

ARE MISSED CALLS AFFECTING YOUR BUSINESS?

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Increasingly, we have to 'do more with less' in many aspects of our businesses, particularly following the events of the past year.

Time and resources are stretched as businesses (especially SMEs) fight to stay afloat and remain competitive. It's getting more and more difficult to keep on top of everything, and there are only 24 hours in the day.

It's natural for business owners to focus on business-critical and deadline-heavy tasks. And it's true that there are some things that can safely be 'snoozed' temporarily when running a business.

However, customer service isn't one of these things, and neglecting this through missing calls (and as such, missing opportunities!) can be incredibly damaging to your business.

The Problem with Missed Calls

Did you know that if a person's call isn't answered, 80% of the time they won't call back? Time is valuable, and if a customer can't reach one business, they'll try another - particularly when the job they're looking to get done is time-sensitive.

The first thing to look at is why your business is missing calls. Often the reason for this is simply that you don't have enough staff to do everything at once, and the staff you do have are focused on other tasks.

There's also the chance that you could be receiving calls during out-of-office hours, particularly if you cater to an international customer base. Even a small difference in time zones can mean you miss a call.

Some businesses don't prioritise phone communications. With the shift to 'everything online', it's easy to assume that most customers and clients will be in touch via email or webchat. But this isn't the case - a large percentage still want to call up and speak to a real person, to make sure their query or message is heard and understood. Even when the phone is answered and a message is taken, this provides valuable reassurance that the situation or enquiry is important to the business, and being dealt with appropriately.

Is Call Handling the solution?

A call handling service can be an absolute godsend for busy businesses. It can also prevent

them from losing their part of the estimated £30 million a year that UK companies lose through missed calls.

If your mind has immediately jumped to the kind of overseas call centre that the majority of customers hate, think again. There are some fantastic options for UK based call-handling services out there, and they have some great advantages:

- Some options are completely flexible and scalable to meet your business needs.
- Most of the time a call handling service won't require a big initial outlay.
- You don't have the cost or commitment of hiring new staff.
- You can cover any out-of-hours enquiries in a cost-effective way.

Replace the picture of a bustling and chaotic call centre with a small team of professional, friendly and capable agents waiting to answer your business calls and you're much closer to the picture of what a modern, reputable call handling service looks like.

How do I find the right call handling service?

Look for a service that doesn't require a contract, where you can outsource as and when you need to. You don't want to be tied into lengthy contracts or subscriptions with cancellation fees or hidden charges. Services included should be clear and any conditions transparent.

Your call handling service will be an extension of your business, and as such the provider you choose should take the time to get to know the ins and outs of your operation and your communication styles and preferences, so that the outsourced employee will blend seamlessly into your team.

Your business reputation and customer service reputation are on the line during every business communication, so it's crucial that you feel 100% comfortable with the service you choose, and confident that they will represent your business in a pleasant and professional way.

Remember, people will tell almost twice as many friends about bad customer service than good! Don't give your customers the reason to do anything other than highly recommend your business to others.

How do Call Handling Services generally work?

When you've contacted your chosen provider, there will generally be an onboarding session so they can get to know you and your business. Following this you'll be able to choose and build your package to suit your needs, and the amount of outsourced work you estimate you'll need.

Usually, you'll be given the option of a tiered range of packages, and choose the one corresponding best to your needs, with the option to add on additional hours if needed.

You'll next be taken through the process of diverting your number, and will be able to do this whenever you wish - during appointments, meetings, or even taking a well-deserved break!

Your dedicated call handler will answer any calls during periods where your number has been diverted to their phone, chat with the customer and note the nature of the call and the details of their enquiry, before passing this information on to you via email, in real time.

A reputable company will make sure their agents are reliable, professional and fully trained, and during the onboarding process you'll be able to customise how your calls are answered to reflect your business communication style.

Protect Your Business

It's estimated that around 80% of the most important business communications are carried out over the phone. Clients and customers still value the human element of communication, and this isn't going to change any time soon.

Customers who are continually diverted to voicemail, placed on hold, or subjected to the phone ringing out over and over will soon become impatient and take their business elsewhere. Don't let this happen!

In an increasingly competitive market, responding rapidly to customer enquiries, and meeting their customer service expectations is absolutely critical. Don't write off outsourcing your call handling as an additional outgoing you don't need, but instead consider it as an investment to protect your business.

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