



# A GUIDE TO SHOPPING FOR AN ANSWERING SERVICE FOR **REAL ESTATE BUSINESSES**

The purpose of this paper is to help educate business owners and managers in the real estate industry how to shop for an answering service. This is an exploration into how real estate businesses have unique requirements when shopping for a new service and what factors these businesses should consider before partnering with a contact center.



# THE IMPORTANCE OF USING CALL ANSWERING SERVICES IN REAL ESTATE

In today's competitive world of real estate, it's important to distinguish yourself from the competition by providing incredible customer service, answering client calls in a timely manner, and going above and beyond your customers' expectations.

Whether you're in the world of property management, you're a realtor, or if you're in any other real estate business, great service is often the only thing that separates you from the competition – so it's critical to maintain this edge, and keep your customers happy.

And, one of the best ways to differentiate yourself and improve customer satisfaction is by using a call answering service to answer customer questions and take messages when you're not in the office. This may seem like a small step to take – but it can have a huge number of benefits for your business.

In this white paper, we'll begin by going over all of the benefits of using a call answering service, and then discuss a few simple steps you can take to shop for an affordable, professional, and reliable real estate call answering service.

## UNDERSTANDING THE BENEFITS OF USING A CALL ANSWERING SERVICE

Before we cover how to locate the best answering service for your business, let's go over the benefits of hiring a call answering service. Why bother with it at all? What are the advantages? Is it really worth the investment?

The short answer is "yes." Using a 24/7 live answering service has a number of great advantages; here are just a few.

**“IT'S IMPORTANT TO DISTINGUISH YOURSELF FROM THE COMPETITION BY PROVIDING INCREDIBLE CUSTOMER SERVICE.”**



## YOU CAN TAKE CUSTOMER CALLS EVEN WHEN YOUR MAIN PHONE LINE IS BUSY

When you hire a live answering service, any phone calls sent to a busy main phone line can be automatically rerouted to a call answering professional at an outside call center. This configuration ensures that your callers always reach a real, live person - and don't have to deal with the frustration of calling you repeatedly, only to find that your phone line is still busy.

When a call reaches the answering service, your callers can quickly and conveniently explain why they're calling, and then the answering service can forward this information to you. Your answering service account can even be configured so that depending on your callers' needs, the calls can be rerouted directly to different people within your company so that your clients get the help they need more quickly.

Proper call handling and routing increase customer satisfaction, and makes your clients feel that their calls are important.

## 24/7 AVAILABILITY WITH NO MORE VOICEMAIL

24/7 availability is especially important for property managers, who may often need to take emergency and maintenance calls after regular business hours. Obviously, most business owners and managers don't want to have to answer the phone at all hours of the night – but if something is seriously wrong with one of your properties, like a burst pipe or a gas leak, it needs to be addressed immediately.

A 24/7 live answering service is the perfect solution. If a client or a resident calls you after-hours, they aren't directed to voicemail, but there's also no need for you to answer their calls when it's not convenient.

Instead, trained customer service professionals handle your calls, and listen to callers' issues. If an issue is urgent, the customer service professional can forward the call directly to you or to any individual that you specify. If it's not urgent, then a message is taken and the information is forwarded to you in the format you prefer (text message, email, fax, etc.)

No more voicemails – which often leave residents or clients unsure about whether or not their requests have been heard – and no more being woken up in the middle of the night for an unimportant maintenance request or other minor issues.

**“PROPER CALL HANDLING INCREASES CUSTOMER SATISFACTION AND MAKES YOUR CLIENTS FEEL THAT THEIR CALLS ARE IMPORTANT.”**



## LOWER STAFFING COSTS

If you run a smaller property management firm, or if you're a solo real estate agent without the budget for a full-time receptionist, then hiring an answering service is definitely a great option. You can't always be available to answer calls – but hiring a full-time office receptionist, renting office space, and taking other steps to expand your business may be out of your budget.

In this case, hiring an answering service is an affordable way to give your business a professional presence while ensuring that your clients receive amazing customer service experiences.

## YOUR BUSINESS WILL FEEL MORE PROFESSIONAL

As mentioned above, an answering service gives your business a professional presence. Your customers will always have their calls answered by a trained customer service professional, who will listen to their questions or issues and take appropriate actions. The end result, is that your business looks polished and established – even if you're a solo entrepreneur!

## SCREEN CALLS FOR IMPORTANCE AND PRIORITIZE

You don't want to waste time on calls that aren't important, such as solicitations or other unnecessary calls. An answering service allows you to organize, screen, and prioritize most of your calls, allowing you to focus only on the most important calls that you may have missed while you were unavailable. Call screening saves you time and energy while allowing you to focus more on growing your business.

## FINDING THE RIGHT ANSWERING SERVICE

So, you're convinced that a 24/7 answering service is a great way to enhance your real estate business, provide better service to your customers, and present a more professional appearance – great!

But how can you go about finding a quality answering service? Where should you start, and what should you look for? Here's what you'll need to do.

**“AN ANSWERING SERVICE ALLOWS YOU TO ORGANIZE, SCREEN, AND PRIORITIZE YOUR CALLS, ALLOWING YOU TO FOCUS ON THE MOST IMPORTANT CALLS.”**



## LOOK ONLINE, IDENTIFY TRUE 24/7 SERVICES, AND CHECK REVIEWS

There are many different companies that offer call answering services – but not all of them are alike. Some provide timely and reliable 24/7 live answering services, using real, human customer service professionals while others only offer live answering during certain hours.

Be forewarned that some call answering providers are no more than glorified voicemail programs – offering automated menu options and voicemail services, but no real-life customer support options.

By doing some research online, you should be able to easily find some of the top providers who offer true 24/7 live answering. Next, take a look at their online reviews and feedback from customers to learn if it's worth taking a closer look at their services and pricing. If a provider doesn't have online reviews, it's best to remove them from your list of potential solutions.

## LEARN ABOUT THE FEATURES AND OPTIONS EACH COMPANY OFFERS

Next, you'll want to make sure that the company you're interested in offers all of the features you'll need to provide your clients, residents or customers with a great experience. What should you be looking for?

- **24/7, 365 service** – Obviously, the main reason you'd want to hire a call answering service at all is to answer calls when you're unavailable – so it's best to choose a service that offers 24/7 service, 365 days a year. Additionally, verify that there are no additional charges or hidden fees for calls that are answered after normal business hours, on weekends or during holidays.
- **100% U.S. based representatives** – Some companies outsource their call answering services to overseas call centers. However, this is not the best way to provide a great customer experience. If your callers cannot understand the people who answer your phone calls due to language barriers, then it will result in frustrating customer service experiences that could cost you business. Choose a provider that uses U.S. based, professionally trained customer service representatives.

**“BE FOREWARNED THAT SOME CALL ANSWERING PROVIDERS ARE NO MORE THAN GLORIFIED VOICEMAIL PROGRAMS – OFFERING AUTOMATED MENU OPTIONS AND VOICEMAIL SERVICES BUT NO REAL LIFE CUSTOMER SUPPORT OPTIONS.”**



- **Pay-as-you-go payment options** – Many services might require you to sign a contract or commit to a particular number of minutes per month. A pay-as-you-go answering service allows you to pay for the minutes you use – and cancel at any time without any fees or penalties.
- **Business and real estate software integrations** – Look for a provider that offers software integrations for your business and real estate software. Details about each call can easily be logged in the same software you use to manage your business every day – putting all of the information about each call at your fingertips.

Though there are some other features you may want – like a phone app to manage your account or access to your call recordings – these are just “nice-to-haves.” If you can find a company that offers the above features, chances are they will be a good choice for your company.

## ASK FOR CALL CENTER METRICS AND DATA AND AN EXAMPLE SLA

You’ll want to get information about the average time it takes for the representative to answer a call and resolve a customer issue, as well as the time it takes for a customer’s phone calls to be answered.

The longer it takes for an answering service to pick up the phone, the less likely a customer is to stay on the line. Ideally, you’ll want information about how long it takes for each call to be answered, to make sure you know what to expect from a prospective provider.

A good way to do this is to ask for an example SLA (Service Level Agreement). A Service Level Agreement is the contract between you and your call answering partner. It outlines their responsibilities – such as answering 90% of calls within 10 seconds, and having 24/7 availability. It also outlines the steps that customers and clients can take if the SLA is breached or the company is not living up to their promises – so it’s a good document to reference when comparing different call answering companies.

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## GET PRICING DETAILS AND COMPARE YOUR OPTIONS

Finally, you should get pricing details from each potential provider. The most common pricing model used by answering services is a simple, pay-as-you-go, per-minute model.

You'll pay based on how many minutes the customer service representative is engaging with your clients – usually on a monthly basis. Some companies offer a flat rate, but this is usually more expensive, unless you constantly find yourself handling a large volume of calls consistently.

Ask each company you want to work with about their pricing model – and if they offer any discounts for higher call volumes. Then, once you have pricing details in hand, you can compare the different costs – and features – of each company, and choose the call answering service that's right for you.

## CONCLUSION

A call answering service has many benefits for real estate and property management companies – and with this guide, you'll be able to choose a partner company that offers great service at an affordable rate.

### **Still lost, or curious to learn more about how a call answering service can help you?**

Contact us at 1-800-645-2616 or visit our website at [answerfirst.com](http://answerfirst.com).

**“A CALL ANSWERING SERVICE HAS MANY BENEFITS FOR REAL ESTATE AND PROPERTY MANAGEMENT COMPANIES.”**

