



ANSWERING SERVICES AND APPLICATION PROGRAM INTERFACES (APIs)

OVERVIEW

The majority of businesses are dependent on at least one piece of software (if not several) and that's why software developers have created Application Program Interfaces - also know as APIs. In this paper we discuss what APIs are and why you should consider using an answering service or contact center that knows how to work with them directly.

SITUATION

Over the past 5-10 years the business software industry has grown exponentially. Whether you're looking for a database to handle your sales leads, an accounting program to handle your invoicing or a calendaring solution to manage scheduling you'll have a plethora of options at your fingertips just by performing a quick Google search.

In many ways, the software industry's growth has been extremely beneficial for businesses, not only because there are more software options for handling various business processes, but also because competition in the market has forced prices down and forced software vendors to differentiate by providing more features and better customer service. However, there is a downside to having so many different options. Sometimes it's crucial that one piece of software needs to work with another yet there is no built-in way to integrate the two platforms. For instance, when you have a calendaring solution that tracks client appointments, but you use separate accounting software to invoice clients for those appointments. Should you have to enter customer contact details and appointments in two different places? This approach would be time consuming while also leaving you with the potential to make errors when entering the data in more than one place.

Additionally, what if you want to use a third party to handle some aspect of running your business? For instance, if you want to hire an answering service to answer your phone calls and you use Salesforce to track all sales inquiries. Should the

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answering service be given access to your Salesforce account? Do their Customer Service Professionals even know how to use Salesforce? What if they enter information into Salesforce incorrectly? Or, should the answering service just answer your phone calls and pass messages to your sales team forcing your sales associates to enter the information into Salesforce when they have time? What if your sales team loses messages or forgets to do the data entry?

As you can see there are a lot of potential issues and limitations surrounding the use of various business software platforms, but the software industry has a solution. Have you heard the term API? It stands for “Application Programming Interface.” According to Wikipedia, an API “is a set of subroutine definitions, protocols, and tools for building application software.” That definition sounds complicated, but in layman’s terms APIs make it easier for developers to build new applications and to make existing applications communicate with each other.

What does this mean for you and your business?

It means that if the calendaring solution and invoicing software we mentioned earlier offer publicly available APIs, it’s very possible that a programmer could make your calendaring solution “talk” to your invoicing system such that every time you confirm an appointment the calendaring system tells your invoicing system to bill your client without you having to take any additional steps.

APIs also have the potential to allow service providers the ability to integrate with your business software in a way that’s secure and efficient. Let’s look back at the example of the

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answering service and Salesforce. If you choose an answering service that knows how to work with the Salesforce API then the service can connect to your customer database via their answering service platform. What are the advantages of this configuration?

- **Your Salesforce account is safe because there is no need for operators to ever directly log-in to it.**

The answering service operators will never have your Salesforce account credentials because by using an API integration the operators work within the answering service's software platform - which interacts with your Salesforce account behind the scenes. In fact, the operators don't even know what software solution you're using as they're just entering data into the answering service software as they do for any other account.

- **There's no need to worry about whether or not the answering service operators know how to use Salesforce.**

Again, the operators never log-in to your Salesforce account. Also, there's no need to pay costly training fees that some answering services charge to get their operators "up to speed" on the software you're using. The API integration between the answering service platform and your Salesforce account circumvents the need for that.

- **Don't worry about losing valuable customer data due to human error.**

If the answering service is just taking messages and forwarding them to your sales team then there's a chance that customer contact data might not get

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entered into Salesforce. By entering the customer contact info directly into Salesforce via an API integration you can be sure that messages won't get lost in the shuffle and customer data is properly stored where it belongs ... in your Salesforce account.

- **Have your answering service account set-up and running quickly.**

Since there's no need to train operators to use Salesforce there's no need to wait. Have the answering service hook its platform into your Salesforce account and start forwarding your calls.

As you can see, there are several advantages to choosing an answering service that knows how to work with APIs. At AnswerFirst, we have worked with many different business software APIs including: Salesforce, ServiceNow, ConnectWise, Open Weather, CoStrategix, Followup Boss, JIRA, Jituzu, Law Ruler, Solve360, RazorSync, SMTP.com, TimeTap, Twilio, ZenDesk, Fresh Desk, Kayako and more.

If you're looking to outsource your business communications, but you're worried that a contact center won't be able to help you because software is an important aspect of how you handle your incoming calls or emails, then try AnswerFirst. Our programming department is extremely proficient at integrating our contact center platform with third-party software via API integrations.

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