



## Twelve Questions to Ask Prospective Answering Services:

1. Does the [telephone answering service](#) have well-documented systems and procedures? Ask, "Do you have a written operational procedures manual?" *Very few answering services have any kind of procedural documentation!* Too often it's a hit or miss scenario that relies on the memories of a few key employees (and not a good situation when these employees leave the company...)
2. **Is customer billing performed monthly or per a 28 day cycle?** For answering service management, a 28 day billing cycle is a thinly disguised technique used to collect 13 billings per year from the customer, rather than 12. With a 28 day billing cycle in use, the prospective client must ask, what other undercover billing methodologies/shortcuts are employed?
3. Who owns the business? **Are the owners involved in the overall management and direction of the business?** If the owner is involved in operations, you may be dealing with a small company with limited resources. Are owners readily available to customers? Beware of absentee-owner operations.
4. What are the trunking arrangements for the long-distance portion of the connection? Some less expensive long-distance trunking configurations are unstable while others offer the same reliability as local telephone service providers.
5. **Are operators or Telephone Service Representatives (TSRs) full-time, career-oriented?** Are they covered with living wages and full benefits, including a health insurance plan? If not, there will be staff turnover (the *worst* enemy of high quality).
6. What is the quality of the TSR staff's working environment? Is it readily available to you for inspection, or is it kept "under wraps"? Is it spacious and comfortable; not closed, cramped and lifeless with a "boiler-room" atmosphere? At Centratel, the telephone answering service operations department is the center of the office with administrative offices located around the periphery.
7. **Is there a "no-tolerance" drug policy?** Is drug testing mandatory for employment? Is there random testing on all TSRs? Is there an employment-termination-on-first-violation policy? This is critical.
8. Is the telephone answering service computer equipment 100% digital? This means no analog connections from the telephone company or within internal answering service equipment. Anything less is simply unacceptable from a voice quality and reliability standpoint: It's prehistoric.
9. Are there sophisticated voice mail and paging services available in-house?
10. **Are all conversations between callers and TSRs recorded and kept on file?** For liability reasons, this is a near-necessity for the telephone answering service client.
11. The typical advanced telephone answering service has dozens of networked telecom computer systems, all functioning simultaneously. Is there a qualified engineer available 24/7? If not, if systems fail could there be extended outages in which your calls would not be answered? Centratel employs a full-time IT professional with these credentials: Microsoft Certified Systems Engineer, A+, Security+ and Net+. Our systems engineer relentlessly maintains and upgrades software and hardware systems. There are very, very few outages.
12. What is the overall impression you have of the telephone answering service? Do you sense that all aspects of the operation are readily discussed and that the people who handle the calls are considered by management, and treated by management, as the #1 asset of the operation?