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## PEOPLE

### The Voice Of Voice Mail



Dr. Joan Kenley

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She's almost perfect - confident, compassionate, impersonal, warm but not too sexy. She is ageless and from no place in particular. Her voice is clear and low. Her tone is authoritative yet kind. But she's not there.

She is the voice of Voice Mail, the increasingly ubiquitous phantom of the phone line. She's a real lady reading a recorded message. Her messages are placed on computer chips and remixed by a high-tech DJ.

The Voice Mail biz is in a place similar to that of the answering machine worked a few years ago. In 1985, 5 percent of U.S. households had answering machines; by 1989 that number had grown to 28 percent. Today, people are frequently disappointed if they get a person on the phone. "I just wanted to leave a message on your machine," they say, reluctantly interfacing with your humanity.

Voice Mail, which was used by less than 1 percent of households in 1989, is expected to grow to 10 percent by 1995. It offers the advantage of handling up to 100 calls at a time so no one is left holding the receiver. Unlike an answering machine, individual family members access their own messages so that Dad can't hear Mom's boyfriend and Mom can't hear Junior's girlfriend.

#### The Digital Queen

A major star in the Voice Mail galaxy is Joan Kenley, who laughingly calls herself "the queen of the digitized voice." Kenley sees certain Voice Mail features as irresistible - particularly the ability of these systems to handle dozens of calls at once. She comes to her throne with an impressive resume that includes being the voice of Pacific Bell's Message Center, Northern Telecom's Meridian Mail, National Semiconductor's talking checkout counter, and the wizard of ah's behind talking machines from cars to elevators to airplane engine emergency systems.

"Engine on fire!" says Kenley's firm but friendly voice in a demonstration of what pilots might hear from her.

"Although the voice of God still seems to be male," says Kenley, referring to the fact that male voices dominate most media jobs, "when we are afraid we regress. Psychological studies show that under pressure, the female voice is what most people will listen to without panicking."

Kenley knows her way around a psychological study as well as a talking cash register. She has a doctorate in psychology and a degree in acting. Once she played opposite legends such as

Jackie Gleason and Ethel Merman. Now she has achieved her own electronic immortality.

At the drop of an octave the Queen can lose the official smiley-face voice and again become Joan Kenley, a likable gal from Bucyrus, Ohio, who once said, "jist" and "warsh" and "git."

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**Joan Kenley, author of VOICE POWER, is passionate to communicate that "improving one's speaking voice is the most overlooked frontier in the self-development field."**

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#### Those Darned Bad Habits

Kenley says everyone hates the way his or her voice sounds on tape, but we can unlearn bad habits and use "the full orchestra of the voice." She explains how in a book called "Voice Power," which outlines "the Kenley Method," a way of using body awareness to improve the voice.

Awareness or not, the Kenley method has worked for her. She has perfected a recording voice that is alternately taken for a live voice or a computer. Once she picked up the phone at a hotel in Toronto and heard the Voice Mail say, "You have one new message." "I thought: 'That's a nice voice.' Then I realized it was me!"

As she is talking about voices of real people trying to reach an unnatural machine-like precision, Kenley's floppy-eared gray rabbit is busy munching bunny chow in one corner of her sunlit family room. The home the voice of Voice Mail shares with her husband, Alain Gauthier, and stepson, Roland, is in the Oakland hills surrounded by eucalyptus. The room is filled with flowers from Joan's garden, 10 vases of purple tulips, yellow lilies, red roses, blue irises and dreamily fragrant pink begonias.

In a world in which the phrase "artificial reality" is beginning to sound redundant, the reward for succeeding seems to be living close to nature.