

Popular Threads on Solosez

Answering Service - Worth the Cost?

For a solo with no staff, is an answering service worth the cost?

I miss quite a few calls every day due to court, meetings, etc. I have voicemail, and I diligently return calls within the next business day.

But I've determined that some missed callers don't leave voicemails. I've tried to track those callers, and it looks like about 3 to 5 per week are lost (no voicemail, and they don't call back).

I'm trying to decide if an answering service would justify its cost by capturing those lost leads. If even one of the lost callers turns into a client each month, my bottom line would increase (one average matter would more than pay for the answering service).

Perhaps my real question for the group is this:

Does an answering service actually handle callers better than them just going to voicemail? Or will a similar number of callers still be lost because I wasn't available to talk right when they called?

I hope this makes sense. I'm looking forward to the group's input.

I use an answering service that picks up if I don't, but I still have callers that don't leave a message.

Will an answering service create more business for you? I don't know. You might want to give it a try and see what happens.

Jeremy J. Richey, Illinois

I don't use an answering service because I have a secretary who answers my phones, but I know several attorneys who do use a service. It seems to me that the service pays for itself, not only in being able to capture more clients, but also being able to get back to present clients and other parties quicker. The service that my fellow attorneys use will page or email the attorney when a new call comes in so my friends can get back to the caller much sooner. I've personally experienced an attorney returning my call, when we were both in court and I had a question regarding a common criminal client, in less than 5 minutes when I left a message with his service.

PC want to deal with a "real" attorney and unfortunately many think that means that you have staff to at least answer phones. When the service picks up the PC does not know that it is a service. Some services can even schedule appointments for you.

If you are missing 3-5 calls a month and the service can convert even 1 call a month into a client, it more than pays for itself.

Glen P. Malia, NEW York

Does anyone have any suggestions on what services are good/bad?

Michael Lichterman, Michigan

I believe that as a solo with no staff that my answering service is a necessity. I forward my office phone to the service always when I am not in the office (and quite frankly, most of the time when I am). They answer "Guilfoil Law Office" and take the message and immediately email it to me which appears on my blackberry and I can return the call immediately. Also, when I get back to the office, I can print the email and make notes on it, so it serves as a record of the call. I love it. I pay about \$75 per month and I am certain that I don't utilize all of the features. They can patch calls through etc., but I have not had them do anything other than email my messages to me. I also had all of the "operators" sign confidentiality agreements. I love it.

Micah G. Guilfoil, Kentucky

I just had to weigh in on this topic, because I am so pleased with my answering service. I use Ruby Receptionists (www.callruby.com), and they continuously exceed all of my expectations. Clients and other attorneys actually complement me on how friendly my receptionist is.

Whatever service you use - use one! My phones are answered by a live person from around 8:30 in the morning until around 6:30 at night. They don't just answer my phone - they can tell clients "He is in court this morning, but should be back around 11:00 a.m.", or "He is in a meeting right now".

After getting a receptionist service, I noticed immediately that I was missing so many calls! When people are looking for attorneys, they had 4 or 5 attorneys to call. If potential client called me at 9:00 a.m. and I wasn't in yet and all they got was a voicemail, they went on to the next attorney until somebody would actually listen to them.

My reception service can take down their name, address, phone number, and a little information about them, and then e-mails me "you got a call from a potential client who wants to talk to you about an estate plan", etc. It is like an itty bitty intake - but it makes the potential client feel like they have been heard.

The potential client feels like they have made "contact" with my firm, and I now have their name and phone number and brief description of their legal issue.

It is also great for screening calls when I am very busy - I know who is on the phone before I answer. If it is a potential client, I'll stop what I'm doing and make time to connect with them. If it is opposing counsel who is calling to ask for another extension on Interrogatories, I direct my receptionist to take a message. It is great.

Anyway, with a free trial, I would strongly recommend giving www.callruby.com a try. I can't believe I just wrote all that, but It has really changed my practice.

Chris Vaughn-Martel, Massachusetts

Although not an attorney, many moons ago I had to decide whether or not I wanted live phone answering for my virtual assistant practice.

As I'm a big believer in options, I researched and chose a tech that lets me decide on the fly... Onebox (unified messaging) - similar to Ring Central and Grand Central, only been in business much longer and can be set up to keep calls, voicemails and faxes easily accessible yet secure. Also, already been bought out by j2global so no need to worry it will get bought by Google or Microsoft and left to languish (as Grand Central was).

I have my Onebox account set to ask callers to state their name and then it connects to me wherever I am. I

can also choose to have the phone just ring my desk without recording the intro name (or cell or whatever phone I tell it to); I can direct calls to my operations manager's extension, or I can pick up immediately, turning off the record the callers name part of the process.

I chose to spend the extra \$30 or so and get a professionally recorded introduction (I now have 5 extensions on my Onebox) - dial 1-866-848-2195 if you'd like to take a listen.

I get lots of compliments on how my phones are set up. Also, I usually tell people if they go to voicemail (during regular business hours) 9 times out of 10, I'm on the phone and can't pick up. In other words, I don't hide behind my voicemail system.

For more information on Onebox, visit my resources page: <http://www.legaltypist.com/resources> or dial my digits and press x101 if you want to speak with me. 😊

Andrea Cannavina
Digital Assistant * Master VA

I must second Chris' statements as I also use Ruby. I have been VERY pleased with them even on the occasion when I had to say "Oops, can we change" something. They think on their feet and have proved to be very cost effective. Case in point, I was out of my office and a call came in from an "AT&T representative" who wanted my email address. They have instructions to go ahead and provide it, but after doing so, the ATT person said that my connection would now be upgraded and I would be billed an additional \$10 per month. The Ruby Receptionist then quickly called a halt and said no, she could not authorize that and insisted that the rep speak with me. Fortunately, I had just gotten off my phone and I was able to stop the "upgrade" which wasn't an upgrade at all. I already have upgraded service and the so-called representative was an outside contractor trolling for ways to bill AT&T for work.

Call Ruby. You will be pleased.

Lyza Sandgren, Paralegal

I just uploaded a Word document to MyDocsOnline.com (sign in with ID: solosez2, password: solosez) where I copied a detailed Q&A email exchange between my part-time assistant and a representative from Ruby. Yes, she did ask permission to post the exchange on Solosez but it was so long it seemed better to place it on the server rather than on the list).

Q&A is in the Law Practice Management folder, file name "Ruby Receptionist".

I was very close to going with Alert Communications (also very responsive to our email inquiries) for their calendaring option, but Ruby currently has a 30-day free trial and between the risk-free trial and the great info they provided to us . . . we're with Ruby now. Check out the Q&A because Brenda asked just about every question imaginable. Hope this helps.

Toni G. Warder, Texas

I'm intrigued by Ruby Receptionists, but am concerned with how quickly I'll use up receptionist minutes with all the phone spam I receive (auto warranties, debt consolidation, etc.). Do they have the ability to filter those out?

Adam M. Pizer, New York

For the cheapest Ruby plan, you get 100 minutes of phone answering time each month. So if the average substantive phone answer is 30 seconds, that gives you about 200 calls each month. I have become really busy and went a little over this month, but it is not a ton of money. Did I mention that they give you a FREE toll-free number that is yours to keep if you ever discontinue with Ruby. I have my regular listed number which is hardwired to forward directly to the toll-free Ruby number. Then Ruby directs the call to my fax line. Whenever RUBY calls, I pick up. If it is not RUBY, I let it go to my fax machine. If Ruby calls and I am not here or unavailable, they get my fax machine and go back to the caller "he is unavailable at the moment, would you like to take a message or go to his voicemail".

This means I am only paying for two lines, one of which is just a dummy hard forward.

Does any of this make sense?

Chris Vaughn-Martel, Massachusetts

Makes sense, but it sounds like, in order to be able to have Ruby pass along a call to you, you either have to have a separate fax line (I don't) or give out your 800 number, which is doable but not ideal.

Adam Pizer

Three to five missed calls a week? Depending on how much you are out, couldn't that just be people who already left a message?

Just putting that out there...

I have had different things...I would love an assistant some day and Ruby sounds awesome, but right now I just use Phonetag.

Amy Kleinpeter, California