



Buying Guide

The following steps will prepare a business to properly select an On Hold Messaging provider. This is essentially a four step process.

STEP 1: DECIDING IF A CUSTOMIZED ON HOLD MESSAGING PROGRAM RIGHT FOR YOUR COMPANY:

- Candidly speaking, if your company truly does not pull calls on HOLD.....there may be little reason for an On Hold Messaging service. A simple 'music' solution may be best.
- Assuming your company DOES put callers on hold, but only for short averages (5-10 seconds), there is little value in the service. Once again, a simple 'music' solution may be best.
- If your company does place calls on hold*, and some of those callers receive hold times of 20 seconds and up, you are a good candidate for receiving value from an On Hold Messaging program. (*Call your own company at several peak traffic times and ask to be put on hold so you can experience your own current 'hold' offering)

If you've determined that an On Hold Messaging program is right for you...then let's take the next step...

STEP 2: KNOW YOUR CALLER PROFILE

- Are the majority of your callers existing clients, potential new clients, or vendor / partners?
___% are existing clients
___% are potential clients
___% are vendors.

...continued to page 2



- Are these callers one time callers?
 ___% are one time callers
 ___% are frequent callers
 ___% are occasional (monthly?) callers
 - Are there any consistent traits of these callers in terms of age, gender, job title?
 (e.g.: male contractors, female merchandise buyers, parents age 25-35, etc.)
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STEP 3: UNDERSTAND YOUR TELEPHONE SYSTEM ENVIRONMENT
 (you may need to consult with your IT group or internal phone administrator)

- How many physical locations do you have? _____
- What telephone system(s) are in place at each site?

- Are there plans to migrate the systems to newer technologies within the next year or two? ___yes___no
- What do callers hear right now if they are placed on hold at your location(s)?
 ___Silence? ___Music? ___Beep-beep tones? ___Other?

If other, what? _____

STEP 4: NOW YOU'RE READY TO SELECT AN ON HOLD MESSAGING PROVIDER:

Realize that you are selecting a provider, whose product is going to represent your company for hundreds or thousands of hours per year to your captive audience clients On Hold. You will find that in the scheme of things, On Hold Messaging programs are extremely affordable, and create great value to the companies that use them. Though difficult to measure, ROI can be tremendous for some industries. Make sure you are aligned with an On Hold Messaging provider that knows what they are doing, even if they are a few dollars higher to engage.

...continued to page 3

Here are several differentiators to consider:

- Experience in the industry – inexperienced On Hold Messaging providers don't have the experience to know what does work and more importantly, what DOESN'T work when it comes to creating an effective program. In some cases, you are better served with a mediocre music solution than a poorly scripted and produced On Hold Messaging program.
- Ask if they have their own in-house studio or do they sub out your productions?
- Determine if the prospective vendor is committed to the On Hold Messaging industry, or is it simply an ancillary service offered outside of doing radio commercials or other audio. The buyer should 'beware' if On Hold Messaging only comprises 20% of the providers overall business.
- Determine if the prospective provider is a member of their industry association, such as OHMA (On Hold Messaging Association).
- Determine if the prospective provider is well versed in providing service on the phone system technology you currently deploy. Ask for references for similar clients using the same phone technology.
- Listen to the voice talent demos offered. Avoid companies that are delivering On Hold Messaging programs that sound like radio commercials.
- Don't be afraid to enter into annual agreements with your prospective provider. Avoid long term agreements of 3 years and longer, but a one or two year agreement is common. You may encounter websites of providers that will try to attract you with "no contract" offers with considerably lower fees to get started. Buyer beware! There are reasons that this service is cheap. Often times, you end up with a short (and quickly boring) program, one voice talent, zero or limited consultation, one music selection, and a 'do-it-yourself' scripting tool. Additionally, these providers often vanish and when you need an update, you will have to start all over.
- Be prepared to update your program from time to time, but avoid the temptation to assume you will update your programs weekly or monthly, unless you have internal marketing resources to help with ideas for fresh content. For some industries (depending on research performed in STEP 2), it is acceptable and prudent practice to update only 1, 2 or 4 times per year.

Considering these thoughts will help you choose a solid provider. The results will be effective steps toward enhancing your callers' experience and your own professional image.