

Desktop Guerrillas

GUERRILLA BRIEFS

TALK IS CHEAP

Having a pro record your phone announcement—
and an 800 number for clients to call on—
can cost less than your next lunch.

VOICE OF REASON

Advertisers understand the power of a voice. From the reassuring tone of Kiefer Sutherland to the overly enthusiastic Mr. Moviefone, there's no denying the value of a professional sounding—if not famous—voice backing your product. The Internet now offers help finding services that allow you to affordably put some polish on your business's voice mail greeting, and make you easier to reach as well.

When I was starting my own company, I tried recording the voice mail message myself, but just couldn't get the tone right. Besides, does anyone really like the sound of their own voice? (Or your nasally assistant's, for that matter?) I decided to find a spokesperson of sorts. The best place to start is voice123.com. This site contains a database of hundreds of voice talents that can be searched using a variety of criteria, including gender, age, and pitch. Auditioning is completely virtual; with just a click you can listen to sample readings by all the voice actors, promoting everything from body lotions to monster truck rallies. Listening to these auditions is more addictive than Spider Solitaire. The more fickle among us could easily spend days deciding between talents.

Once you've narrowed it down, the recording process is quick. The new voice of my own company was Murray Vair, a soothing but authoritative sounding tenor. Like many of the people in the [voice123](http://voice123.com) database, he has his own studio and was able to turn around my script in under 30 minutes for just \$25. He gave a couple of different readings (one more enthusiastic, one more sub-

dued); I even asked for tweaks and he was happy to oblige. The new voice of Desktop Guerrillas was fully realized: assured but not cocky, comforting but not complacent. My own Mr. Moviefone for less than the cost of a night at the movies.

YOUR VERY OWN 800 NUMBER

Now, you need an 800 number for people to call. Not only does it save your out-of-town customers from off-putting, long-distance charges, but it adds a level of professionalism that a local number simply can't. You can also hand the number out to any frugal family members.

There are several services available that give you a "virtual PBX"—an incoming number that can route calls, accept faxes, and even support multiple extensions—without any more hardware than a phone and a computer. One such service is provided by RingCentral (ringcentral.com).

When clients dial your number, they are presented with your greeting—or Murray's, as the case may be. You can then customize the system so your calls can be forwarded to any or all of your phone numbers to find you. If you don't answer at any of them, the caller will be delivered to your RingCentral voice mail. The messages can then be retrieved via phone, the Web, or delivered right to your email. You can even install a program on your computer that acts like a caller ID, enabling you to accept calls at a particular number or shuttle other callers directly to voice mail. If you do answer, know that the toll free calls are not toll free to you. On top of RingCentral's monthly fee, you're billed about 7 cents a minute for the incoming calls. If you have a better phone plan for

outgoing calls, you may want to come up with a reason to call your clients back.

The service can also support multiple extensions for an additional fee, each with its own voice mail and fax service. If you want to keep your old number, but centralize all messaging, your existing number can be forwarded to your new 800 number with the help of your local phone company.

One note: If you decide to have your greeting recorded by a pro, be sure to ask for it in a format that is compatible with your messaging system. For RingCentral, it's WAV PCM, 11kHz, 8 Bit, or Mono. Uploading is a breeze via its website, which also gives you access to your voice messages, faxes, and settings.

The great thing about all these services is the speed in which you can get started: RingCentral will set you up in minutes, and many of the voice actors can turn around their work in a day, if not hours. You might not get Gene Hackman, but at least you won't need to resort to Jean from accounting.

RingCentral

\$9.95/month and up. www.ringcentral.com

Voice123

Pricing varies by actor (and is directly billed by them). www.voice123.com

Desktop Guerrillas is an IT consulting firm serving small businesses in Fairfield County. Whether you're a one-person operation or a team of thirty, we can help you implement a messaging solution to meet your needs.