, phone number, and the type of unit they are looking for. Even better, allow your answering service to make appointments for the caller with your leasing agent. It is not as complicated as you might imagine. Capturing even one rental call can easily pay for your answering service for a year or more.

Living in Mom and Dad’s basement apartment saves money, but is it worth it?

After another battle over parking spaces and moving cars in the middle of a movie, a young couple grabs the laptop to look for a better alternative.

“Let’s see if there is room at the place where Jeff and Carrie live,” she suggests, “Here it is – call them, here’s the number.”

“Thank you for calling LMN Garden Apartments,” a scratchy voice announces. “Your call is very important to us ...”

“NOT!” she exclaims, terminating the call.

“But wait, look at this one, it isn’t far from here – and it even has a pool!”

When her fiancé has keyed in the number they hear: “Thank you for calling EFG Apartments, this is Rachel speaking, how may I help you?”

“My fiancé and I are interested in renting a one-bedroom apartment, do you have availability?” he asks.

“I believe we do,” Rachel replies. “Our leasing agent has stepped out for about an hour, but she should be able to meet with you at 2 p.m. Let me take a little information to pave the way.”

The happy couple excitedly discuss a new move, thrilled that they can meet with the leasing agent so quickly.

Within days, and a little paperwork, their move-in date is set.

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**Living in Mom and Dad’s basement apartment saves money, but is it worth it?**

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# 6

## So Cost Effective



Did you know that it would cost more than \$10,000 a month to pay an employee to answer your phone 24 hours a day, 7 days a week?

Your answering service can be there for you all day and all night for as little as \$100 a month.

Most answering services charge for the actual time used when speaking with a caller or working on your behalf. AND you do not have to grapple with Payroll services, unemployment insurance, medical insurance, worker's compensation insurance, taxes, Social Security, buying toilet paper, or people eating someone else's lunch!

An answering service provides around-the-clock protection for pennies a day. A combination of automated attendant options

and human response can help lower costs even further. Sophisticated equipment running in the background allows artificial intelligence to perform time-consuming tasks, such as several steps in the delivery of a message, keeping labor low.

Even if you are only using your answering service for after-hours phone coverage, you have peace of mind knowing that if an emergency happens, a person will be there to help.

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ABC Management Company employed two assistant resident managers at one of their larger communities, staggering their times so that there was someone in the office from 8 a.m. to 8 p.m. for leasing inquiries, among other things.

When one of ABC's assistants had a baby, they decided to have their answering service cover more hours. They would actually open the office at 9 a.m. and close at 5 p.m. during the three months of maternity leave. The phones were turned over to the answering service when the resident manager needed to show an apartment or go to lunch. Though they expected it to be a significant inconvenience, they were surprised at how well it worked out.

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In fact, the company not only realized they were saving more than \$800 a week, but also that they also had no complaints from their residents. The service set up two or three leasing appointments a week, and everyone seemed happy.

When the new mother decided she was not ready to leave her baby and requested six more months of leave, the company immediately agreed with no misgivings.

Minor inconveniences were worth enormous savings, and when their employee became a stay-at-home mom, the community never replaced her position.

# 7

## Provide Better Work Life Balance for Employees



Did you know companies with good “Time Off” policies have less turnover?

Everyone from property managers to resident managers, from receptionists to maintenance engineers, need “downtime.” When one person is out, others fill in, causing work to back up and frustration for everyone.

When you leave for the day, you should be able to enjoy your life without work calling. Now, more than ever, we value our personal time and resent interruptions.

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At the same time, our residents and tenants live in a customer service-oriented world. They want what they want when they want it. If the window leaks at 2 a.m. when it is pouring, they are likely to stuff a towel under the ledge and call right then and there, rather than wait for morning when they are in a rush. After all, they have you on speed-dial, so they do it NOW.

When you make it convenient for your residents to call day or night with things you should be made aware of, your community gains a reputation for excellent, caring customer service. And things are fixed before they become a problem.

Answering service agents understand the difference between an emergency or urgent situation, and one that can wait until normal working hours. They will take the message and hold it for the office, reassuring the caller that it will be seen first thing in the morning.

There was a mutiny going on at a local property management company. They had lost three good maintenance engineers within six months and their newest hire was about to leave. This turnover was costing real money. A solution was needed – fast. With a little detective work the problem was obvious: sleep deprivation! The company’s crew members were on call for a week at a time, every other week. “It’s out of control,” one said. “These people are calling for ridiculous reasons, and it makes me so mad I can’t go back to sleep.”

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**If your regular receptionist is out, your virtual receptionists take over. No one needs to put important work on the back burner to “cover the phones.”**

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Your answering service understands! You don’t need to pay overtime for calls that can be handled in the morning and your team deserves decent sleep most nights they are on call – real emergencies don’t happen that often. With your answering service as a triage center, residents know they can let the management company know about a problem when it is convenient for them, and that you will get the message when it is convenient for you.

Your answering service is also here for you whenever someone is unable to report to work. If your regular receptionist is out, your virtual receptionists take over. No one needs to put important work on the back burner to “cover the phones.”

When you can give your employees a better work-life balance, they are more likely to stay with you for the long haul.

# 8

## Mine the Data in Your Messages



Did you know an answering service can be an essential tool for your industry?

When your answering service handles your incoming calls 24/7, you accumulate a goldmine of useable information. With the right message template setup your service can create a report that shows which buildings require the most maintenance, which maintenance personnel respond in a timely manner, which days and times of day are the busiest for your business, and other data that will assist you in running your communities more efficiently.

There are also canned reports and custom reports available to provide you with vital information that can give you a competitive edge (or boost your bottom line.)

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"I don't understand why our bills keep creeping up," the caller said. "My portfolio isn't that much different, and the weather hasn't been severe, but my bills are about 10% higher than last year, and a little higher month over month. Can you come out and help us figure it out?"

We were happy to meet, but the work began right there at the service. There were reports to check, messages to review, and agents to talk with; the people who answer the phones have a great deal of insight into why someone's bills are higher than they want them to be.

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**A conversation regarding the management company's expectations – that all calls needed to be responded to promptly – was all that was needed.**

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The meeting was a fruitful one. The service could demonstrate that two of the client's communities had a history of requiring several calls before on-call maintenance personnel could be reached. Each retry took several minutes, which added to the bills. A conversation regarding the management company's expectations – that all calls needed to be responded to promptly – was all that was needed.

During the meeting, the answering service customer care representative suggested a way for maintenance personnel to respond without even speaking to the answering service by simply using their smartphones. This also saved money. A thorough review of the account protocols set up years earlier showed other efficiencies that could be achieved.

Ultimately, costs did not just go back to normal – they went down! And the service quality went up.

# 9

## Disaster Planning and Support



An answering service should always be part of your disaster planning.

Your answering service provides protection for your residents and buildings without costing a fortune. When someone is experiencing an elevator trap, having the answering service call the elevator company can result in a quick release, without damage, rather than having the fire department break down an expensive door.

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**The recent pandemic is another example of the way your answering service can help protect you, your employees, and your reputation.**

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The recent pandemic is another example of the way your answering service can help protect you, your employees, and your reputation. When an emergency situation develops, you can turn off the lights, transfer the phones to the answering service team, and simply walk out the door.

One sizable management company turned their phones over to their answering service at the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, and decided it was so convenient and cost-effective, they would not take them back when the office was cleared to reopen. With just a few changes in their protocol, the service became the receptionist and their lives became easier.

It was 9:52 a.m. when the lights suddenly went out at PQR Management Company.

“What happened?” the manager of six communities asked, stepping into the hall. “I was in the middle of a conversation with the painters and my phone went dead!”

Down the hall, another manager poked his head out his office door. “My printer just died, and I need to have this contract over to our client in 20 minutes!”

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**Answering service agents never know what they will hear when they answer a ringing call, but they are well-versed in how to address almost every kind of emergency.**

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The answer was 16 floors down, at the street corner, where the road crew had just cut through wires bringing electricity to an entire city block.

This wasn’t going to be a fast fix.

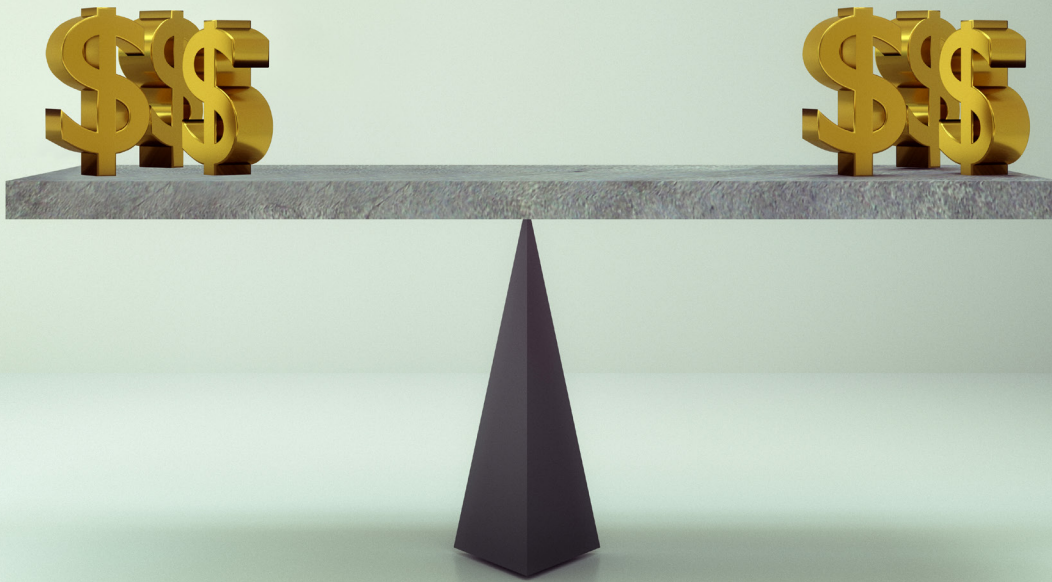
Within minutes, the answering service had been contacted and had helped the management company reach their phone supplier. Within an hour, all calls had been redirected to their answering service, where agents were busily taking messages and relaying them to cell phones.

The manager’s personal phone numbers were protected as the answering service made outgoing calls for them and connected the two parties together. Later that afternoon, the phones were once again working, but in the meantime, there had been several urgent calls, including one call requesting a check-in for a resident who was not answering their phone. That woman was having a heart attack. The ambulance was called in time.

Answering service agents never know what they will hear when they answer a ringing call, but they are well-versed in how to address almost every kind of emergency. When an answering service is part of your disaster planning, your communities, and all who live in them, are likely to be a bit safer.

# 10

## Share the Cost



Did you know that many apartment communities are sharing the cost of an answering service?

Property management companies often have their communities forward calls to the main office when they close for the evening. Answering services provide a way for these costs to be shared among various building owners or communities by offering billing based on the time used by each community.

Usage can be easily broken out, and invoices can be sent to each individual community or to the management company for disbursement. Such detailed billing can be delivered in report format for the management company so they can compare expenses and understand which properties generate the most maintenance calls, even if they prefer not to pass on the costs.

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**Did you know that many apartment communities are sharing the cost of an answering service?**

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A meeting with a long-term residential management company client revealed that they were confounded by the uneven distribution of the answering service costs.

“We KNOW what the problem is,” the property manager said. “Most of the communities we manage are fairly new and well kept, but we have several owners that have allowed their properties to fall into disrepair, and that causes them to get a lot more calls during the off hours, when things break or need service. Since all the calls from all our communities come to the main office, we have no way to isolate those that are costing an unfair share of money. Can you help us?”

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**An answering service can easily set up accounts to allow calls for each community to go to a “bucket” that counts their calls and minutes individually at billing time.**

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“Of course,” was the quick reply.

An answering service can easily set up accounts to allow calls for each community to go to a “bucket” that counts their calls and minutes individually at billing time. The management company gets a simple report showing exactly how much time was used by each community.

Moreover, an answering service could actually create invoices for each community so that the cost for service could be paid by each owner.

This client now pays some of the invoices themselves and sends others to the building owner for payment. The management company can choose to pay the service with one check and be reimbursed, or the invoice can be paid directly to the answering service by each recipient.

Each management company has many choices for providing service to their building owners.

# 11

## Automation Can Be a Good Thing



Using a voicemail announcement to direct a call to the right person is a simple and acceptable way to handle incoming calls in today's business environment.

An announcement can explain the call will be recorded, offer a way to receive driving directions, or provide office hours, before connecting a caller to an agent. Frequently, these preannouncements satisfy the entire reason for the call.

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**Providing options to reach different departments will also be appreciated by your customers.**

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Providing options to reach different departments will also be appreciated by your customers. Keep in mind: just because there are 10 numerals on a keypad, doesn't mean you should give 10 choices for departments or personnel. Limit available options to three so your callers won't become confused. And always, *always* make sure there is a way for your caller to reach a human for assistance.

“Thank you for calling the WXY Highrise. If you know your party’s extension, you may press it now. If you would like to speak with our leasing agent, press 1 now. If you need the community manager press 2 now. And if you would like to talk with a customer service representative, press 3 now.”

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**Within minutes, and with a little guidance, the caller has explained her needs, and ended the call feeling confident that they would be met.**

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After pressing three a pleasant voice responds, “Thank you for your patience, this is Amanda, how may I help you today?”

“Am I talking with a real person?” the caller asks.

“You certainly are,” comes the cheerful reply, “This is Amanda, how may I assist you?”

“I’m just so happy to be speaking to a person. This message will be a little complicated. I hate voicemail, and I always get flustered when I have to use it.”

“I understand, I don’t like voice mail either,” Amanda replies. “Now, what is your name, please?”

Within minutes, and with a little guidance, the caller has explained her situation, and ended the call feeling confident that her needs would be met.

# Focus Answering Service Can Enhance Your Community's Reputation

**Y**ou want to provide your residents and communities with the best service in the most cost-effective manner possible. When your resident reaches a calm, knowledgeable person who immediately takes their information and helps them, that resident thinks your community is exceptional!

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**This is the time to call a reputable answering service, and discuss the many ways, and multiple tools they have to make your life easier.**

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When choosing an answering service, ask about what they are most proud of. Ask about the awards they have earned. Ask about the longevity in their staff and in their customer base. Ask them how many clients they have in the property management industry. Ask for references.

Focus Answering Service can make answering service solutions part of your business today.



Call us today at 1-800-886-6696 to set up a consultation or visit us online at [www.focustele.com](http://www.focustele.com).



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