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Using A Cell Phone As A Main Phone Line

Firm:

I'm curious as to how many of of us 'Sezzers use their cell phone as their main phone line for their practice. Your thoughts, feedback, experiences (good and bad), changes you would make or would have made would be appreciated. Any concern about clients calling you at all hours of the night?

I'm looking at several different options to have a separate phone number forwarded to my cell for now, leaving open the option that if I do ever have real office, then I can keep the same number for a land line.

Daniel X. Nguyen

One major problem with the cell phone as your main line is that you will not be listed in the phone book.

I often have my office number forwarded to my cell phone if I am going to be out of the office for an extended period of time.

It may depend on your practice- but I rarely get calls at strange hours- and on the few occasions when they do come in I wont answer it unless I know who is calling.

Lew Wiener

I am still building a new practice so solo for me really means solo and I work out of my home. I use my cell phone as my main line but I am seriously considering a second land line/voice mail. That way I can call in for messages and/or only occasionally forward the calls to my cell. The biggest problem for me is that despite today's mobile technology, it is painfully obvious to the client that you are on a cell phone every time he/she calls. I do a lot of work for other lawyers and worry about the impression that leaves with them. So far, not having a "real" office has not been a problem.

Denny Esford

I had considered it as a cost savings but was worried about electronic interference from the computer and dropped/interfered calls. I went with Vonage with a set monthly rate - although not perfect, I am pretty happy.

Michael D.J. Eisenberg



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I can tell 99% of the time when someone is on a cell phone. If I were calling a professional, and s/he always answered on a cell phone, I'd be wary. As a professional, I want to sound and appear professional. That's why I engaged a "virtual office" to answer my calls. That's also why I installed two new phone lines in my home to receive calls from the virtual office and also to receive faxes.

The old cliché -- if you're going to do something, do it right -- applies here. I'm all for saving money and reducing overhead, but I think receiving calls on a cell phone, day-in-and-day-out, is amateurish. Bite the bullet, put in a couple of landlines, and when you're out of the office you can forward calls to your cell, if necessary.

Scott I. Barer

I had to pipe in. I disagree with using the cell phone use being an amateurish way to run a business. While landlines may appear more professional, this is a digital, mobile age, and since 80-90% of everyone has cell phones, I believe they understand that access to their lawyer is what matters. I use my cell phone as a selling point for service. I tell clients I want never to miss one of their calls, and that I give them my cell so they can always reach me. I believe they appreciate having immediate access. True, this can be abused, but it rarely has been. Being a new attorney, at the stage of continuing to seek new clients, client service and access is something I offer to break away from the pack.

My \$.02.

Sergio H. Benavides, San Francisco, California

I agree with Sergio to the extent that the cell phone is an adjunct to landlines which create the appearance of a professional office environment. Many of my clients have my cell phone and direct landline numbers, but I still believe that most people want to feel like their attorneys have a practice of "substance," and I think clients calling lawyers (especially in larger markets) expect a receptionist to answer the phone and screen the call (unless the client has the lawyer's direct line). Conversely, I think that if you're using a cell phone as your primary phone line, and consistently answering the phone yourself, it appears amateurish, especially in larger markets.

Another of my \$.02 (\$.04 for the day!).

Scott I. Barer

A lot depends on how you project yourself. If your clients expect a large office with a receptionist, then the cell phone projects the wrong image. If, on the other hand, your clients know that you are sole practitioner, then they understand that you will frequently answer your own phone. One of the benefits they get is the direct access to the attorney. I have a regular land line, but my clients know that most of the time they will get me directly on the phone and they appreciate it.

As to sound quality, that's all dependent on your equipment. I use a wireless headset in the office so sometimes people think I'm on my cell phone even though I'm not.

The most important thing to your client is probably the service you give them.

Larry Kramer, Silver Spring, Maryland

I don't think that clients particularly want or expect a receptionist to answer the phone nowadays. I know several major firms that want and expect the attorneys to answer their own phones and give the clients the attorneys direct line.

I know I would rather leave a message with voice mail than with a receptionist or answering service who often messes up the message.

I would agree however that I would wonder about an attorney that only had a cell phone.

Lew Wiener

Larry makes a good point. My clients appreciate my cell phone only approach, as do prospective clients referred to me by existing clients. They appreciate the more immediate access, and some are particularly impressed that their attorney is not still operating in the dark ages. OTOH, if I were just starting out, and if my target client base consisted of people who need to be impressed by some otherwise unnecessary overhead, then I would probably do one of those fake things where they are given the impression I have a staffed office. (But I'm so glad I don't have to!) I have had a couple of occasions when some lawyer in a big NYC law firm says "Are you on your cell phone?" The tone seems as though they fear they have made a big mistake in calling me on my "private" cell phone rather than "at the office." I say "yes", and explain that I always use it, since I move around a lot and want to stay close to my clients -- and have done so ever since I left the big firm practice. They are envious.

John Mitchell

I have a cyber telephone number where the voicemail is emailed to me. That serves as my "landline" and that's what's printed on my biz cards. That's where all my opposing counsel, annoying client and telemarketing calls go. For clients I like, I always make a big deal out of handwriting my cell phone number on my biz card and handing it to them, saying I only give this number out to people I like (half-jokingly). That never fails to get a big smile out of the client. After that, they know they're calling me on the cell and they feel like part of the inner circle. Did I mention that I don't get hit by telemarketing calls, too?

Gene Lee

.. a slightly different variation....I have a land line, which is answered by a receptionist. However, I make almost all of my outgoing calls on my cell phone. I do this partly because it's cheaper, and partly because that leaves my landline free. I do have voice mail, so callers never get a busy signal, even if I'm on the phone, but I still prefer to do it this way. I've been doing this for about 6 months now, and the only 'problem' is that on rare occasions, clients will call back on the cell, rather than the landline

just my \$.02

Laurie Gienapp

I was trying to direct my questions to people with "Virtual Offices" and/or those who run their practice out of their home for the time being (with the real possibility of moving into another physical location in the future). If one actually has an office, then I see why one would not use their cell as their main line. Nevertheless, all of the responses have been very good.

If I have a separate call in number (no call out abilities) and call out with my cell phone, that would somewhat defeat the purpose of having a separate call in number since the caller ID of my cell would show up as my cell and the person I am calling would probably associate my cell as my primary number.

Daniel X. Nguyen

Has anyone tried the Gizmo Project's Area 775 service?

<http://www.gizmoproject.com/area775-faq.html>

It seems like a good solution to this issue, since you can pick up a call on a landline, if you want to, but you don't have to give out the landline number. It also serves as a fax line.

Lisa Solomon

I have signed up for it and do have a 775 number. However, I have not used it extensively to give it a proper review. You can pick up from a landline if you have it set to forward from your 775 number or you can buy a SIP ATA adapter to hook up your regular phone to your broadband connection.

Alternatively, you can buy a local call in number for about 3 or 4 dollars a month with free incoming calls via Sipphone.com or gizmoproject.com.

I'm testing out Sunrocket's \$10 a month service, which I have forwarded to my cell phone. It has free incoming and 200 outgoing minutes to NA and PR. However, it does not come with enhanced voicemail, which allows you to check your messages over the internet and other features.

Daniel X. Nguyen

Of course you could block your number so that whomever you are calling doesn't see it and can't capture it.

I personally don't like blocking numbers- I think the person I am calling has a right to know who is calling- but it is an option.

Lew Wiener

Keep in mind that not all areas have digital service. Phones will switch to analog mode when necessary, and analog calls are not at all secure. They can be picked up quite easily with a cheap scanner. Nobody should underestimate the number of people who listen to scanners out of boredom, if nothing else. I have limited digital service in my area, and as a result tend to use cell phones for personal calls (having a very boring life) and limited business calling. My rule of thumb is never to use the cell phone for anything I don't want everyone to know.

I actually listened to some people who told me that was paranoid nonsense, and used my cell phone to confirm a hotel reservation once. A month later I had to cancel the card and get a new number due to all the racy stuff that suddenly showed up on that credit card.

I would worry using my cell phone as the primary business line that I was violating my obligation to use due care to maintain client confidences.

Anita Fuoss

I only very recently got a land line for my home office, but frequently still use my cell phone because I'm away from the office alot. It is not a good thing. Calls get dropped; sometimes even though the call doesn't drop, the reception is poor and the client and I can only hear every other word, etc. It's a necessity that some clients have my cell phone. But, I will definitely be pushing/advertising the land line number as the primary number.

Traci Ellis

See this post at Greatest American Lawyer - he has a cell solution even for a two person office: http://greatestamericanlawyer.typepad.com/greatest_american_lawyer/2005/02/last_day_of_pay.html

Carolyn Elefant

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