More and more people across Penn’s campus are getting the message—through VoiceMail! Since 1991 the number of faculty, staff, and students owning a personal mailbox has grown from about 700 to more than 4,000. In addition, more than a hundred departments now use some form of voice processing technology to augment their customer service effort, reduce costs, and improve quality. The technology has changed and enhanced the way people conduct business, due in large part to the changed perception of VoiceMail. Once seen as just a sophisticated telephone answering machine, voice processing technology is now acknowledged as a powerful, productivity-enhancing communications tool.

**Telephone answering**

Using VoiceMail to answer the phone is something many take for granted. But Penn’s system, which is integrated with the campus phone-switch system, offers many customization options that distinguish it from an ordinary answering machine.

For example, Mark, a student who exercises the full range of options, likes his phone answered by VoiceMail when his line is busy or when he’s not there to answer it. Since the integrated system can distinguish between the two signals, he has recorded a different greeting for each case. Callers can leave a message or “escape” to reach live assistance at any campus number he designates. Mark likes being able to retrieve his messages, at his convenience, from any touch-tone phone, at any time, from anywhere in the world. Integration also provides a stutter dial tone that activates when a message is waiting in his mailbox. “Envelope” information lets him know the time, date, mailbox number and, in many cases, the telephone number of callers. Mark also likes being able to manually activate and deactivate his mailbox at will.

**Voice messaging**

Voice messaging is a method of back-and-forth communication via recorded messages. For example, voice messaging allows you to review a message and then press “8” to leave a reply in the sender’s mailbox or press “88” to ring back the sender.

When the faculty and staff at Wharton were faced with the need for faster information exchange and confidentiality of messages, they began using VoiceMail—making extensive use of voice messaging features. Heavy utilization has made Wharton’s faculty and staff the most proficient campus group using and navigating the system. The Wharton community found that the feature-rich mailbox opened innovative communications channels. For
example, the ability to record and then send the same message simultaneously to multiple mailboxes via a group distribution list has proven invaluable. Another feature lets you hear a message and send a copy to another mailbox. You can send a colleague a message and request notification of when it was received. The Message Locator helps you quickly find messages that require immediate attention. VoiceMail even works in conjunction with your pager to “outcall” or notify you when messages have landed in your mailbox. And you can have a number of guest mailboxes for exchanging messages with someone who does not have a mailbox on the system. The keypad on your phone is your vehicle for getting around your mailbox—pressing different numbers allows you to play, store, delete, scan, or retransmit messages. A handy flowchart on page 18 of the 1994-1995 Penn Telephone Directory illustrates which keys to use to activate different features.

**Voice processing**

Some academic and administrative departments need the additional functionality provided only by voice processing—also known as Enhanced Call Processing (ECP). With an ECP application, your phone calls are answered by the VoiceMail system with either a single recorded announcement or a recorded menu of options, depending on your customized configuration. There are more than 100 ECP applications at Penn. They can be constant, seasonal, or one-time-only special event applications. For example, the ever-popular 898-MELT line provides the Penn community with a “listen only” mailbox containing recorded emergency closing announcements and up-to-the-minute information. No other listen-only mailbox is used more often than 898-4CST, which provides weather information from AccuWeather. Listen-only mailboxes are accessed by dialing a designated phone number or by dialing Spell-by-Name (898-9999) and then entering a designated code name using the keys on a touch-tone phone. For instance, entering “WIG” routes you to Mask and Wig Club information; entering “WHERE” gives you directions to the campus.

There are as many specialized ECP menu applications as there are departments using them. Dining Services offers 898-MENU, Escort Services provides 898-RIDE, and Human Resources maintains 898-JOBS. Upcoming graduates and their families dial 573-GRAD to hear commencement activity updates provided by the Office of the Secretary. Both the Department of Sociology and Law School Admissions have an ECP that gives callers a menu of choices, one of which is an option to fill out an interactive verbal “Voice Form” to request a catalogue or application. Other ECP applications include those provided by the Biomedical Library, Van Pelt Library, Penn Mail Service, the University Museum, WXPN, the Computer Connection, and VHUP. The list goes on and on.

**Wait, there’s more!**

Other voice processing technology is available, including Extension Mailboxes, Interactive Voice Response (IVR), and Dual Tone Multi-Frequency (DTMF) Forms. Extension Mailboxes are used by groups of people sharing a single phone number who want their own personal mailbox. IVR links your callers to a computer database so that their inquiries, orders, and data entries can be processed automatically and immediately. Callers can now register for classes that are offered by Training and Organizational Development by dialing 573-TNOD thanks to IVR capability. Dual Tone Multi-Frequency (DTMF) Forms allow your callers to respond to specific pre-recorded questions using the touch-tone keypad. The data captured in this system can be downloaded to your local computer for further processing and analysis—a perfect way to capture numeric information or survey data.

Soon, Fax Integration will give your customers immediate access to frequently requested information, such as brochures, pricing, instructions, technical specifications, or course descriptions—any time of the day or night. Somewhat further out on the horizon, VoiceMail, e-mail, and fax messages will be integrated into a desktop computer application boasting a graphical user interface that will make it as easy to manage and manipulate your VoiceMail as it is to manipulate e-mail via point-and-click commands and pop-up information screens.

If you are interested in finding out more about VoiceMail, call 898-2486 or send e-mail to ali@a1.benhur.upenn.edu. Once you’ve “got the VoiceMail message” don’t forget to read the monthly newsletter, *Message Waiting*, which provides subscribers with information about new features and functions, as well as tips and pointers on making the most out of owning a mailbox.

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