



by Peter Finlay

# Are There Any People Out There Who Really Like Answering Machines?

## If there are, there can't be too many.

I came across a new one a few months ago in Cape May, New Jersey. One that I'm still having trouble believing. I called for a dinner reservation at a restaurant. Got their answering machine. Surprisingly, the voice told me to state my desire for the date, time, number of people in the party, and my contact phone numbers. Then I was told I'd get a phone call to confirm or deny my request. I did get a return call a couple of hours later and was "granted" the reservation.

What if I had wanted to know something about the restaurant, the cuisine, or whether it had a private room? The kind of information one restaurant reviewer, who writes a column in a New Jersey newspaper, said she was looking for when she left not one, but four messages on a restaurant's answering machine. She said she did not receive one call-back. However, she did reach a real person during dinner time and told them that she had left messages inquiring about the restaurant and had not received a reply. She was told that they were too busy to answer those kinds of questions and only had time to talk to people who want to dine at the restaurant. (Not only a rude response, but very bad business, particularly if directed at a food and restaurant reviewer.) The reviewer, exasperated, said, "Wow, I guess that won't be including me." Needless to say, the restaurant wouldn't be getting a review from that columnist either.

I think that's the height of hubris. Now people have to wait on someone at the restaurant, who just might have enough time to call back to answer a few simple questions. That is, if they call back at all. In a business that lives or dies on its customer service?

Whatever happened to the live voice

that said, "How can I help you?" Think about it. Someone actually asking a question . . . and hopefully listening. Instead of just telling you what they have, actually asking what you want and waiting for an answer. And, with proper listening skills, they may even get around to offering you what you "need" rather than "want." Is this a thing of the past? Where are the listeners?

Listening in the specialty gas equipment business is alive and well.

Apparently, listeners still exist in the specialty gas business. For our focus in this issue of Specialty Gas Report, we asked several companies to answer the question, "What are the most important issues to consider when selling specialty gas products to end-users?"

For openers, not one of the people we spoke to said that the selling process can be handled with automatic answering machines. No surprises here. Everyone we spoke to said that you need to know as much about the end user's application as possible in order to provide a solution to his/her problem. So, obviously, the answering machine is out. So too, when on a sales call, you don't begin the presentation with a litany of the products in your catalog. Nor is it always appropriate to jump at the chance to sell the customer what he/she asks for. You must find out what problem they're trying to solve. And the only way to do that is to ask questions about the application . . . and then listen, listen, and listen more. (And for you end-users reading this piece, you need to insist that your supplier truly understand your application before offering a solution.)

If you turn to page 38, you'll see how several industry experts answered the question. In his answer, David Gailey

of Harris Products Group outlines six specific issues that he considers when discussing specialty gas applications with end-users. While Rexarc's Scott Haimerl admonishes us to make sure we do our homework before calling on an end-user . . . whether you already have an existing relationship or it's your first call on the customer.

**Victor Palzes, who is VP of marketing and sales for Genstar Technologies, cautions that our solutions can't always be the most expensive ones. And the way to prevent this is to sell only what the customer really needs. Ceodeux's Bob Newton and William Hald, took a different tack in answering the question. When developing new products for particular applications, they believe it is critical to understand the balance between performance and safety. Never sacrifice safety for performance.**

And Advanced Specialty Gas Equipment has another perspective: According to Glenn Haun, VP and GM, any one person at a particular end-user's facility may not be able to provide you all the information you need. So it may be necessary to speak with several people within their organization. It's worth the extra time to help sell the right product and eliminate problems down the road.

Collectively, these submissions form a succinct compendium of valuable advice on what it takes to sell equipment in this eclectic business of ours. There's no guarantee of uniformity from one end-user to another. That's why you need to ask a lot of questions to gain as much knowledge of the applications as possible.

Suffice it to say, there is no way on earth to gain this kind of knowledge from an answering machine. Thank goodness! **SGR**

## Genstar

### You Can Sell Your Customer The Most Expensive Solution Only So Many Times



by Victor Palzes

Whether you are selling specialty gas products or yard tools at the local hardware store, the most important move to closing a sale is to establish what your customer

really needs—right from the start. If you know your product and the industry you serve, you can help your customer arrive at an informed and correct decision; i.e., the best product or service that will satisfy his needs.

Customers quite often mistake wants for needs, which often results in the selection of a product that really does not suit the purpose intended, and may even be detrimental.



**Figure 1. A supplier who has the broadest range of products is the one most likely to fill your customer's needs with the best selection and price.**

Whatever his wants, it is your job to guide your customer to the right choice by making it evident that you have a good idea of what is required to achieve an optimum end result. This means that you have considered not only the physical solution, but also the cost effectiveness—that the cost of the product you have recommended is reasonable as compared to other acceptable solutions.

For example, a stainless steel regulator may easily accomplish the desired end result in your customer's application, but that application may just as well be satisfied with a nickel-plated brass body regulator.

Specialty gas equipment, such as a regulator with a nickel-plated brass body, can be found in the catalog of any specialty gas distributor. Brass bodied regulators are less expensive and work well in many applications. This is particularly true when used in systems that handle inert gases, flammable gases, or mildly reactive gases, such as carbon dioxide.

### Compatibility Easily Found

The compatibility of materials that come in contact with the gas can be determined easily by using the material selection guide published by the gas or equipment manufacturer whose product is being sold. A compatibility chart provides information on all wetted surfaces (all components that may come in contact with the gas or media reviewed), such as bodies, diaphragms, seats, gauges, and relief valves. This is especially true for all non-metal surfaces, such as the seat, and possibly the diaphragm. The compatibility chart should include information on all manifolds, pigtailed, piping, and tubing that may become wetted surfaces.

Few suppliers can offer everything—manifold systems, pigtailed, regulators (brass and stainless), valves (check, needle, ball, and diaphragm), and fittings (tube and weld), with a choice of internal surface finishes. This makes it extremely important to review and match compatibility of all system components. Choosing suppliers with the most complete offerings makes this task easier.

Applications that involve the use of toxic, corrosive, and poisonous gases require additional care when choosing and recommending equipment. Not only should you consider the compatibility of wetted surfaces, but also the safety of the surrounding environment, which can be enhanced by recommending a system that is most capable of preventing any

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