Voice mail strategy, tips and tricks

People screening candidates use their voice mail systems to control the communication flow and to help prioritize. In most cases you will not be able to connect directly with someone, but you can still use your voice message to a significant advantage. A poorly left voice message can knock you out of contention, but if done right it can help you land an interview and move you forward to the short list. Here are some ideas developed by seasoned employment professionals that could make a difference in your job search.

The message you leave is your 10-second commercial – Getting a hiring manager or HR person on the phone is tough or even fruitless especially when their calls are screened by a voice mail system or front desk administrator. Some job seekers call continuously in the hope that they can get someone on the phone to promote their cause, and hang up when they don’t get through. These hang ups get logged, are irritating and may actually harm your candidacy. Others leave lengthy messages, droning on in a monotone voice hoping that someone will listen.

On the other hand, employers like to know that someone is interested in their company and in the position they need to fill. They gage the caller’s professionalism when they listen to the message and even though in most cases they press delete, at least they heard your name and a short message. If the message is really good, it will get you noticed. Make it your goal to call every employer that you send a resume to and leave a great but short message, and your options will increase.

Take a hint from advertisers – Advertisers frequently use the AIDA (Attention, Interest, Desire, Action) approach to quickly communicate a message and this can be used in developing yours.

A - Get the attention of the listener
I - Be of interest to them so they continue to listen
D - Build on the listener’s interest by offering some benefit they desire
A - Request that some action be taken

Here is how this may work in developing your message:

Attention - Politely greet the listener, use Mr. or Ms. and pronounce their name correctly, clearly state your name and the purpose of your call. Don’t say something like, “I’m following up to make sure you received my resume”, (that’s pretty lame). Instead tell them you are a job seeker very interested in a career with their company and in the opening advertised.

Interest – What might the listener be most interested in? How can you help the listener and make their job of screening candidates easier? State that you have the all of the skills needed but avoid going into much detail. Help them understand that you are the person behind the resume that has exactly what they are looking for.

Desire - The term “hot button” is used to identify a key driver that will make an impact. What’s most important here is the tone of your voice, your vitality and enthusiasm. Being articulate and concise are very desirable qualities and most voice messages are pretty bad, so these qualities alone will be desirable. Also, if this is a job posting, what is the main requirement or characteristic they are seeking? What makes you stand out? Drop a name if you have a connection and let them know you are very excited about this possibility.

Action - Always end the call with some specific request, but do not expect it to be fulfilled. Your goal is to get to the next step in the hiring process and there are lots of factors in play. Request a call back and repeat your name and number. Tell the listener you when you will be available if there are some limitations, but be flexible. Make your request assertive and not wishy-washy.
Examples:

- Good morning Mr. Johnson, my name is Sara Wells and I am calling to further express my interest in the customer service position that you have open. I realize your company is highly sought after and that you’re looking for people with excellent computer skills. Computer skills are among my greatest strengths! Please call any time and let me know when you would like to schedule a phone or face-to-face interview. This is Sara Wells and my number is 212 555 5555. Again, Sara Wells at 212 555 5555. Thanks and have a great day!

- Hello Ms. Robertson. This is Gary Reed, the candidate that sent you a resume for your accounting opening. I know your time is very valuable so let me just summarize that I meet all of the qualifications you listed in the ad, plus have excellent references including a former classmate, Sharon Thomas that works in your Chicago office. Rather than play telephone tag, please let me know when the best time is to reach you and I will call you then. My cell phone is 919 555 5555. Please leave a message with the best time to call you back if the line is busy. Gary Reed 919 555 5555. Thanks!

- Hi Mr. Morgan, this is Frank Fletcher calling to let you know how excited I was to find out that XYZ Company is hiring. I’ve read nothing but great things about your new product line and the opportunity of meeting you and being considered for this marketing opening would be very welcomed. My resume is in your email, but let me emphasize that I have experience with similar products and can hit the ground running in this role. Call me at 716 555 5555 and we can talk specifics. Again, Frank Fletcher calling to schedule an interview for the marketing position – 716 555 5555. Thanks.

- Ms. Smith, briefly this is Tom Grant calling to give you one more piece of information not on the resume that was sent for the account manager position. We have a common connection named Jane Ferguson who shared your number because she felt it would be good for us to talk. Jane and I worked together and she is aware that I’m seeking new employment and that you have a need. Let’s arrange a meeting. Tom Grant at 305 555 5555. Again, Tom Grant 305 555 5555. Have a great day!

Second or Third Attempt Examples:

OK, you left a great voice message but did not get a call back. Now what to you do? Most people stop when they don’t get a call back. But not you! Give it another shot for a total of three follow up calls. These could be several days to a week apart.

- Hello Mr. Johnson, this is Sara Wells – the person that left you a message last week. I realize how busy you must be so I will make this voice message brief. I have the qualifications you need and am available to review them with you anytime. My number is 212 555 5555. Again, I realize you’re busy and will keep it brief. Sara Wells, customer service professional at 212 555 5555. Thanks and have a great day!

- Hello Ms. Robertson. This is Gary Reed calling on the accounting opening and the person referred by Sharon Thomas. If you haven’t had a chance to call during business hours, maybe we can talk in the evening or over the weekend. I’m especially interested in this because of the good things Sharon mentioned about your company. My cell phone is 919 555 5555 and if you get my voice mail please just give me the best time to reach you and I’ll return the call. Gary Reed at 919 555 5555. Thanks!

- Hi Mr. Morgan, this is Frank Fletcher calling. I’m the marketing person familiar with your products and wanting to work for your company. I have been reviewing your website and am confident I could make an immediate impact. Please call me at 716 555 5555. Again, Frank Fletcher calling to talk about how I can help XYZ Company – 716 555 5555.

- Ms. Smith, this is Tom Grant. I left an earlier voice message and completely understand how busy you must be, but thought it appropriate to follow up again given how well suited I am for the account manager position. My
resume couldn’t substitute for a personal meeting and I’ll make myself available at your convenience. Tom Grant at 305 555 5555. That's 305 555 5555. Have a nice day!

**Tips and Tricks:**

- Leaving a message saying that you would like to "discuss" something is too vague. Be specific but brief.
- People are busy, so don’t be a slow talker. Try for a 10 second message or shorter.
- Always repeat your name and number. Be articulate and enunciate.
- Assert yourself and express a sense of urgency but not desperation.
- Many voice mail systems allow you to re-record your message by pressing the # key. If you flub the message and cannot re-record it, call back and try it again stating that you “were distracted.”
- If you get hung up in a call tree, get anyone on the line and ask for the extension you need. Ask to be transferred if they will not give you the extension. If asked what the purpose of your call is, say “personal business.”
- Avoid leaving an email address in your voice message. This defeats the goal of establishing personal human contact.
- Eliminate all background noise. Use a land line if you can to avoid sounding like an android in your message.
- Respond to your messages immediately but not when you are driving or having lunch. Make sure the voice message on your line is appropriate. You may want to give an alternate number and say, “If this is in reference to my job search, please also try 555-555-5555.”
- Finally, get ready for some rejection but don’t get frustrated. People are paid to filter and screen candidates and they are just doing their job.