

Phoneline Technologies

Introduction

Areas and regions throughout NA operate various hotlines, helplines, and information lines. The *Guide to Phoneline Service* discusses these different types of lines. Please read it.

This bulletin supplements that *guide* specifically discussing phoneline technologies. The first section describes different technologies used to answer the phone, gives generalizations about cost, and *advantages* and *disadvantages*. The second section, (Other Features) describes some additional features that may be added to the phoneline. The final section (Other Issues) discusses some general problems some of these new technologies have created.

This bulletin uses "area" generically and can be either an area, multi-area or regional phoneline. We will use the term "phoneline" generically rather than hotline, helpline or information line.

Information came from survey questionnaires distributed in 1995 and discussions at phoneline workshops. New technologies are introduced rapidly.

Phones are answered either by a person or by a machine. People are paid special workers or NA volunteers. Machines can be answering machines, voice mail, or computers. Although answered by machine, some technologies then transfer calls to an NA volunteer.

Decisions require consideration of many factors: cost to initiate, monthly operating costs, amount of NA people-power available, type of geography involved, volume of calls, and options available from phone companies.

Answering Machines

Answering machines are generally owned by the local service committee. They may be kept in a member's home, garage, or office, or an NA service location. Answering machines can be simple, like a home answering machine, or more complex. Some answering machines can page a volunteer when messages come in.

More sophisticated answering machines can handle several incoming lines, call forward to other locations, and have several voice-mail boxes built in. Prices are less than a computer, but have limited programmable features. They can generally only handle one call-forward order at a time.

Greetings left on an answering machine should be developed by a committee. It is helpful to have a number of people with different levels of experience call in and listen to the greeting. Will the message be easily understood by newcomers, old-timers, visitors from outside your area, and people outside the fellowship looking for help or one of the business subcommittees? Remember, this may be the first impression someone has with NA. It is important that the greeting be attractive, cheerful, business-like, easily understood, and concise. Explain whether messages may be left and when they might be returned. You may want to include your area's mailing address for those that want additional contact with NA.

Costs include purchase of the answering machine, installation of a phone line(s), message tapes, and basic phone company charges for a business line.

Advantages: It is low cost and easy to maintain. The caller can leave messages. It gives the basic information all phonedlines strive to give, information about where the meetings are. Few NA volunteers are needed.

Disadvantages: NA must purchase, or rent, the equipment and maintain it. The equipment may need periodic repair or replacement. An answering machine in someone's home ties the phonedline to that individual and their personal schedule. If that person relapses or moves, NA's phonedline must relocate. Rotation of service becomes more difficult. The recorded message must give general information, like weekly meeting information. If one tape cannot hold all the information, the tape must be changed periodically.

Answering Services

An answering service is an outside organization used to answer our phone for us. They generally operate 24 hours a day. Answering services are versatile. Most have non-addict operators answering the phone and giving out meeting information. Some services take a message and contact the NA volunteer by phone or pager. The volunteer then returns the call. Some services route the call directly to the NA volunteer's home. Some only program call forwarding orders at each shift and never speak to any callers. We do not recommend giving out the phone numbers of NA volunteers. (Please refer to *A Guide to Phonedline Service* for further discussion of this issue.)

Answering services can be cheap or very expensive. The more services provided, the higher the cost. Some answering services have a cap on the number of calls. Some patch calls through to the NA volunteer. The phonedline coordinator must provide up-to-date information for the answering service operators. The format the answering service uses may be different from our typical meeting directory. Extra work may be needed to give the service what it needs. Often the answering service operator uses information from their computer screen. The answering service may be slow in updating its computer. The phonedline coordinator may need to provide training to new answering

service operators. Some areas periodically place test calls to evaluate the level of service being provided.

When selecting an answering service, interview as many as possible to get detailed information. The services available and costs for those services vary greatly. It is appropriate to ask for references, and then check those references.

If calls are routed to an NA volunteer, ask how this is done. One area had a service that required phone-company operator assistance to route all calls and an added \$1.00 was charged by the phone company for each call on top of the answering service's fees. One area's service required that the answering service operator manually disconnect the line after the call was completed. The line remained busy until then. When the answering service was busy or staff inattentive, the NA's phonenumber gave a busy signal for long periods of time. One area's answering service charged for each attempt to transfer, whether the transfer was completed or not. When the answering service made several attempts for a single call, it got very expensive.

Ask questions about their staff. Is the staff properly trained to handle your calls? Does the NA phonenumber coordinator need to be involved in training new employees? How often does staff change? Are they trained to handle a potential crisis call? One area hired an answering service owned by someone in recovery where all the employees were members of another fellowship. With the best of intentions, they referred all callers to NA to another fellowship. In one location, two answering services merged resulting in two NA areas using the same answering service. The operators frequently confused the two and sent callers to meetings that were not the closest to their location. One area reported their answering service only gives out meeting information. Business callers needing to speak to a subcommittee are also referred to meetings.

Ask how they bill for their services and what kind of reports they provide.

Costs include monthly fees to the answering service, and sometimes also basic phone company charges for a business line. Some answering services require an initial deposit to establish service. Some may request additional deposits if your volume of calls increases. Keep track of any deposits carefully. Many areas end service after many years and forget what deposits might be refundable. Answering service costs in metropolitan areas have gotten quite expensive. The cost to patch calls through to NA volunteers has significantly increased in the last decade. One area reported paying nearly \$5.00 per call.

Advantages: Answering services are easy to set up. They do not require purchase or maintenance of any equipment. Services provided can be changed as the area grows. Costs can be quite low and predictable depending on the services provided. A human voice answers the phone. Answering services can transfer calls to gender-compatible volunteers.

Disadvantages: As an area grows, phonenumber costs can soar. Some answering services charge for each attempted transfer, not just the completed transfers. When the answering service charges for each attempt, the call can be expensive and never transferred. With patch-through service, it is important to keep the volunteer list up-to-date. Shift assignments may be advisable. Some areas limit the number of attempts the answering service can make for each call.

Calls may not be answered promptly, or the caller may be put on hold. Without patch-through service, there is no addit-to-addict contact.

Answering service operators should not answer questions about the NA program. Answering service operators try to be helpful. They sometimes overstep their instructions and give information (not always accurate) about the NA program.

Sometimes the answering service owns the phone number. It can be expensive and time consuming to change.

Answering services sometimes charge for administrative tasks, like changing the schedule information or volunteer list. Answering service bills can be complicated to read, but without regular, close review, overcharges can occur.

Voice Mail

Voice mail is an automated way to answer the phone. It is similar to an answering machine but with greater technological capabilities. Voice mail can be tailored to suit the needs of the area. Voice mail is available from phone companies, independent companies, answering services, or computers. Voice mail works with mail boxes that contain recorded information. The caller makes a selection on a touch-tone phone. The voice-mail system plays a specific recorded message. Information should be read slowly so the caller can write it down. The caller should have the option to repeat the information without having to call back. Some voice-mail systems can transfer the caller to an NA volunteer. Some allow the caller to leave a message. They should be checked frequently and responded to promptly.

Refer to the Answering Machine section for suggestions related to the outgoing message. It is helpful to have the subcommittee assign specific responsibilities for the voice mail: someone to record greetings, someone to record schedules and schedule changes, someone to respond to incoming messages, someone to coordinate and train the phonenumber volunteers, someone to interact with the voicemail provider.

Costs include initial setup fees and monthly charges for each mail box. Costs might also include call forwarding and toll charges if a call-forwarding option is selected.

Advantages: There is no equipment to purchase or maintain. Voice-mail boxes and options can be added or deleted as the area changes. Voice-mail box costs are

predictable without per call charges. Recorded information can be changed over phone lines. Voice-mail systems can often handle multiple calls simultaneously.

Disadvantages: The entire message must be recorded when any change is made for that mail box. For large areas, this could be very time consuming. Answering service voice mail may charge to record voice-mail messages. It can get expensive to record meeting schedule changes. Without call forwarding feature or message boxes, the caller can only get recorded meeting information. These features are not available in all areas. Call forwarding to a volunteer must be done manually at the beginning of each person's shift. The caller may get caught in a voice mail loop. Set up your system carefully.

Office with a Phone

Some areas maintain offices where, among other services, the phone is answered by NA volunteers. Most offices must have another phonenumber system when the office is closed. Some offices turn on an answering machine when volunteers are not available. Others forward calls to a volunteer's home.

The cost of the phonenumber itself can be very low with only basic phone charges.

Costs include rent for the office space and basic phone company charges. Costs might also include a secondary system for times when the office is closed.

Advantages: There is direct addict-to-addict contact when the phone is answered.

Disadvantages: Low-cost offices are not always in the best parts of town. Areas report difficulty keeping the office staffed after dark. Travel time to the office inhibits people from volunteering for phonenumber service. Offices are nearly impossible to keep staffed 24 hours a day. Some combination of services is needed to maintain 24-hour service.

Computer Owned and Maintained by NA

Areas have begun purchasing their own computer to replace outside answering services or voice mail. The computer program can be customized. NA-owned computers are the most flexible of all the systems. They may also be the most complicated to maintain.

The computer must physically be somewhere. This usually involves rent in a public place. Outgoing calls may incur service-area message units or long distance charges. Some areas specifically located their computer in a central location to reduce those charges. The location must be secure and have good electrical power. Phonelines have to be installed. A surge protector is a wise investment. Modestly-priced backup power supplies protect against short-duration outages. The computer can be set to automatically default to the phonenumber software whenever power is interrupted. Some areas forgo the backup power supply.

Calls are routed to the NA volunteer based on a shift assignment. Others route calls based on a rotating list. While the call is being transferred, recorded information can be played for the caller. Computers can be set up to imitate voice mail.

Computers can track information about each call that comes in and what happens to that call. Reports can be customized to provide a trouble list for the phonenumber coordinator. Security passwords can be part of the system. This makes sure calls are transferred only to trained volunteers. Most computer systems can handle more than one call at a time. Multiple phonelines would have to be installed. Each area must decide how many or how few lines to have. For example, one line can be for English, one for Spanish or French. Calls can be limited to a specific time then automatically disconnected. This frees up the phonenumber for other calls.

It is important to have more than one person trained to maintain the computer. It helps to insure continuity of service. One area had the computer system fail when the only trained person was on vacation. The area had no phonenumber for several days. Refer to the section on Voicemail for additional responsibilities that should be assigned with an automated system.

Recorded information is stored in small voice files linked together. A single meeting change is recorded and then automatically added to the link by the computer. The computer can sort the meetings by day and time for playback.

In many locations, basic business lines will not give adequate service for computer-transferred calls and a loss of volume may occur. In many areas in North America, "Central Office Based Network System" lines may solve this problem. Talk to a telecommunications professional about these issues prior to establishing service.

Central Office Based Network System lines also allow the calls to come in and go out on the same line. Some areas take advantage of this feature to allow the computer to answer a second call while the first call is being handled by a volunteer. If only one volunteer is available at a time, the second caller will only be able to get recorded information. Other areas choose not to take advantage of this feature because they want the computer to monitor the call and limit the duration of the call freeing the volunteer for the next call. One drawback is that, generally, the minimum number of Central Office Based Network System lines is two and the second line may be unused (but paid for) if the computer does not take advantage of two incoming lines.

Costs include the initial cost of the computer and software. Monthly charges include basic phone company charges for a business line, rent, and outgoing calls transferred to the NA volunteer. Although there is a high initial cost to purchase the hardware and software, there is a very low monthly operating cost. One area reported paying for start-up costs with phonenumber savings in just nine months.

Advantages: NA has complete control and responsibility for the phonenumber system. Once up and running, the computer system is easy to learn and operate. Little or no previous computer experience is required. It does not require a new state-of-the-art computer.

Disadvantages: Some level of computer proficiency is required to make the buying decision for hardware and software and get the system up and running. Some computers require changes be made at the computer site. Others can make changes remotely. Changes and upgrades to the services provided require someone with sophisticated computer knowledge. NA owns the equipment. If the equipment fails, or is damaged, it must be replaced or repaired. Potentially, replacement may be expensive and sudden, although no areas reported this type of catastrophic failure. Some areas have set aside a modest prudent reserve specifically for emergency repairs. The computer must be located somewhere. Safe, secure, accessible locations may be difficult to find.

Cellular Phone

Cellular phones enable NA volunteers to answer calls without going to an NA service office. Volunteers take turns carrying the cellular phone.

Many areas have a variety of service-providers and their costs and features may be substantially different. Some areas have free air time during the evenings and weekends. Some services have high monthly fees, but low per-call charges. Others offer low monthly rates, but high per-call charges. Some areas include call forwarding as an option so the phonenumber volunteer can transfer calls and avoid air-time charges. In many areas, call forwarding a cellular phone line still incurs air-time charges, plus the cost of the forward. Investigate the options in your area.

Costs include purchase of the phone, monthly cellular service charges, cellular air-time, and battery replacement. Cellular air-time is more expensive than basic phone charges.

Advantages: An NA member answers all calls and can provide immediate addict-to-addict experience, strength and hope. NA volunteers are not tied to a specific location while they have phonenumber responsibilities. Fewer volunteers may be needed.

Disadvantages: This type of system does not work well in areas where there are great distances between volunteers. Phonenumber volunteers may have long shifts before they turn the phone over to the next volunteer. This may mean taking the phone to work, grocery shopping, out on dates, etc. We do not recommend a phonenumber volunteer do NA service at work. Volunteers must physically meet each other to switch shifts. There is no security that only trained NA volunteers will answer the phone. The cellular phone can be lost, stolen, or damaged, and phonenumber service would be immediately down. The phone system can only handle one call at a time. Batteries must be recharged regularly and replaced periodically.

Pager

A pager is carried by an NA volunteer who returns calls when paged. Simple systems display the number entered by the caller. Others allow the caller to leave a voice message then pages the NA volunteer. The volunteer retrieves the message, returns the call, or takes other appropriate action. Volunteers take turns carrying the pager.

Costs include purchase of a pager and monthly service charges. There may be costs incurred by volunteers returning calls. Some pager services have an upper limit on the number of pages received.

Advantages: Pagers are very low cost. NA volunteers are not tied to a specific location while they have phonline responsibilities. Fewer NA volunteers may be needed.

Disadvantages: This type of system does not work well in areas where there are great distances between volunteers. Phonline volunteers may have long shifts before they turn the pager over to the next volunteer. This may mean taking the pager to work, grocery shopping, out on dates, etc. We do not recommend a phonline volunteer do NA service at work. Volunteers must physically meet each other to switch shifts. The pager can be lost, stolen or damaged and phonline service would be immediately down. Hang ups can be a problem. Callers may not want to leave their phone number. Callers using a pay phone may be blocked from receiving call backs.

Other Features

Diverters and Remote Call Forwarding

There are four types of call forwarding:

1. Remote call forwarding is from a number that exists in the local phone company's central office to a pre-programmed number, such as when you move or get a new number. This is done by the phone company and a fee is often involved.
2. Variable call forwarding is programmed by a telephone instrument where the number exists. It may be forwarded to any number that you choose and changed whenever you want to change it. In some places you may be able to dial in from the outside to change the forwarding number. However, in most locations, it can only be programmed from an instrument at the physical location. The phonline can transfer calls to the NA phonline volunteers. The phonline is not tied to a single location.
3. A diverter box, also called a remote program automatic dialer, enables variable call forwarding when those options are not available by the local phone company. Most diverter boxes can be programmed remotely giving flexibility often not available with phone company variable call forwarding. A diverter box is a separate piece of equipment attached to the phonline instead of a phone or answering machine. When a call comes in it redirects the call to another pre-programmed number using a separate outgoing line. A diverter box can be used

to give out recorded information before transferring a call if a compatible answering machine is used.

4. Busy/don't answer remote call forwarding will send the call to a number programmed for you by the phone company if the phonenumber is busy or does not answer after a pre-agreed number of rings. This might be used by an office that uses an answering service as a back-up for when the office is unattended. The number must be prearranged with the phone company and programmed by them.

Costs include phone company monthly charges for specific options selected, and perhaps an installation fee, forwarding fees and maybe also message unit or toll charges, depending on the distance forwarded. Cost for a diverter box include the diverter box, perhaps an installation fee, and basic phone company charges for two business lines.

Advantages: It adds greater flexibility to the phonenumber.

Disadvantages: It is an extra cost.

Toll-Free Numbers

Toll-free numbers are a type of technology that must be used with another phone system. Toll-free numbers only relate to who pays for the call. In North America, these toll-free numbers use the prefixes 800 and 888, with new prefixes being added. Toll-free numbers can be limited geographically, or they can be national or even international.

With toll-free numbers, NA pays for all incoming calls.

Toll-free number services can forward calls to specific area phonelines based on the location of the caller. Features for toll-free numbers are changing rapidly. Contact your local telecommunications vendor to discuss options that might be suitable for your area.

In purchasing toll-free numbers, the per minute costs can vary widely from providers. It is best to shop for features and rates. Several areas may work together to qualify for a volume discount. In order to do this, a single toll-free number is purchased and the calls from specific area codes and/or exchanges are routed to a number that will handle those calls.

Be very specific about the area of coverage that your phonenumber wants to handle calls from. If this is not defined, you may get calls from all over the United States with questions you are not equipped to handle. Your area will be responsible for these calls, and the long distance charges to get them. Geographically limited toll-free numbers save money, but also prevent callers from outside the area getting through. This has been a problem for travelers trying to plan trips. People from nearby towns cannot get the correct phonenumber. People leaving jails or institutions may have trouble reaching the NA area they need. Areas that do not limit the calling area can incur high costs. If you

use geographically limited service, you may want to list both the toll-free number and the local number.

Refer to the section on phone books for important information about toll-free numbers.

To reduce costs, some locations only publish toll-free numbers in Public Information efforts. They list the local number internally and on meeting directories.

Costs include set-up fees, basic monthly charges, and tolls for all calls. Calls routed to NA volunteers pay for incoming and outgoing calls.

Advantages: A single phone number can be used for a wide geographic area. Some areas believe it is an encouragement to the caller to use a toll-free number.

Disadvantages: Costs for the toll-free number are in addition to other phonenumber costs. Some areas have reported canceling their toll-free service because of high, often unpredictable, costs. If your service is not geographically limited and your toll-free directory listing is not specific, you may incur very high costs. One area reported a \$700 toll-free bill in one month before they limited their service and changed their listing.

Other Issues

New technologies have created some new problems: how to get service and equipment, whether to set up a cooperative phonenumber, multi-lingual phone services, TDD lines, transferring calls, phone books, problems with caller ID features, and protection from phonenumber hackers. Finally, areas may want to consider combining several technologies.

Acquiring Service and Phonenumber Equipment

Phone service allows you to make and receive calls and get a phone number. In the US, phone service involves some basic monthly fee plus charges for outgoing calls. In some locations, a phone line and number can or must be purchased. Leased service would have a monthly fee. One area reported paying \$4,000 just to buy a line to establish service.

When establishing service through an answering service, find out who owns that phone number. Leaving the answering service may require additional costs and often involve getting a new phone number. One area paid high fees to give callers the new phone number until phone books were printed. Without this referral, the answering service would have said they had no information about NA.

Equipment is hardware: the telephone, answering machine, pager, diverter box, TDD equipment, or computer. Equipment may be purchased or leased depending on your location. Some technologies (like voice mail) may not require any equipment at all.

Cooperative Phonelines

Any of the above phoneline technologies are appropriate for cooperative phonelines. Phonelines are generally established by area service committees to serve the local area. In some locations, areas have split, but kept their phoneline service intact creating a shared-service arrangement. Sometimes several separate areas will merge their phonelines and create a shared-service arrangement. Some areas have moved their phoneline service to the regional level and eliminated area phonelines. In other locations, a regional phoneline has been added to the existing area phonelines.

When several areas share services, issues need to be clearly resolved: Who will pay the phoneline costs and how? Who will be responsible for maintaining the phoneline? Who will coordinate the answering service? Who will update the voice mail? Who will maintain the computer? How will changes be approved? Who will recruit and train NA volunteers? Who will review and approve bills? All these issues need to be discussed, clearly written, and made accessible to all areas. Specific, detailed, written agreements between the areas may reduce confusion when trusted servants change. It is best to equitably share these costs and responsibilities. This prevents one area from assuming a large human or financial burden.

Regional phonelines can replace area phonelines and serve all areas within the region. A single answering service could route calls to volunteers who serve the entire region. A regional office can answer all the phone calls. This is most feasible where the region is geographically small, such as within a metropolitan region. It may be difficult to get updated information from several areas to the volunteers quickly.

Regional phonelines can supplement area phonelines. In this model, each area maintains its own phoneline and a regional phoneline is added. The regional phoneline might give out only basic information. It could refer callers who want to speak to an addict to the area phonelines. This might be a service office where a special worker gives out business information only.

Regional phonelines that route calls to area phonelines are becoming more popular. This is often a toll-free number published for the entire region. It routes calls to the appropriate area based on the location of the caller. The major disadvantage is that a caller cannot get through to another area. Calls are always routed back based on his location. Regional phonelines that supplement area phonelines are additional costs, not replacement costs.

Multilingual Phonelines

Most locations needing multi-lingual services have a dominant language and one or more secondary languages. Phonelines can meet these needs several ways. A separate phone number with separate sets of volunteers may be difficult to coordinate. It may be hard to get enough volunteers in both languages. Some areas will have the primary-language volunteers answer the phone. Secondary-language volunteers return

calls when needed. This can be difficult if the caller cannot speak in the primary language.

Some areas establish separate phonelines for each language. The phonelines may be completely different for the primary and secondary languages.

Some areas maintain an information-only line for the secondary languages using answering machines or voice mail. Recorded information from translated and published NA materials can provide the caller with information about NA. Callers can be directed to meetings available in that language. It is important to have volunteers retrieve and return messages promptly. An answering service with multi-lingual employees can route calls to language-specific volunteers.

TDD

TDD, or Telecommunications Device for the Deaf, is a system designed for the deaf and hard of hearing. It allows the caller and phonenumber volunteer to converse by typing. If you want to publish a TDD number, you will have to purchase TDD equipment and then train volunteers in its use. Both the caller and the phonenumber volunteer must have the TDD equipment. The phonenumber needs an office, or some way to transfer the call to the appropriate volunteer. Some answering services will provide TDD services.

In the US a special relay service is provided for the hearing impaired to enable them to interact more readily with the hearing world. This service is available around the clock. The hearing impaired caller contacts a special operator using his or her TDD equipment. The operator contacts the NA phonenumber and they converse by voice. The operator then types the information into the TDD equipment and relays the conversation back to the caller, essentially acting as a relay between the two people.

Transferred Calls

Calls can be transferred to an NA volunteer several ways: by an answering service, by call forwarding, by voice mail, by computer routing, or by diverter box. Callers will expect the call to be answered with the name Narcotics Anonymous. A generic "Hello" may frighten an already paranoid caller. Computers and answering services usually announce it is an NA call before the connection is made. This allows the volunteer to greet the caller as an NA volunteer. When the volunteer is expecting an NA call during a specific time, he can answer accordingly. In some locations, the phone can have a special ring to indicate it is an NA call.

Phone Books

Remember to talk to your local phone company about your listing at least six months before the new phone book is due to be published. After publication, check to verify the listing is correct. One area reported paying for an additional line in the yellow-page

listing that reads "No dues or fees" to differentiate NA from all the fee-based treatment programs listed in that same section of the yellow pages.

Business numbers are generally listed in the white and yellow pages of the local phone book. The NA listing can be added to other phone books. The local phone company can suggest which books cover your geographic area. There are now multiple organizations printing phone books in some locations. Your area needs to carefully consider where to be listed. Listings generally need to be updated each year and there is a fee involved. White-page listings usually cost less than yellow page listings. With independent phone book companies springing up, your area may be solicited to advertise other places. Be careful! Sometimes these solicitations look like an invoice and get paid accidentally.

Many locations have a community-service section in the phone book, sometimes called the blue pages. In some locations this section is coordinated by the United Way. Listing there may be free or at a very low charge.

When getting a new number, some areas timed the change with publication of the new phone books. Ask the phone company for the deadline that is often several months before distribution.

Although the phone book listings are correct, the directory assistance database may not be. The number may be listed only by the town where it is located. Listing in several phone books may not change the information database. Without knowing which town to ask for, directory assistance may not find NA. Call your local phone company to discuss these concerns. Check the directory assistance information given out periodically. One large metropolitan area reported not being listed in the primary phone book. The service committee did not make the call to have NA added to that directory.

Toll-free numbers are not listed free in the local phone book. They are not listed automatically in toll-free number phone books and directory assistance. Discuss this issue when your service is established. There are many toll-free numbers being used in NA. You may want to include the geographic location in the listing. Remember, your area's name may not be clear to the public and you might want to consider a more standard description for the phone listing.

Two or more NA phonelines may be listed in a single phone book. Both areas may want to consider adding geographic distinctions to their name to help the caller. Example: Narcotics Anonymous, West Valley and Narcotics Anonymous, East Valley.

Caller ID

Caller ID is a feature available in many areas that a business or individual can choose. If a person has this feature, he gets a readout identifying the caller. The recipient may know the name, phone number and address of the caller. The NA volunteer should be able to protect their own anonymity. This feature can be blocked. Check with your local phone company to find out how to block it.

Phoneline Hackers

Any technology using remote call forwarding or transferring calls can become the victim of phoneline hackers. Hackers tap into the phone and dial out to numbers of their choosing. These are usually long distance numbers and can be quite costly. Review all phone bills carefully. Consider blocking 900 numbers and area codes outside the area served to reduce the potential liability. The phone company can set these blocks. Phoneline hackers also tap into the frequency codes used with cellular systems. Technology is changing quickly. Discuss these concerns with telecommunications professionals when considering your options.

Combining Technologies

The technologies are often combined to give the area the features it wants. Voice mail with pagers allows the caller to leave a message. The volunteer can quickly return the call. An answering service with two pagers can make the phoneline gender-specific. After reviewing the various technologies available, consider a combination to best suit your area's needs.

Summary and How to Get More Information

A Phoneline Technologies Referral List is available from the WSO. It gives the phoneline numbers for areas using particular technologies. Call PI or Phoneline chairs in several areas using the systems you are considering. These people are a wealth of information with helpful tips and warnings about pitfalls. Call world or regional-level trusted servants for referrals. Multi-regional learning days and PI workshops at conventions are excellent sources of information. Ask if anyone knows who is using the type of service you are considering. We have tried to present much of that information here. We hope it is helpful.