

## You Don't Have Voice Mail?

By Claude E. Ducloux, Hill Ducloux Carnes & Clark

**N**o. I refuse to have office voice mail. As it is, I feel like I've already got more strings on me than Pinocchio. There's nowhere to hide. If you want to reach me, I'm in the book. That is: the phone book, the Business Directory, the Legal Directory, the Bar Directory, the White Pages, the Yellow Pages, and all sorts of specialty listings. We've got office phones, home phones, pagers, cell phones with messaging, faxes, and now, of course, the ubiquitous e-mail – invasive, Wi-fi'ed, forwarded, and maddening. But, apparently that's not enough. Unless someone can leave you a message at your office at midnight on Christmas, you're under-equipped. I hate it.

Like most of you, I think I get more than my share of e-mail, and even a good filter protects you from being drenched in spam about as much as holding a newspaper over your head does in a thunderstorm. Being dragged late into the e-mail culture, I used to enjoy it. Now, it's just one more tool, an annoyance as much as asset. It's like bringing an interesting acquaintance on a long car trip, only to discover he won't shut up. Ever.

With all these messegologies, I live in constant fear that I'll overlook some vital message or another. Although I've always been accustomed to a desk piled high with message slips, now I also have the constant chiming of my e-mail and the ding on my cell phone to know someone has found me there. And you don't dare respond to the "unsub-

scribe" links, having been warned that even negative contact proves to those cockroaches that they have an active e-mailbox. I'll bet you never realized all those mortgages you'd applied for, based on the "Your Loan is Ready" spamlets we all receive. These spammers deserve to die painfully. Perhaps as jurors in a patent trial.

Since I feel that I am already contactable any number of ways, I won't load "VOICE MAIL" (or more accurately "voice jail") on our phone system. I don't want to have to worry about voice mail messages that come into the office at night and over the weekend. I look at those digital messages as a dangerous arrangement of electrons: one more repository of malpractice. I figure if you don't have voice mail, clients can't leave you a message that they later allege you ignored. Ignorance of their latest gripe is, indeed, at least temporary bliss.

So, here's the problem: There is at least one other lawyer with whom I practice, who, for anonymity, I'll simply call Hull Youngblood, who insists we should have 24-hour voice jail. Now, Hull already has enough gadgets on him to make Batman throw in the bat towel. He has some sort of cell phone contraption that also serves as a Palm Pilot/e-mail transceiver that allows you to write your e-mail with a "stylus." It's also a ham radio that makes fruit smoothies. The thing emits so many microwaves that we've posted a "pacemaker" warning near his office door.



But is he satisfied? No. He wants voice mail for overnight phone messages. Well, he's met his match. NO soup for you!

I'm going to seek a new Rule of Civil Procedure that once you have phone, fax, cell, and e-mail access, overnight voice mail should be absolutely prohibited. I love my clients (mostly), but they should be comfortable with office hours. Besides, I can only think of two situations where I'd like to be contacted immediately in the middle of the night: a) I've won the lottery, or, b) my pants are on fire.

Okay, here's an alternative idea: Outsourcing. I say we hire Nabil in Bombay to take our nighttime messages. Clients could wait on hold like this:

**NABIL:** Hello, how may I being of service to you.

**CLIENT:** Is Mr. Ducloux there?

**NABIL:** He is very apparently not in the office. But our messaging technology is available and at your service, should you desire to leave an appropriate message in the proper digitally formatted inbox, which will quickly store your information,

thus making it available to your attorney during normal business hours. Please hold...

**CLIENT:** Could you tell him simply to call.... Uh... hello?... You there?

**NABIL:** Thanking you for patience. Do you desire the digital messaging input mailbox?

**CLIENT:** Can I just leave a number?

**NABIL:** But certainly. Listening, please to the following menu: For messages please involving admiralty matters, please press 2854. For administrative law, please press 7995; estate planning, please press 2877; for ...

(You get the idea. It's got to discourage them. It certainly works for Dell.)

I must admit, though, if life gets anymore complicated I don't think I'll have any choice but to take all of those free e-mail offers of potent discount medications that we receive daily. Besides, from what those ads promise, if you're taking the "weekend" pill, I doubt you'd have any time to return voice mail.

Keep the faith. • AL