

Success Tip – Tangled in Technology

Tech tools help us work faster and more efficiently. But they can also complicate our lives.

For example, I was talking to a colleague about his new listing the other day while he sat at his computer. His cell phone hummed, but after checking the caller ID while I was talking, he clicked the phone back into its hip holster—apparently dismissing the interruption.

But before I finished my question, he said, “I’ll be leaving in about an hour.”

I thought I got the hint. “Fine—that’s all I wanted to know.”

“Should I pick up milk?” he said.

“Milk?”

Then he stood and turned toward me, wandering absently out of the room. That’s when I saw the Bluetooth earpiece device on the other side of his head. He had actually taken the call, and was chatting with his wife about the rest of her shopping list. Unknowingly, I had been deleted.

Here are some ideas for controlling technology so that it doesn’t control you.

Mobile phones

If you monitor your phone 24/7, it can become an electronic pest. Unlimited access to you can interrupt your conversations, endanger your driving, annoy people who are with you, jinks your golf swing, or wake you up. If you want to lower your stress—and maybe your blood pressure—try leaving it on only certain hours unless you are expecting an important call. If you do that, be sure your voicemail greeting tells callers when they can reach you, and when you will return calls. (e.g.: *“Thank you for calling, and please leave a message. I will answer and return calls today between 11 and noon, and again between 4 and 5 this afternoon.”*)

Email

Even though I have a spam filter, I have to scan through the junk in case something valuable got snagged. I read a few subscribed newsletters. I look at some of the photos and, increasingly, videos forwarded by friends. I reply to messages, delete or save others. I used to do that multiple times each day, until I questioned the need for so much attention to my inbox. Now when someone asks if they can email me something, I tell him or her that I check my emails once each day before 7 am. People seem to be more satisfied with predictability than with promptness. If it is something truly urgent I’ll make an exception, but I’ve freed up much time with this practice.

Living through the real estate techno-evolution has taught me to step back from time to time and question how the latest innovation will enhance my work practices. For example, I didn’t buy a mobile phone when they first became available because they were the size of a paving brick—and pay phones were still everywhere. I didn’t buy a fax machine when they first came out because very few offices—and no homes—had one (who would we fax to?).

But I am fascinated with techno-gadgets. I bought my first computer when they operated with DOS and had green screens that made your eyes sore. I was a PDA early adapter, and I’d be lost without my GPS.

In future newsletters we'll comment on new tech tools that can enhance your communications and work practices. More of those tools are moving to the Web, and below are a couple a freebies you can use right now.

(Note: Our reviews are opinions only. We do not receive compensation from companies we review, and we are not responsible for their performance.)

Efax.com

Send and receive faxes from your computer—free! It handles many formats, including PDF and Word. You can add enhanced features for a nominal fee.

Box.net

Store your files online. You can retrieve, edit, or share them from any computer with online access. They offer one gigabyte of storage for free, and charge a small fee for more.

--Jim Luger
jim@continuingedexpress.com

Best Practices - Voicemail Manners

Do you receive voicemails that make you flinch with irritation? This tip sheet will help you avoid making other people feel that way with *your* messages.

Who's this?

Give your full name. Your phone or the receiving phone can make voice recognition difficult, and the recipient might know more than one person by your first name. Add a memory jogger if there is any doubt about the person remembering you, such as your company, or where or when you last met.

An easy rewind.

Leave your number right after giving your name, so if the listener didn't write it down, he/she will only have to re-listen to the first part of the message.

Don't assume he/she is a speed writer.

Say *"My phone number is..."* and give it s-l-o-w-l-y. Visualize the listener fumbling for a pen, and then trying to write it down—maybe while driving. You should indicate where the number connects if you have multiple phone numbers. (*"My cell number is..."*)

You're "it."

Avoid a time-wasting game of phone tag by giving the recipient the best times to reach you at the number(s) you leave, or offer an alternative way of reaching you. (Tip: On *your* voicemail prompt, give the best times to reach you, and when the caller can expect a return call from you.)

One-way communiqué.

Don't make them scramble for paper and pen if unnecessary. If you don't need a call-back, preface your phone number with *"It's not necessary to call back, but my number is..."*

Get down to business.

Small-talk is fine for a live conversation, but it can be annoying when someone is trying to check multiple voicemails in a hurry. State the reason for your call upfront. If there is more than one item, state them all upfront before leaving details. (Otherwise, if the first item is not of interest, the recipient might delete the entire message too soon.)

"And further more..."

Long monologues are often deleted out of exasperation before they end. State the important information upfront, and be brief. If the message is complex, give the reason for the call and ask the listener to call you for the details.

Once is enough.

You don't have to say the same thing two or three times. You don't have to say the same thing two or three times. The same thing doesn't have to be said two or three different ways. (Annoying, isn't it?)

Rambling Prose.

If you have a tendency to ramble, jot down a quick outline before you call. Remember, this isn't a conversation—you are talking to a *machine*.

Cool off.

Don't leave an emotionally-charged voicemail. You might feel differently after you've vented, but the damage will have been done. Call after you calm down, perhaps the next day.

Timeline.

Give a sense of the urgency: *"No hurry."* *"Please call me at your earliest convenience."*
"If you get my voicemail when you call, please press zero and have me paged."

One more time—maybe.

If you are making a sales call, you might want to emphasize your phone number again at the end—slowly—in case the listener wasn't motivated to write it down before your message, or wrote it incorrectly.

"Oh, and by the way..."

If you try to leave an after-thought at the end, the recipient might have already pressed "delete." If it's important, consider leaving a follow-up message.

After you get in the habit of using these easy tips, your voicemail messages will be received as clear, effective communications.

Sign Posts – This month's Realistat

According to The National Association of Realtors® *2007 Realtor® Technology Survey*, 39.9% of real estate agents keep in contact with *current* clients primarily through email, and 47.9% keep in contact primarily by phone.

Both methods are excellent ways of communicating with clients, but you might want to find out which method they prefer. Also, try to be mindful of when one method is more appropriate than the other. Technology can help make communications more efficient, but hearing a person can impart more meaning than just viewing words in an email.

Updates and Sneak Previews - Homeowners Insurance course

During the month of May we've added another course entitled, *A Real Estate Agent's Guide to Homeowners Insurance*. This course was written by Jack Hungelmann, who is the author of *Insurance for Dummies*, and has been in the insurance industry for over 30 years. Jack has made learning about insurance interesting and engaging! This new course is full of helpful advice you can share with your clients when they shop for homeowners insurance.

(Note: This course is only approved in Minnesota at the moment. We are currently working on the approvals in other states.)