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**Bernard Andersen's**  
**Streamline Your**  
**COMMUNICATION!**



**Make Your Messages MORE POWERFUL and PROFITABLE**

By Bernard Andersen

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## Please Read This **FIRST**

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## Our Action Plan

Every day, most of us communicate with people, from twenty to a thousand or more of them.

We all think that we're naturally very good at it because, after all, we've been doing it ever since the nurse snipped our umbilical cord!

But, apart from a few that have a natural talent for connecting with other people or had a family, and probably teachers as well, who helped them to develop these valuable skills, few of us get the best results that we could from the wonderful communication tools that we were given for free.

It's not hard to put some thought and effort into it, and shouldn't take much of your time – do it in little bites. You can practice most of the suggestions in your daily encounters. The improvements that you see will keep coming to you for the rest of your life.

This ebook will help you to improve the way you communicate and the results that you get, by revealing short-cuts and strategies you can use with minimum preparation in the many areas, both personal and business, where we interact with other people.

I've included those that work for me. I worked out some of them as the need arose; others came from reading and also by carefully watching how other people handled particular situations.

Some will fit you well straight off the page and I expect that you will adapt some others to better fit your own circumstances – that's what I did too.

Read quickly through the whole ebook, and then pick the areas that you feel that you most need to focus on.

There have been whole books and even multi-part courses offered on some of the topics which I've covered in just a few pages here, but you should find

plenty which you didn't know or had not done as well as you now realize that you can up till now.

There's no fluff, just short-cuts and strategies which work.

Let's get started ....

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## Conversation Cues

If you often have difficulty in starting conversations and maintaining the interest of people you are speaking with, you are just a Member of what is probably the largest group of humans on this planet – “nice people with less than perfect communication skills”.

Your upbringing and life experiences may have made you defensive or even negative about most people that you meet.

It might be that you just need to improve your socializing techniques a little.

It is very unlikely that you can't improve at all with the help of my tips in this section. Of course, not all of my suggestions will work equally well for every reader. You will not need to improve at all in some areas anyway.

**Accept compliments:** While we all crave recognition, many people find it very hard to accept praise. Sometimes, their reaction sours the moment for the person who offered the compliment too. If someone praises you in a genuine manner, thank them. You can acknowledge anyone else that deserves a share of the credit but take what is due to you without fuss or false modesty.

**Drop Your Fences (just a little!):** If we are tense about meeting people we don't know but we want to make a good impression with, that may cause our whole body to start to prepare for flight (the most natural reaction to the fear we are filling our mind with).

That will cause the other person to react at a very basic level to the unspoken signals we are sending them.

We should remind ourselves that there's little chance that they will attack us (muscles – relax!) and counter the negativity with positive thoughts that we can improve the other person's day in the next few minutes.

Then, those positive vibes will cause a more positive reaction in the other person.

**Prepare your opening lines:** Most experienced speakers rehearse their casual, off-the-cuff remarks as well as their formal presentations. Otherwise, the ad-libs might not work and tend to reduce their professional image in the minds of the people they are talking with.

So, rehearse a few openings and don't hesitate to take every chance you get to use them.

A simple, proven way to reduce any butterflies is to ask yourself, "What's the worst that might happen?"

**Ask Open Questions:** Closed questions can be answered with single-word answers such as "Yes" or "No!" You can see that they just don't give much scope for your listener to open out the discussion.

When you start a conversation, you want an answer from the other person, which you can use to continue the conversation and broaden the range of it.

"Did you enjoy the concert?" is a closed question.

"What did you like best about the Concert?" is an open question that invites more conversation, even if they thought the concert was the worst that they've ever seen.

**Show Respect for Their Answer:** Sometimes, you may not agree with their response, but please don't immediately push your opposite view at them.

When you begin the conversation, ask a question that will spark a conversation, not a battle.

Start the conversation as you want it to continue.



**Always Be Positive:** If you drop your troubles in your new acquaintance's lap, their reaction is not likely to be sympathy (except for themselves for meeting you!)

Whatever hassles you're going through in your life, leave them at the door. Try to be upbeat and interested in everyone in the group and what they have to say.

Give positive re-enforcement to the people you talk with and keep away from criticism of people that are not present. Keep away, as far as possible from people that hack 'absent friends'; just think what those turkeys might be cackling about you when you're absent yourself.

**Gag the gossip:** Gossip and rumor is always negative about someone. Don't spread it or encourage those who do by letting them foul your ears with it.

**Keep quiet:** Don't pass on anything which other people tell you unless you are sure they want you to. That they 'probably won't mind' is never a good enough reason. This will reinforce the good impression you make.

You've got two ears and one mouth – use them in that proportion.

If you think that you might be boring your listener, stop drilling. Often, asking them something about one of their special interests is the best way to get the conversation going again.

### ***Stop "I"ing Me!***

Have you endured conversations like this exaggerated example?

Two actors met at a party and one spent 5 minutes telling his friend how successful he was. Then, he said to her, "But that's enough about me. What did you think of my performance in my new show?"

If one person in a conversation is completely focused on their input and how that is received, they might as well not be there. The other people are probably wishing that they weren't!

**Simple fix for the Um-mers among you:** If you are inclined to sprinkle "um's" or similar expressions through your conversations, try this simple but very effective tactic. Slow your pace of talking slightly, and drop in a pause every now and then.

This should help to keep your voice more in synch with your racing mind which can process words much faster than anyone can talk. This will help your listeners to take in the meaning of what you say to them.

An extra possible benefit is that your listeners will probably believe that you're taking the trouble to think deeply about what you're saying to them.

I won't tell them if you don't!

**Don't be too nervous:** A little nervous tension is natural and healthy. It's been part of every human's physiology since everybody lived in caves and my grandfather invented the wheel.

Even the most professional of actors and speakers feel some nervous strain just before their performance. Most of them welcome it – they've learned that it is a positive sign that their body is ready.

Just remember that you will feel any tension much more than you friends and colleagues will be aware of it, or even care about it. They probably won't even notice unless you make an issue of it yourself.

So, focus on getting your message across and listening carefully to the responses from your listeners. They're probably feeling the same sort of buzz, in varying degrees, themselves.

**Preparation is the best tonic ever invented for your nerves.**

**Making the wall-flower bloom:** If someone that you are trying to include in your conversation is either imitating a solid brick wall, or perhaps overcome with shyness, you should try to help them.

Don't push them, but give them opportunities to contribute to the conversation.

If you don't get any response, stop pumping for a while.

**Be a happy medium:** In every group, there are people that feel they must drive the others along and some who are happiest when they're directed by others.

You probably feel that you may be able to improve your life in some areas with help from others in the group, but you also have ideas and views which are as good as any put up by the "born leaders" among them.

**Decide how important each particular issue is for you:** Compare it against other relevant factors. How much will a particular decision, which you don't agree with, lower your enjoyment of the group's activities or any other benefits that you get from the group?

Try to balance your own desires and concerns fairly against what you can see of other people's views and desires. Sometimes, someone will attach a lot more importance to something that you may not have much regard for.

I remember being a Member of a Club where one person had a fixation about being in a particular position on the Committee. They probably weren't the best person available but could be depended on to do those duties and they had been contributing to the Club in whatever way they could for years. So, it was an unspoken rule that they were elected each year unopposed. Most people are nice like that.

Decide whether you will let the decision pass or take action right away. It's too late to complain after the group settle on a course of action. Don't let the matter take more of your attention than you feel it deserves.

Letting an aggravation simmer only increases the negative effect on your own enjoyment of the group activities. That will also lessen other people's enjoyment of their interaction with you. Eventually, it may even affect your physical health!

Stick to your decision unless you are shown facts that give you firm reasons to change.

Unless it's a matter which you decide is of minimal importance and impact for you, you probably should try to discuss it with your friends or colleagues. Some of them, including the group's leaders, may not be aware of the importance that you attach to the matter.

**Tune in to their W.I.I.F.M;** That's the radio station which is playing in everyone's mind all the time, even when they're asleep; **What's In It For ME?!** You'll get and keep their attention more easily if you focus on fitting what you say to reflect their desires and needs, not just putting your own needs forward.

**Be a Touchy, Feely Talker:** No, we're not suggesting you risk harassment claims!

But, you should try to gauge how your listeners are most comfortable taking in information and make sure that you feed it to them that way.

Many people are best at absorbing information they get through their eyes; what they see is what they best remember.

Others need a hands-on experience to set the message in their heads most effectively.

A smaller group handles messages which they hear most efficiently.

But, you don't need to provide samples for the "feelers" or a sound and light show for the visually activated. Just include the sort of words that reflect their most-developed senses.

These are just basic examples and don't fully reflect the power of this technique:

"That *touched* me"

"We *saw* this with our own eyes"

"The applause almost *deafened* me"

You don't need to emphasize the 'hook' words when you say them. Their presence will be enough.

A strong example which I heard in a workshop was aimed at a listener who was a "feeler".

The speaker looked at her and said, "I know why you *feel* that way. When I first tried that drink, I *felt* like energy started flowing through my body from the first sip. I *found* that the effect became even greater as I continued to drink it every day."

**NOTE:** I've just italicized the 'power' words in that paragraph for your information. The speaker did not emphasize them at all in the way he spoke.

**Move on or change the subject:** When a conversation starts to dry up, introduce a new topic or, if you feel that the participants are drying out faster than the talk, either move on to another group or get some savories or drinks to revive them and the conversation.

## ***Telling and Listening to Jokes***

If you tell a joke, it had better be really funny. Be careful what jokes you tell. Always rehearse how you will tell it – even the simplest one-liner. Most professional comedians do. They say that their job is to try to make their routines seem effortless, even impromptu. That's a better trick than most magicians do!

**Don't tell that joke you just heard on TV last night:** There are at least 2 good reasons to heed this suggestion:

1. It's most likely that your friends will have either seen the same show or been told the joke sometime that day.
2. The other reason is that you won't get a great reaction, even from people that haven't heard your joke, unless you take time to practice it and fit it to your personality.

**Remember the punch-line and how you're going to get there:** Unless you're an experienced and polished story-teller, there's no benefit in leading your listeners through the set-up of the joke if you spoil (or forget) the punch-line, or pay-off. Seasoned storytellers can make the journey so enjoyable that their listeners don't mind if they never get to the point with some of their stories.

But, the rest of us should make sure that we deliver them a laugh every time.

Even if you've heard the joke before, you should be their best audience ever! There aren't really any new jokes. There are just a lot of writers who creatively re-work old, and very old, material for audiences who mostly have pretty poor memories.

So, it's inevitable that you'll know some jokes that people you meet start to tell. You may have heard it at your grandfather's knee a very long time ago.

But do them a good turn; give them your full attention while they tell it and react appropriately to their punch-line.

Treat them as you hope people that know the jokes you tell will treat you.

**Never try to top someone else's story:** If someone tells a joke that you know another, perhaps better, version of then please save it for another time.

**Only tell jokes which everybody will find funny:** Put-down jokes, religious, ethnic, rude or plain nasty jokes are out unless you are sure that everyone present will enjoy them as much as you will enjoy telling it. If you lessen the enjoyment of the occasion for even one of the people that you tell the joke to, you failed.

**Don't tell any joke just the way somebody else did:** You won't make the same impression that David Letterman did with that one-liner, however hard you try. There's only one 'Jay Leno' and there's only one 'you'. You're the best 'you' there's ever been on this planet, so that's what you should give your listeners, not a weak copy of someone else.

## Your Power Letters

In the Internet Age, we might send fewer letters than we used to but the speed and low cost of email have not pushed the letter to follow the Dodo. That's because a carefully constructed letter can have an impact that is much harder to achieve with an email.

### Get Results with EVERY Letter

Here are some simple tips for improving every letter that you write.

**Make a draft:** You know what you want to say because you're dealing with the subject of your letter every day. But you need to make your points clear to the reader of your letter and make sure that you don't forget any important points.

It's a good idea to **list those personal details of the person you're writing to** which you'll use in the letter; imagine your embarrassment if you find out that you've misspelled their first name just a couple of minutes after you've posted the letter!

Also, write yourself a note with all the vital points that you want to be sure to mention.

**Focus your sales letters on customers' problem(s):** The best way to 'hook' your reader is to show them how they can fix a problem, personal or business, which they have. If you have trouble writing an effective sales letter, ask yourself what are the most pressing problems which your product can help your customers with.

**Use a Spell-checker but be aware of their limitations:** Those programs will only check for words, or groups of letters, which they don't recognize as acceptable words - but they won't pick up mis-used words.



**So, they may let us down if we write;**

**your** instead of **you're**

**their** instead of **there** or **they're**

**accept** instead of **except**

**principal** instead of **principle**

**then** instead of **than**

**to** instead of **too**

**lay** instead of **lie**

**premiere** instead of **premier**

.... and many other homonyms (similar sounding words that are spelled differently.)

Spell-checkers also filter the text that you are checking according to the particular 'dictionary' of words you have selected. If your checker is using a North American English filter, then it will pick up some English words as wrong if you use the British spelling for them, even though most of us accept both spellings in our everyday use.

**Grammar is less important than clarity!** Don't let formal rules get in the way of the reader understanding your message. Keep it simple.

But, you do need to spell-check it and remove anything that interferes with the reader's understanding of your message and why it is important to them. If you don't do this, you risk giving the reader a poor impression of your attention to detail.

**Write as if you were just talking to the reader:** Don't adopt a more formal persona with your letters than you show when dealing with people face to face. They want the "real you".

**Keep 'business' and 'personal' separate:** Obviously, you will become friendly, or even good friends, with some colleagues and other business contacts. But, it's usually best to stick to business in your business letters, except for, maybe, brief comments in a P.S.

Remember that your friend, while appreciating your shared outside business activities, may have to show your letter to his or her colleagues, so any nick-names or in-jokes would be out of place.

**Write your letter to just one person:** Even when you are writing a newsletter that you send to all your customers, contacts or prospects, imagine that you are telling one person the information and how it will help them.

When you are actually writing to just one person, personalize it where you can.

**Start a "swipe" file:** This can save you time and improve the impact of sales letters, etc., faster than just about any other method.

When you get a sales letter or brochure that keeps your attention, even if it is for a quite different product or service to those which you offer, think about whether the approach used by the writer (who may have charged the Company up to a thousand dollars to write the letter) might work for your letters.

You must not copy the text – that's asking for trouble. But, often there are aspects of the letter, like the way they use the P.S. or how they describe the customer's potential problem, which you can change to fit your product or service.

**Keep your letter focused on the benefits to your readers:** If they don't see anything that appeals directly to them in a quick scan, many will not bother to give your carefully prepared letter a closer reading. You have to grab their attention with your first sentence, but without resorting to the brashness of the TV spruikers.

**Stick to one main topic in a letter:** Remember that your reader is probably time-poor and overloaded with reading matter. Put the main points in your first or second paragraph. Put some highly relevant supporting information in the next one. Keep the rest as short as possible.

**Never use jargon or big, showy words** unless you are absolutely sure that your reader will understand and be comfortable with them. If they don't use them when talking or writing to you, that's a strong indication you should also leave them out.

You're competing with the best in your field, so do your best with every letter you write.

**When you've covered all the important points, STOP:** Keep the chit-chat and less important details for another time. They could dilute any interest that your main message created and reduce the reader's desire to act on your message.

## **Simple, sure-fire letter outline.**

1. Brief greeting. Use their name.
2. Introduce yourself, just giving relevant information and mentioning any mutual contacts – business people or Clubs.
3. Tell them why you are contacting them
4. Give them your message; “call to action”
5. Tell them how they will benefit.
6. Include testimonial or refer them to your website for more detailed information and reviews.
7. Repeat your ‘call to action” and mention any real time (or other) limitations on the offer you’ve presented to them.
8. Brief thanks.
9. Include your contact information, including phone number and snail-mail address.
10. Now, just check that you’ve included ALL the important points and fix any obvious spelling errors.

## Managing the Flood of Incoming Mail

**Answer your mail within 24 hours**, if possible. It:

1. helps to forge better relationships with the people who sent the questions, etc. to you
2. will probably increase their confidence and word of mouth about you, and
3. reduces the weight of "stuff" in your In-tray.

**Try to handle mail only once:** If you don't pay someone to pre-sort your incoming mail, do a quick, preliminary sort;

The main rule is "Do you need to do anything with this?"

If it's junk, then junk it.

If someone else should deal with it, then route it to them. If you think it necessary, make a note to check in a few days that they received it and have acted on it.

Don't make a copy of anything unless there is an important, maybe administrative or legal, reason to do so. If you want several people to see a particular letter, brochure or whatever, then put it on a circulation list and get it started around the group immediately.

If you're on a regular distribution list which delivers nothing you need or can give useful input to, sign off it now.

## **Phone Power**

The phone is a pervasive force in all our lives. When someone phones us, we almost become their captive, connected directly to them by the handset at our ear.

### **Every phone call you make is important.**

If you make a good impression on the person you call, that's great!

But, if they are not happy with your manner or the message you deliver, the effect is hard to overcome even if they give you another chance.

This section will help you to improve the results that you get with personal and, especially, business calls.

### **Making Your Calls Matter**

You and the person you call save time and can get a better impression of the other person than you might get from an email or letter.

But, any call where no decisions are made and no action is started as a result of that call, is a waste of money and time.

It's worth taking some trouble to make the impression you leave with the other person as positive as you can.

Try to set up a block of time where you can make your phone calls with minimum interruption, so that you can focus on the people you call and the information that you exchange.

Write down, either on paper or on your computer, the essential points that you want to cover in the call before you pick up the handset. Think carefully about the first thing you will say to the other person, especially if you want something from them and have not had previous dealings with them.

How will you introduce yourself to them? You have to make it clear that your call is worth their time, so you should give your name and clearly state the reason that call will be of value to them.

Or, you may have to talk first to a gatekeeper - their secretary or receptionist. Don't try to bluff or bully them. The people in these positions are highly trained and experienced in dealing with the variety of people who want access to their Boss and they've "heard it all before".

If you try to mislead them, then a word from them to their Boss can have that door permanently shut to you. If they do not put your call through, try to keep them receptive to another call from you.

I remember the title that a Sales Trainer, whose name unfortunately escapes me, gave to the gatekeepers; "**Director of First Impressions**". It gives a true reflection of the valuable job they do.

I hope that the Sales Trainer is getting a royalty payment from all those businesses that now use the term!

Recall, or look up, any personal or other significant information about the person you call before you lift the handset. You won't use that information every time you speak with them, but it helps to give you a better 'mind-picture' of the person that you're talking with.

Research, and my personal experience, show the value of this simple tactic; **take a breath and SMILE when you start to dial their number!** Yes, it really can help. Somehow, the friendliness of a genuine smile seems to be transmitted through the line to the other person.

Let's face it; it can't hurt either of you!

If you phone some-one that you, say, want to sell some bathroom fittings, **stick to the subject** - unless you are happy to let the other person lead your conversation off that topic.

Before you introduce a different topic, decide whether the other person is likely to be interested, or not, in discussing it. Keep tales of your children or pets for the calls between family members and the doctor or veterinarian!

Try to be considerate of the other person's time as well as their opinions.

Do a quick check of your notes to be sure that you've covered the important points before the call ends.

You will sometimes get their answering machine, another person at their company or their answering service, rather than the person you really want to speak to. So, it will pay you to prepare a short message with your name, contact details and the most important reason why they should call you back. That will save you fumbling for words, create a better impression and increase the chance that they will call you back.

### ***Ask Early and at Least Twice***

If the main point of the call was to get them to agree to have dinner with you or to buy \$24,000 worth of taps – make sure that you ask them!

Don't get carried away with the small talk, or any indication that they want to end the call. If you don't ask them, you have wasted their time as well as your own.

This is a very widespread failing that wastes a lot of time and increases the telephone companies' profits with lots of follow-up calls. Ask early and, if you don't get a "Yes" or an outright, firm, "No!" (and can do so without being too pushy), ask again before the call ends.

If their answer to your first request was "Yes", thank them and be considerate by keeping the rest of the call short and on-topic.

If the answer is negative, don't show any of the upset or disappointment that you may feel. Try to 'keep the door open' for further contact at another time.



Unless the other person tells you why, you may not even know their actual reasons for rejecting your offer. It may not mean that they don't like you or your offer, or that there is no possibility of a future business or personal relationship.

But, a negative reaction to their response by you would probably ensure that their door is closed to you permanently.

### ***Reduce the 'Buyer's Remorse'***

One of the most important calls that sales people should make is to follow-up a few days after the sale of any major item. That's so you can ease any doubts that the customer is feeling after spending so much money or squeezing their credit card so hard.

Have you felt it yourself after buying, say, a car, wide-screen TV or similar?

Most people have some degree of negativity in their make-up and these buying decisions are often not all that clear-cut. There could have been a couple of other sellers who almost got that customer's check instead of you.

You should call the customer, congratulate them on their decision and ask for their impressions of their new purchase. If you have a small but useful, or valuable, extra that you haven't mentioned previously, but can offer them (for free, of course) at this time, that will have a good effect.

If they are exceptionally happy with the new item, this might be a good time to ask them to recommend you and your product to their friends.

Keep every call short and on-topic unless you are sure that the person you call is comfortable with a longer, chattier call.

## **Incoming Calls**

Every call might be a new potential customer or an important contact. But, many people answer their phone as if every caller should have made an appointment or just not bothered!

When you answer the phone, always give the caller a great reception.

### ***Turn Callers into Customers***

Most of us can set aside a block of time to make most of our phone calls but almost nobody can get people to all call them at the time which is most convenient.

If you can arrange for people that work for you to make their calls to you at a set period each day, as far as possible, that can help you keep your day more organized.

But, you have to handle most incoming calls whenever they happen.

I believe that, unless you are expecting an extremely urgent call, you should not interrupt any serious, face-to-face discussion to answer the phone.

It's more polite, and likely to make a better impression on the person or people you are with, to either arrange for someone else to answer the call or set your answering machine to cut in after, say, six rings.

If a visitor interrupts you while you are on the phone, you will have to interrupt the call while you ask them to return later or, better, tell them that you will go and see them when you finish the call.

Always remember that many modern phones will pick up any sound from any-direction, so just putting your hand over the mouthpiece will not prevent the person at the other end of the line from hearing everything you or your visitor says!

Before you answer any call, do as I suggested doing with your out-going calls. Always take a relaxing breath and SMILE! It really works!

You've got time to do that. Answering your phone at the first couple of rings will actually unsettle some callers! They probably haven't read this ebook and are still marshalling their thoughts about what they want to say.

Try answering on the third or fourth ring, with your genuine smile in place and your welcoming introduction at the front of your mind.

That first sentence should be relaxed and informative. It should not sound stiff or 'canned' – otherwise you might as well just leave the answering machine on day and night!

You're wasting their time if you just say, "Hello". Always give your name or your company and department, if that's relevant.

If your business has a very long name, or your boss insists that you always say the company's catch-phrase when you answer the phone, it's worthwhile to practice a few times. That will, at least, ensure that the caller hears the slogan clearly. Many times, I've heard these 'mini-ads' as a garbled mess that I couldn't make out, even though I already knew the slogan.

If you say, "Welcome to Ajax Aardvarks, this is Ben" and let your tone rise slightly on "is Ben", you will encourage most callers to respond with their own name. That's a good start to the call, isn't it?

Many people are more casual in their business discussions now than ten years ago, but I recommend that you always use a title, such as Mr., Mrs. or Ms. for each caller that you don't know unless they suggest that you call them by their first name.

Please, never use the diminished form of someone's name if they use the full version when they introduce themselves to you. "Benjamin" is as likely to be

upset about being referred to as "Ben" (or "Benny"!) by someone that he doesn't know as "Margaret" is when called "Meg" or "Maggie"!

Older people are the most likely to appreciate these courtesies but they certainly aren't the only ones.

Try to get the caller's contact details early in the call and a clear idea of why they called. A person called me a few weeks ago but the battery on their mobile phone was drained before we'd completed the discussion. I had got her basic information first up so that, when she called back in a couple of hours, I was able to answer her original inquiry without delay.

## Handling Calls When You're not Available

Make sure that everyone that answers any of your business calls is able to do so in a pleasant, fairly professional manner. That includes any members of your family that might intercept the odd business call to your home.

You may think that your four-year-old is really cute with the lisp (and I'd probably agree), but they won't remember the long distance phone number where your boss wants you to call her back urgently!

Do you use an answering machine or service for those times when you can't take calls yourself?

One or the other is almost essential today, but you need to check out every aspect thoroughly. You're letting a lump of high-tech plastic, or people you don't know, respond to your potential future customers and important current clients (all your current clients are important!), instead of you or your own trained and enthusiastic staff.

So, you need to think about the messages that the machine or the service use. Listen to them a few times. If they start to grate on you, then try something different.

Please, don't use the pre-recorded "funny" messages that you can buy, unless you're a comedian. Even then, you should make your own.

People who call you want to hear you. The only pre-recorded messages that are worth using on a business phone are those using a friendly, professional, business-like voice.

It's not hard to produce your own message. You don't have to have the clear tones of a Shakespearean actor or the wit of a professional comedian. Just be the best "you" that you can be.

## **Create Your Answering Machine Message.**

Write out your message. Imagine that you are talking to a friend or neighbor.

Include your name, company, alternative phone number (if available) and then ask for them to leave their name, phone number and a brief message.

Leave no more than a couple of seconds of silence at the end of your outgoing message.

### ***Checking Out an Answering Service or Machine***

Before signing a contract with a service, ask for some referrals to their other customers. Don't just contact those customers (they are likely to be their most loyal supporters, of course.)

Get someone to call their customers' business numbers outside regular hours to hear how the service actually handles callers. Ask other Members of any business groups which you may belong to for references and horror stories.

Take the time to do this checking or you could be stuck in a contract, or have to pay an exit fee, if you find the service that you choose is unsatisfactory. And one lost customer could be worth more than it would have cost to do some checking first.

Test your answering machine's features too. Get someone to call in after you've set up the machine with the message you've decided to use. Make sure that they will give you their honest impressions of the whole experience:

- ? Was the wait until the machine clicked on too short or long
- ? Was the welcoming message crystal clear with enough information and
- ? Did they get enough time to leave their message?

You might think of other questions too.

Check the clarity of the recording of messages from callers. If you can't decipher their phone numbers, you probably need a different answering system!

## **V.O.I.P. - Combining Your Phone and the Net.**

V.O.I.P. is "Voice Over Internet Protocol". The service allows you, for a fee, to communicate with anyone that has a computer and access to a V.O.I.P. service, or almost anyone that has a telephone!

The fees charged by the various companies that supply these services can save you significant money when compared to the cost of equivalent long-distance phone calls.

You need to get a headset and subscribe to a V.O.I.P. provider, like you have subscribed to your Internet Service Provider.

The V.O.I.P. service allows you to connect to ordinary phones when the person you call does not have a VOIP subscription. These calls cost you more than computer-to-computer calls, of course.

Use the tips I've provided in the phone calls section to make the best of your V.O.I.P. experience.

"FireFly V.O.I.P. Internet Softphone" is a highly regarded software package that I have used through my V.O.I.P. service provider. There are others and you should do your due diligence before signing up for any service because the options and features of available systems are being improved almost as you watch!

Be considerate – check the time in the other person's time zone before your call them!

If you use a Windows based computer system, you can get a free program called, "**World Time Clock**" from <http://www.programming.de/> that will allow you to display the current time in 5 World cities of your choice so you can match the time you call your contacts with their time zone.



## **E-Mail**

Email has not yet taken over the World but it has made low cost, almost immediate communication available to almost anyone in just about every country.

Whatever their age and other circumstances, people in most countries can use email through their own account, through their parents' accounts or from public access services such as Internet cafes and public libraries.

You can keep in touch with friends and family in the next town or other countries, and even send one email to a list of people (that have asked to get it) or just one person.

You probably started getting unsolicited commercial email (spam), soon after setting up your email account or website. The low cost of sending thousands, even millions, of advertisements to people and the willingness of some businesses to pay for their products to be promoted that way, meant that spam quickly became very profitable. The amount continues to increase despite every attempt to discourage it and get legal remedies against the people who send it.

Never send emails about your business, products or services unless you have had previous contact with the people you send it to, and they've indicated an interest in getting the information.

### **Safety Tip**

I'll leave the technical aspects of setting up your email account, connecting with your Internet Service Provider and so on completely alone, except to touch on particularly important points.

The first is to make sure that you have reputable software which checks all your incoming emails for viruses, trojans and other nasties. And check

regularly that you are using the latest and most powerful version of that protective software.

One company which provides this kind of software is Grisoft <http://www.grisoft.com>. They offer a free version of their anti-virus software and also of their firewall software for personal (non-business) use. I am not associated with the company except as a satisfied user of their commercial software. You can download trial versions of their programs from their site.

There are many other companies offering similar products. Some that I know provide quality products include Norton, McAfee, Vet (Australian), Computer Associates, Ewido, Webroot and Trend Micro. They are, of course, not the only good suppliers.

### **Send Emails That Will Be Read!**

If you like creating fancy emails with HTML and the people and businesses that you are contacting welcome them, that's great.

Many people and companies are comfortable with it and appreciate the effort you put in. Others, for various reasons - including possible security concerns, will only accept and see a simple text version of your message.

I like HTML emails but, of course, never click on a link in an email for those same security reasons.

Attachments are routinely blocked by a large number of people and companies. The main reason here is security – many viruses and exploitation scripts have been circulated through emailed attachments. If you are not sure whether the person you are emailing will ever see the file you are attaching to the email, ask them before sending it.

If they cannot accept attachments to an email, a simple way around that is to upload the file to your web site and send them the web address (URL)

where they can download it. Check that YOU can download the file and then read it before sending the URL to the other person.

Most email programs let you prepare templates – standard messages with much of the information already filled in – and signatures – short blocks of text with a closing message (“Thanks for your inquiry” or whatever), your name and contact information.

This can save you a lot of time and typing. It's worth putting some time and a little creativity into your signatures. Keep them short but make them as powerful as you can.

Keep your emails as brief as possible and try to keep to just one subject for each email. If there's more than one topic in your email, you may not get action on some of the topics; the other person may put your email aside until they have more time to deal with all of the topics you ask them about. Sometimes, there may just be some small niggling point that they want to check and that can delay them taking action or providing answers to some of your other questions.

Keeping to one topic also means the person you contact just has to hit the Reply button on their email program and send you the information you want. The easier you make it to respond, the quicker you'll get your answer.

But, some business emails are too brief. Some marketers send emails where they just put the greeting, then the link to a web page that they want the reader to read (and probably buy from), and then wish the recipient a curt good-day!

It's plain not sensible to blindly click a link or copy it into your web browser if there is no information as to what is at that web address and, most important, how YOU (the reader) will be better off if you visit that site through their affiliate link!

Show some respect for people – give them information about what you are

offering or recommending; enough to show that you are confident about the offer and believe that they can work out for themselves what a great deal this is!

If you send any emails, such as ezines or autoresponder-based courses - with commercial content, advertisements - or even free offers, etc. - make sure that you have a record of the recipient giving you prior permission to send it to them.

Acknowledge in the email that it is a commercial email and give a link where they can be completely and promptly removed from your mailing list.

Also provide your off-line contact details, including your name, phone number and, at least, a snail-mail postal address.

### ***Never Assume***

Some on-line marketers make a special offer and don't charge for whatever they offer, but they do require that the person accepting the offer supply their name and an active email address.

They usually include some text that indicates that they "hate spam" but they then send their newsletter or other commercial email to the supplied address.

They probably put an unsubscribe link in their emails but, if they haven't stated in their original offer that they would be sending these follow-up emails to the people who accepted the offer, then they are assuming too much.

Always be open and up-front. You could be surprised at how your response rate improves when you are honest in every part of your offers.

## **Dealing with the Deluge – Incoming Emails.**

You can save time by making sub-folders in advance, to store the emails you get about different subjects. Then, you just use your email program's filters to sort the messages that you receive into the different categories which you've created.

Some email programs give you the ability to check your emails on your I.S.P's server before you download them to your computer. Some programs even let you just download the header information (such as subject and sender) before deciding whether to grab the whole message or delete it from the server straight away.

This is not just a time and bandwidth saver, it's re-assuring when you can delete any unwelcome or suspicious emails before they even reach your computer system.

You can usually set your email program to either delete all the emails from your I.S.P's server as soon as you have downloaded them, or to remove all your emails from the server when they are older than the number of days which you specify.

I leave emails on the server for 24 hours, mainly as insurance if something goes wrong when I download it, or if I accidentally delete the copy off my computer when I clear out any junk mail that I might have downloaded at the same time.

The space available for your emails on the server is probably subject to a specific limit, so don't leave old emails there for too long.

If you use one of the 3rd party services like Yahoo, Hotmail or AOL, they have their own rules and restrictions. Some of these services put advertisements on all the emails that you send through them. That, in my opinion, makes them totally unsuitable for use by any business because the

unrelated advertisements scream "amateur" to the people who receive your messages.

Some also aggregate information about their users for marketing use. On the Internet, there's usually some pay-off for whoever provides you with a "free" product or service.

**It's important to answer email correspondence promptly.** Some people seem to assume that the speed of their email's transmission to someone else's computer should be matched by a lightning-like response time. They don't consider that the people they've emailed have their own lives and commitments other than checking for their emails, or the different time zones that the other person may live in.

Not everyone is like that, but it's a good idea to check your emails at least daily and try to respond within 24 hours – yes, seven days a week.

Check the number of emails in your allotted space on your ISP's server. Log in to your account regularly and delete all the emails that you are not likely to need a back-up copy of.

Your email program will work faster for you because most of them scan all the messages in your account each time they check for new emails on the server.

## **Be Careful!**

There are obvious risks and some that are not so well-known.

Think twice before forwarding emails. Be especially suspicious about any which contain warnings about viruses and other mal-ware (Trojans, key-loggers etc.), or pleas for financial or other assistance from people or organizations which you are not familiar with.

Junk all congratulatory messages from lotteries and other sweepstakes that you've never heard of or entered.

Never respond to a spammed offer, no matter how desperately you want or need the item offered. The minimum loss you will definitely suffer is to get your email address sold to many more spammers – you'll need a larger inbox for the extra junk emails who will pour in! You're unlikely to get any product and, even if you do, it will be doubtful as to quality and ingredients or serviceability.

But, a growing serious risk is that many of these spam messages come from criminals who want your credit card and other personal information. The 'phishing' messages which appear to be from your Bank or other financial institution are not the only fake messages that they use for this.

One less well known aspect of phishing scams is that your information may sometimes be collected months before the crooks use it. It may be on-sold between criminals before someone rips away your identity and your cash from your bank accounts.

- x Never, ever, click on an email or web site address in an email.
- x Always copy the email address to a new, blank email inside your program.
- x Always open a new window in your web browser and
- x Always use the same address that you were previously given by the Bank in correspondence which you are sure came from them, to log in to their site.

If you have any doubts or other questions about any email that appears to be from your Bank or other financial institution, contact the Institution by phone first, rather than responding to the email.

Most spam is just time and bandwidth-wasting junk, but the other small percentage can cause serious damage to your computer system or even your finances.



## Forums

Forums are sites where people can post messages, questions, advice and, sometimes, advertisements related to the topic which the forum owner has provided it for.

There are forums about just almost any subject that you can imagine. We can use them to:

1. Learn more about the subject which the Forum is focused on
2. Gather relevant information
3. Discuss the advice others have posted
4. Help to answer questions from other visitors. These questions can be very valuable if the Forum's main topic is related to your business – use the most common and pressing questions as the basis for any advertisements that you write for your related products.
5. Meet possible business partners and
6. Promote ourselves and our online businesses, within the rules off the particular forum.

It's important that we tread carefully when we first visit a forum. The early impression that other Members get from your first few posts can accelerate your progress or cause potentially valuable contacts to be lost - maybe forever.

Most forums have clearly displayed rules or Terms of Use, but you can quickly spy out the lay of the land for yourself and that is worthwhile.

The operator of the forum may be using it to promote their services or products, which they offer the visitors. Be aware and considerate by not

mentioning or promoting competing items, at least until you know what is acceptable in that forum. After all, they provide the forum and allow you free (in most cases) access to potential customers and business partners, as well as a platform for your own questions and contributions.

Most serious forums require that you accept the Terms and Conditions that the forum owner specifies and register as a Member of that forum. That means filling out a Profile with your name, basic contact information and a short biography before you can post anything to the Forum.

You can make some of the information you provide available to visitors while other information is only visible to the forum owner and, possibly, the moderators – volunteers who check posts to the forum and remove blatant advertisements and other undesirable posts.

You will usually be able to set personal preferences as to how the messages on the forum are displayed in your browser and whether you get an email alert when someone replies to your post or sends you a Private Message through the forum.

If this at a business-related forum, I recommend that you use your own name as your forum nickname. This will help to promote you and your business, because of the helpful and informed posts that you make.

Alternatively, you might use the name of your website (without the .com or .co.uk, of course) if it is short and relevant to the subject on which the Forum is focused.

I suggest that you browse the Forum for, say, a week before starting to post regularly. Get some idea of who are the helpful contributors, those who only post to push their products or ego and watch for any who post disruptive or inaccurate entries.

You are usually allowed to put one or more links to your own sites or products in your signature, which appears with each post you make at that forum.

It's important to follow any posted rules about this and other conditions of use. If you can't find any posted information, use the signatures of visitors who have a large number of helpful posts in the forum as a guide.

My main rule for posting in forums is K.Y.P.P. - always Keep Your Posts Positive, no matter what might be said or done there.

Leave the policing to the forum operator and the moderators who they appoint. Even if someone posts something very negative that is aimed directly at you, keep your cool.

Posting an angry response will actually give something that these "flamers" feed their twisted egos from. Their lives probably have little joy, so they see any response as some sort of recognition!

If you see, or even just suspect, that there is something underhanded happening within the forum, it's usually best to send a Private Message to the moderator (preferred) or the forum owner. Let the "experts" handle it. They could have more significant information about the poster and the content they posted than you have.

## A Support Forum on Your Web Site

Why not put a Forum on your own site to draw people that might be interested in your products or services?

This is an option which you might consider but you have to realize that setting it up, or paying someone to install it for you, is just the start of the work and time which you will have to commit if you want the Forum to become popular and stay reputable.

- ? Can you can afford the time to maintain the Forum, including removing any inappropriate posts and answering your customers' questions promptly?
- ? If you want to take time away from your Forum for a trip or other reason, can you find someone to look after it for you?

A well-maintained forum is visible reassurance for your current and potential customers that you care about them after you've cashed their check.

Many programmers, who give their programs away or just ask for donations from people that use them (donation-ware), use forums to handle support questions and other feedback.

The feedback will be greater than you are likely to get through just waiting for your customers to email you. That's because it's fairly rare for customers to take the trouble to send an email about your product.

But, more customers are likely to post their compliments on your forum where they also get the benefit of other users' experience and can suggest possible extensions and improvements to your product.

Some of those suggestions are likely to be unachievable for reasons of cost, or whatever, but the others can provide you with valuable ideas for

improving your current products and procedures. They may even suggest new products that it could be very worthwhile for you to develop!

As the Forum grows, it becomes an expanding library of tips, questions and suggestions for you to mine at your leisure. It may take some work from you and your staff, but there can be significant potential rewards as well.

There are many programs that you could use to set up a Forum. Two of the most commonly used are actually free!

Check out [PHP Bulletin Board](http://www.phpbb.com/), [http:// www.phpbb.com/](http://www.phpbb.com/) and [Snitz](http://forum.snitz.com/), <http://forum.snitz.com/> forums. These programs use PHP and a MYSQL or other type of database, but they are fairly easy to set up. Each of the programmers that provide the programs offer help from support forums (of course) on their respective sites.

### ***Web Site Tip***

If you want this sort of program installed on your site, but are not confident of your ability to do it from scratch or, maybe, can't afford to hire someone for the task, you can still have your own forum!

Just go to the Control Panel (CPanel or similar), which most website hosting services provide with your hosting account, and look for a function called **Fantastico**.

Fantastico contains all that is needed for an almost-automatic installation of features like forums, blogs (on-line diaries) etc.

Your Control Panel also will have Guest books and other add-on functions that are really simple to set up.

## ***Protect Yourself in Forums.***

There are potential risks, both personal and business, in posting to forums and other places like chat rooms. These risks can increase dramatically when you have contact with other forum visitors outside the Forum.

People can assume false identities and give false information. The forum owner and moderators cannot accept the responsibility for verifying the profile and other information posted by every visitor to forums, etc.

Many forums have thousands of registered Members and large numbers of posts each day.

Keep your most personal information and critical information about your business private.

The risks involved in starting an off-line personal relationship with someone that you've only met through a forum or chat room without doing some serious due diligence is frequently documented in the media and police reports.

But, there are also potential risks in the business forums as well.

Never assume that other Members are as honest and reputable as you and the forum owner.

As well as the possibility that people are posting false information, large numbers of visitors to busy forums mostly lurk in the shadows and rarely post. Sometimes there are more lurkers than there are people who post to the Forum.

Sometimes, this is because they are simply too busy to indulge in chit-chat or answer posts which don't offer any benefit to them for participating.

But, some lurkers watch the forums for information and ideas which they can steal!

Some of these people build their own successful businesses by creaming off other people's creativity and information from un-guarded posts in forums.

If, for instance, someone asks for help and explains that they are developing an exciting new software program, but provides a little too much detail about what their new software will do in the friendly environs of the forum, the lurker swoops on the information and quickly produces (or has produced by freelance programmers) their own version of the poster's original idea.

They are already set up with the resources to package and promote their version in a much shorter time than someone with less online business experience and resources. So, the person whose original idea was the seed of the lurker's copycat product may find their potential market more limited. And, they will also find a fierce competitor already in place when they launch their own product.

You must also realize that posts that you make to most forums may become the property of the Forum owner. That sort of rule is often among the Terms that you can read (most people probably don't) when you register as a Member of the Forum.

This is probably there to lessen any possible hassles if the forum owner, for instance, uses part of some posts to publicize the great information which appears in his forum.

Some forum owners set their terms to say that posts remain the property of the person that makes the post.

But, of course, that will not stop other people from copying your posts and using them in their own writing or websites without permission. Don't post anything to a Forum that you want to retain full ownership of.

## **Chat Rooms**

These are like Forums, but most are more focused on the visitors' personal interests rather than business.

There are many which make strenuous efforts to maintain their reputations and make the online experience of their visitors as safe and enjoyable as possible.

But, the same precautions that I recommended for Forums should be applied here – you need to be sure of the identity and reliability of people you meet at these sites before offering any personal information, including your off-line contact information.

## **File Swapping**

Some of these sites are havens for people that swap illegal copies of software programs etc. This is pretty risky.

Some of the people who frequent these sites offering deals of this sort may set up their 'on-line friends' and then send their information to the original suppliers of the software in the hope of a reward.

Other people do supply the files they say they will but, sometimes, their pleasure comes from imagining how the people that download those files try to cope with the viruses and spy-ware that they secretly added to the programs!

## ***Peer to Peer (P2P)***

A lot of this activity has now moved to P2P (Peer To Peer) networks where specialized software is used to swap very large files between consenting computers.

Each user sets up a section of their own computer with the files they want to share and space for the files that they hope to get from other users.



Using the special software, the user opens that section of his computer so that other users can get copies of the files he offers and he can get the files he wants from their computers.

The security risks are probably obvious, but there is also a significant risk of receiving viruses and other nasties (trojans and key-loggers, etc.) along with the files you want.

Some P2P software that has been available in the past was said to contain programs that inserted themselves secretly onto your computer and did things you wouldn't like!

I read that the first computer virus released on the Internet was secretly added to bootleg copies of expensive software programs.

Some of the viruses just put up silly messages on the user's monitor. Others were very destructive, even wiping the user's hard drive so that nothing on it could be recovered.

That is a high price to pay!

## **Groups, Discussion Boards and Lists**

You can gather your customers, near and distant family members or people that share your interest in a hobby or sport in a group email list.

Mailing lists and group discussion lists may be available from the Control Panel that your web-hosting provider supplies with your web site.

Other options include buying software to create and manage your lists from your own computer or using a service provided at a website on-line.

WorldMerge from [Coloradosoft](http://www.coloradosoft.com/), <http://www.coloradosoft.com/> is a reputable and proven, low-cost mailing list program. No, I am not associated with the company but I know a few people that use and recommend the software. Anyway, there are other programs available at your computer store or you can get trial versions, and even some free programs from [Nonags](http://www.nonags.com/), <http://www.nonags.com/> and [Snapfiles](http://www.snapfiles.com/), <http://www.snapfiles.com/>

You can also keep in contact with your customers through a common-interest group at on-line networking sites such as [Ryze](http://www.forums.ryze.com/), <http://www.forums.ryze.com/>, and [Yahoo Groups](http://www.groups.yahoo.com/), <http://www.groups.yahoo.com/> etc.

### ***Discussion Lists***

Discussion lists are a special type of mailing list where the registered Members of the list can send an email to the list's contact address and all Members will get a copy. They can also send emails to other Members of the list directly which aren't copied to all the Members.

Some lists are set up so that all Members can send email to the list address but the operator of the list decides which ones are copied to all Members. Most hosting providers give their customers access to software which will handle these sorts of discussion lists.

You might use them for contacting users of your products or your resellers or staff in other locations around the world.

[Yahoo Groups](http://www.groups.yahoo.com/), <http://www.groups.yahoo.com/> is a feature-rich service that is free to use. But, the whole system is "advertiser supported" which means that there are advertisements on all the emails and each groups' pages. In my opinion, this limits its usefulness to personal and hobby groups. For them, it is well worth consideration.

[Ryze](http://www.forums.ryze.com/), <http://www.forums.ryze.com/> and similar services provide space for people with a wide range of commercial and/or hobby interests to network with other like-minded people.

Anyone that becomes a paid Member can set up their own Group. There are other benefits to the paid Membership, but you can join groups whose interests you share and participate for free.

## **Talk to Your Customers On-line**

The relentless march of technology is continuing to throw up new ways to keep in touch with your customers, friends and colleagues.

Two systems that have, until recently, been out of the reach of small businesses and sole traders because of their cost and technical requirements are Live Help and On-line Conferencing.

I looked at these just a couple of years ago, but realized that they were out of my reach for the reasons already stated.

In 2006, however, there are affordable, low-maintenance systems that you might find worth considering.

I could write an entire book just about this area, which is having explosive growth. I've only listed a small number of the offerings available because of the very rapid changes and for space reasons.

I suggest that, as well as looking at the programs and services I mention, you investigate other options, including ones that might not have been available at the time of writing, by putting the topics into your favorite search engine.

You'll need to allocate some time because the variation in costs and features is considerable!

### **Live Help on Your Web Site.**

Earlier this year, [Coffeecup Software](http://www.coffeecup.com/), <http://www.coffeecup.com/>, introduced their 'Live Chat' program. This is not a program for setting up a chat room, but one which you can set up fairly easily on your own web site so that your customers, or other contacts, may "talk" to you in real time.

This is a simple way to provide support for your customers and an excellent addition to email support and support through a forum on your site.

You and your customer actually type your messages to each other in a text box. Of course, this is not limited to commercial conversations – you can give the web address to anyone you want to conduct a private text conversation with.

This sort of service has been available for some time from some companies who provide the technology on their servers and you just put the 'chat' window on your site. The Coffeecup program is complete in itself and you don't have to pay ongoing fees, either.

The software, which is currently priced at under \$40, uses Flash, PHP and XML. But, there is no requirement for you to learn much about these before you can install and test the program on your site.

This sort of communication is very popular on those sites where it's available. I've had technical support and other questions answered through this sort of set-up on a few companies' sites and have been very impressed.

Of course, you won't want to, or be able to, accept contact from your customers and other visitors to your site 24/7 unless you have other staff that can share the load.

At those times, you just put up a sign in the chat window that you are not available at certain times. No-one will be offended by that and I think you might be pleasantly surprised by the positive responses you get if you take the trouble to set up Live Help yourself.

The Coffeecup software is not the only one which is now available. You can get another program from [Crafty Syntax](http://www.craftysyntax.com/), <http://www.craftysyntax.com/> and the supplier just requests a donation if you use the program.

This one uses PHP and a MYSQL database but, again, the program doesn't require that you know much about these factors. You can set up a MYSQL database through the Control Panel which your web host provides and the PHP will look after itself!

To get the best from using your Live Help, whether with one of these programs or the on-line services provided elsewhere:

1. Keep your messages short
2. Save answers to questions that might be asked by other customers in a text file

When you have time, it's probably worthwhile to put these answers in a Frequently Asked Questions page on your site. But, don't make the mistake of telling a potential customer that asks that question later through your Live Help box to go to the FAQ page. Just answer the question again.

Otherwise, they're likely to get upset and go to your competitor instead.

## Online Conferencing

If you have benefited from attending regular conferences, the idea that you can remove most of the costs, including all of the accommodation and travel expenses, involved by putting your next conference on to the Internet will probably have great appeal.

This is already very popular, and the available options are improving and expanding almost by the day.

You, and every other participant, need a web camera and an audio head-set (earphones and microphone) to use these services. The more recent and powerful that your computer is can also be a factor with some packages.

You can set up conferences where the callers connect to a central system on the service provider's server by phone.

Another option is that you can use a system like [Hot Conference](http://www.hotconference.com/), <http://www.hotconference.com/> which is entirely web-based.

You can actually have your conference area (or even several "rooms" for different groups of people) available 24/7. Also, you control access to your conference area(s) from your computer.

The [Hot Conference](http://www.hotconference.com/) system, and some of the others which are now available, incorporate the option for you to on-sell the service to other people. I am not recommending only the Hot Conference system. It just happens to be the one that I have had some experience with.

I haven't seen enough of the others (and there are probably dozens!) to make a fair comparison.

[Webex](http://www.webex.com/), <http://www.webex.com/>, is another provider of this sort of online service. Their products are more varied, with something for almost every sort of need in this area.

Some of the systems offer you the ability to record text, conversations and even video of the discussions or demonstrations.

Many of the available systems will let you use graphics etc in your presentations during the conferences.

Using these sort of services and the associated software to keep in touch with your customers and colleagues, and provide demonstrations for them, requires the same sort of preparation as producing talks and demonstrations in the real, off-line world.

However, the costs and stress is much less. People from almost anywhere in the world can participate, there are no travel or accommodation expenses, and you don't have to dress up.

You can arrange the meeting at any time that is convenient to the majority of those who want, or need, to attend and give - or even sell - the recording of the event. provided your license for using the service or software allows.

While this sort of meeting is very convenient, you will need to prepare well and maintain a business-like manner to try to ensure that you and your colleagues get the best results.



## **Thanks for Listening**

I hope this ebook has given you plenty of ideas for improving and expanding the ways that you communicate in 2006.

Bernard

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