

Telephones

You'll notice this section is titled "Telephones" rather than simply "Telephone." That's because many event planners have more than one phone. You'll need:

- A **business line**
- A **fax line**
- A **cell phone**
- A **dedicated computer line** (DSL) or a **cable Internet connection**

Other lines you may need later include an extra line for an employee or just an extra line for yourself if you find you must be on the phone with a vendor and a customer at the same time. You will eliminate a lot of "telephone tag" when you are trying to arrange a difficult purchase.

Your Business Line

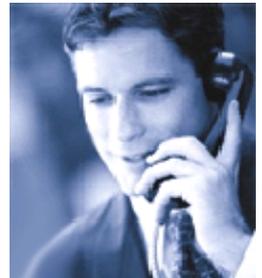
Your main phone number should be a business line. It will cost a little more than a residential line, but you will be listed under your business name in the white pages and under directory assistance (which makes it easy for clients to find you) and you can receive a free listing in the Yellow Pages under "Special Events" or "Event Planners".

Make this phone off-limits to the rest of the family. And always be sure it is answered professionally with the name of your business and "How can we help you?"

These days, even large corporations have their phones answered by voice mail systems, so it should make little difference to your business if you either install an answering machine, or subscribe to the **voice-mail services** offered by telephone companies.

The advantage to the answering machine is that you can monitor calls as they come in, and defer responding if what you are currently doing is more crucial than answering the phone. The advantage to the voice-mail services is that they are often much easier to access from the road than an electro-mechanical box sitting on your desk (which also might develop repair problems you wouldn't know about until you got back), and they offer a number of choices about how callers can leave messages. Most have message forwarding capabilities, so you can send incoming messages from your office phone to your cell phone, for example, if you decide you want to return calls while you are out.

You could also **hire someone** to answer the phone when you are not there. But unless you have other work for that person to accomplish, that would certainly be a lot less cost-effective than using any of the electronic helpers available. And fortunately, answering services – with real people taking messages – are just about



a thing of the past. Often, the person answering the phone would not be interested in projecting the kind of image your business should project. You can control that by putting your own message on your answering machine.

When you sign up for your voice mail or telephone service, be sure you can get an instant list of all the calls you've received since you last picked up messages. Why? Because many people don't speak clearly, or even make a mistake when they leave their voice message, and you might not be able to call them back. If you have a list of

all the numbers of those who left messages, you can easily figure out which is the missing link, and call that person back. Most telephone company voice mail services offer call display, either standard or as an add-on.

Several phone companies, like Verizon, MCI, AT&T and Sprint, offer these services and you can review them at their respective websites. You can also **compare rates** for service from many companies in your area at sites such as:

LowerMyBills <http://www.LowerMyBills.com>

888 4 Dialtone <http://www.8884dialtone.com>

Additional Phones

You can use your regular business line for faxes, or you can use your Internet line by installing software that lets you send faxes from your computer. (However, that poses a problem: What do you do when the fax is a document that isn't in your computer, and you don't want to scan into your computer?) While it is a bit more expensive to have three lines – phone, fax and Internet – those costs are **minimal** in comparison to the business you might lose if you had to explain, "Well, to receive a fax, I'll have to be off the phone. So just phone to tell me when you're going to fax it."

Even if you do have a fax line, you might consider getting the software you need to fax things from your computer to a fax receiver, in case there are times you just want to send documents totally through cyberspace without using paper. For an example of a program that does this, check out **WinFax Pro**.

WinFax Pro <http://www.winfaxpro.com>

When you install your initial business phone lines, consider making the first line a **rollover line** that can handle two phones. That way, when there is a call on one, the next incoming call will roll over to the other phone, which your new assistant can

pick up instead of having the call go to voice-mail.

You should also get a **cell phone** as soon as possible. As a successful event planner, you will spend a lot of time away from your office at events, as well as investigating new vendors, and meeting with clients.

While you may not be able to return all calls while you are on the road, you can pick and choose. The cell phone, coupled with a voice mail service and message forwarding, may help you increase your potential client contacts better than any other method.

Telephone Tips

Often, people will wait only a short time for a return call before they move on to the next company that provides what they want to buy, whether that's tires for their car or a consultant to help them plan an event.

So make sure you **honor a reasonable callback time frame**. For some, it's only a few minutes. Most will wait at least half a business day, however, and you should be easily able to make contact with those callers and present your business services before they have looked elsewhere.

What about **call waiting**? It's rude, pure and simple. Callers these days are used to leaving messages. And if someone is on the phone with you, they don't want to be asked to hold in the middle of their important conversation unless your building is on fire.

So don't get call waiting, or, if it comes in the package of services from your telephone service provider, don't use it. It's actually easier to ignore than a ringing phone. Your caller may hear a little beep as the other call tries to kick in. But if you ignore it, the caller you're speaking with will be happy, and will also think, "Wow, I'm so important, she ignored another incoming call for me!" Don't get call waiting just to impress your customers that way, though.

Likewise, do not answer your cell phone while speaking with a client or prospect at their office, or yours. (Don't answer your desk phone, either). The only exception to that would be if, during your conversation, an opportunity arose in which you could say, "Let me call the vendor, and I'll find out for you right now" and the vendor says they'll call you back in five minutes. That makes it imperative to get a cell phone with **caller ID** — the only call you want to pick up in five minutes is that vendor's call, and caller ID will let you do that.

Your cell phone should have a vibrate mode, too, so you'll know if a call came in while you were meeting, and you can then check your messages and call back after the meeting.

