



Virtual PBX July 1, 2005

For any innkeeper, communication is a critical piece in every aspect of serving your guest. Every piece of communication from the first contact until they arrive to stay, can prepare you and the guest for a wonderful stay. However, if the guest's flight plans change and has a difficult time reaching you, you may be less prepared to accommodate the guest's needs. Failed communication can result in frustration for both you and the guest.

Voicemail and answering services are certainly standard these days for any bed and breakfast operation. However, voicemail boxes as provided by local phone service providers are limited and can easily be the highest costing single feature on your monthly telephone bill. However, there are some situations best handled by you personally or one of your staff. How can you ensure that personal contact for every guest? Some innkeepers use a combination of call forwarding and cell phones for those many times a week when running errands or away from the desk. Wireless headsets are also an option.

But wouldn't it be great if a system could simply act like a real person – find out where you are and get the call to you, or if you are completely unavailable take a message and deliver it to you? Traditional PBX systems operate as a phone-switching device, routing incoming callers from one single number to a variety of extensions and recorded messages. Typically, a PBX system cost thousands of dollars to setup and install.

If you are on the cutting edge of communication technology, you may already be using what's known as a *virtual PBX* system. This new *virtual PBX* technology will take incoming calls, and actually search a series of phone numbers that you provide to make sure the caller (your guest!) can reach you. If every number fails to be answered, the same system will let the guest leave you a message. Then you will either be paged or emailed the message according to your preference. Now that is some great service!

These new *virtual assistant* services are available for a low monthly fee, but provide so much more flexibility and usability than the traditional voice mailboxes and answering services.

Following are just some of the features available with a virtual PBX system.

- Customized greeting message
- Call search and forwarding (system will forward to a local or cell number you provide)
- Do not answer (will direct an unanswered call to leave a message)
- Provide additional extensions
- Record sales and marketing messages.
- On hold music



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Here is an example of how a virtual assistant would answer your incoming call. You can record these messages personally, maintaining that personal touch.

Thank you for calling the Highland Inn. For this weekend's availability, please press 1. To speak directly with our innkeeper, please press 2.

#1 I am sorry, we are fully booked July 15-17th. However we do have availability July 22-25th and during the week. Please press 2 to make a reservation!

#2 Please hold while I connect you with our reservations desk.

These *virtual PBX* systems can handle all of your incoming calls and increase your availability to your guests at a very affordable cost. Messages for calls when you are unavailable are efficiently handled and delivered in the way you prefer.

To find vendors, search for "virtual PBX" on the Internet. Following is a sample listing of providers. Their inclusion here is neither an endorsement nor guarantee.

gotvmail.com

www.virtualpbx.com

iglobalink.net/communicator.html