

Physician Referral & Telephone Triage TIMES

The National Publication for the Physician Referral,
Health Information and Telephone Nursing Professional

Vol. 7, No. 3

March 2007

Vanity Numbers or Not

BURLINGTON, VT—Way back in the late 1980's in the beginning issues of our predecessor publication *Physician Referral Update*, we looked at the arguments for and against having a vanity number as the number of record for the call center. It was a key issue in that era as many healthcare organizations were starting call centers and this was one most important decision to make: a local number, a toll free number, a vanity local number, a vanity toll free number. One or perhaps several in combination would make up the slate of phone contacts for individuals needing to connect with the call center.

The argument for the vanity number at that time was that it was an easily recognizable number for people to remember. It melded right into an advertising campaign as a call to action. The main negative was that consumers were not happy about hunting and pecking letters as they dialed.

Each healthcare organization then had to weigh the various points on each side and make their decision as to which way to go. There has been a development in recent years that may tip the scales in favor of the pro vanity number argument, argues Laura Noonan, Vice President of the Burlington, Vermont-based 800response.

"The main negative that some folks felt was vanity numbers were easy to remember but difficult to dial—we heard a lot of that up until about five years ago," she says. "We don't hear that

much today. Now you have text messaging and cell phones. More and more folks are entering people's names in their cell phones. And, have you seen how fast some people are using a keypad to write a text message?"

There's also change afoot amongst the older generation, she maintains. One of the company's clients is a hearing center in Missouri with a number of older individuals as customers. The vanity number has significantly increased this organization's

"The main negative that some folks felt was vanity numbers were easy to remember but difficult to dial—we heard a lot of that up until about five years ago."

business, she says.

So, just what is 800response? This is a company that started as a long distance phone company serving New England. Since the late 1980's it has owned a block of 800 numbers. The phone company part is now gone, but the 800 numbers are still there. "We own 800-639," she says. "That translates into 'new' and 'nex.' We are one of a small group of companies that have 800 numbers to lease."

She advises call centers looking for a local vanity number to talk to their local phone company. "You can also get toll free numbers from your local

phone companies but most of these are going to use the newer 866, 877 or 888 prefixes." Noonan says.

She points out that one reason there are limited 800 prefix choices lies with the keypad. "1" and "0" are out as they have no letters and there are only so many combinations of the other letters that make interesting words.

However, there are a fair number of words that can be constructed with the last four letters of the phone number that can conform to particular professions. That's because one doesn't have to be limited to just four letters to finish the number. For example, if someone would purchase 800-newdoctors, there are three letters at the end to finish the "doctors" word. It's a valid number; it's what consumers would call. But, as they finish the "t" and start on the "o" the system would begin dialing and may even ring the number before all letters are completed, she says.

The company works on a shared use model so it can license the same number to several areas of the country at the same time with geographic limitations on its range. It prices based on population density and whether or not the client is choosing ancillary services such as call recording and real time call tracking.

The company has over 1,500 clients of which about 100 are in the healthcare field. Altogether, she says, having a vanity number in place seems to increase call volume an average of 30 percent, although some may be less and some may be more depending on other factors of the promotion. ■

800response

200 Church Street • PO Box 1049 • Burlington, VT 05402-1049
1-800-NEW-SALES • www.800response.com

Copyright by HMR Publications Group, Inc.