

## On Hold Messaging Opens Up Marketing Opportunities

Guest article by Julie Cook

Ever thought of giving your hold button a promotion—to company spokesman? Savvy marketers and customer-service managers are realizing that hold time can be a goldmine in making connections with customers and prospective customers. Through well-crafted on-hold messages written with your callers in mind, you have the ability to promote your brand, up-sell other products and services and answer frequently asked questions. It's effortless, affordable and easy to put in place within just a few business days.

Considering that the average hold time in America is 43 seconds—almost the length of a radio commercial—you have a significant opportunity to tell your callers exactly what you want them to hear about you. After all they're captive, and we know from research that most callers want to hear something other than silence, a radio station, or sleepy Muzak while on hold.

Not sure what an on-hold message is? Also known as music on hold, an on-hold message is typically four minutes in length. When written and produced by seasoned on-hold producers, it will feature a well-written, interesting, and balanced blend of messages about your company or organization and courtesy phrases that encourage the caller to continue holding. When read by professional announcers (voiceover talents)—not wannabe DJs—these messages are edited with music specifically licensed for this purpose.

Some organizations like to play their jingle along with their on-hold script. Others ask for spoken customer testimonials to be featured during the message. Some use their on-hold message to move product. Others prefer a soft sell or no sell. But all on-hold users agree: Keeping their callers from hanging up is the priority. The right on-hold production can accomplish all of this, and more.

**Impulse buys.** A customer calls your pizza parlor at the dinner hour. You place them on hold while you take another order. While they're holding, they hear about the cheese bread special for \$1.99 with any order. They weren't thinking about cheese bread when they called, but it's beginning to sound good. When you come back on the line, you take an order for pizza—and an order for cheese bread. All thanks to the power of on hold.

**“On-hold messaging is marketing at its most basic level. You have a captive audience to whom you have a message to deliver. If you do it right, your on-hold message can powerfully build your brand and your relationship with each and every caller. Subtle yet effective.”**

**Basic information.** A caller needs to know your website address and calls your office. Your receptionist is busy and has to place them on hold while she takes care of the two callers in line ahead. While on hold, your caller hears office hours and website address—which is all he/she needed anyway. She hangs up, moves on with her day, and your receptionist has one less blinking light to answer.

**Branding.** You're a national delivery service and you've just rolled out the new slogan, “We'll get it there tomorrow—or it's free.” You've spent hundreds of thousands of dollars on traditional media buys to enforce the new slogan. But for less than a dollar a day, every caller placed on hold will hear the slogan. Considering that the average business receives more than 100 calls a day, the per-impression cost is practically zero.

**Diffuse negative emotions.** One of your customers received an incorrect shipment from you. When they call you, they are angry and frustrated. While the customer service rep places the caller on hold to check the order history, the caller hears hip, contemporary music and a pleasant voice assuring the caller that “we're doing everything we can to come back to your call just as soon as possible” as well as “your satisfaction is important to us.

**Shape perceptions.** There's nothing worse than calling a company and being placed on hold in silence—one wonders if they've been hung up on. Or worse yet, they begin to form a negative opinion about the company because it appears you didn't think through your relationship with them—in person, on the phone, and on hold. Too many companies miss opportunities to shape how their customers feel about them—all because they neglected their callers' on-hold experience.