

Get past the phone menu runaround

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YC man cuts through call options to find real humans

By Kyle Buis/Appeal-Democrat

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If you want sales, press 1. If you want customer service, press 2. If you want to speak to a live human being, good luck.

Gabe Davidson was tired of wading through a sea of phone menu options when he was dealing with banks, so he spent hours searching the Internet for shortcuts and testing them. Now he's putting that work on the Internet for people to find for free.

"I was calling this bank, which I won't name, but I was on hold forever," he said. "I thought it would be great to have a list of extensions and numbers so I wasn't sitting here waiting."

The 33-year-old Yuba City real estate agent has compiled more than 400 phone numbers of companies and government organizations on his site, www.1800shortcuts.net. While the majority of the numbers are 1-800 numbers, some aren't toll-free.

The site can help save time as well as money.

Most companies have some kind of back door in their automated phone systems to immediately get in contact with a live person. Most of these have been scattered on the Internet or hidden in obscurity, waiting for someone to pry through the system to find them. A lot of the shortcuts that Davidson found came by process of elimination.

"You get a feel for it after awhile," he said.

Most phone systems use the star key to repeat the machine's messages, the pound key leads to customer service, and hitting zero multiple times can lead to a live operator, Davidson said. From there, he scoured the Internet and began testing ideas for hundreds of phone numbers.

"There was a lot of research and a lot of dialing," he said.

The Web site itself is much simpler than the process of culling the information. Instead of overloading it with ads and graphics and layers, Davidson has every phone number on one page. It's just text, a simple Google ad and a small logo at the top.



Gabe Davidson of Yuba City started a Web site – 1800shortcuts.net – after he got tired of spending his day calling corporate phone numbers and working his way through automated phone systems to get to a live person.

"It was fun for me to deal with the steps of getting it all together and putting together the site," he said. "The hardest part was just coming up with the initial idea."

Davidson has some technology experience, though he didn't study it specifically. He's worked for Century 21 for the past four years and before that he was involved in computer sales.

The site is far from complete and Davidson is trying to add more companies and phone numbers to his list.

If people have tips for how to get around more phone systems or want to report a mistake, he said the best option is to e-mail him at info@1800shortcuts.net

"It's a simple concept and I want it to be a useful tool for people to use," Davidson said. "And before anyone asks: no, the site is not for sale."

Appeal-Democrat reporter Kyle Buis can be reached at 741-2400. E-mail him at kbuis@appealdemocrat.com

Americans Red Cross emergency services for the Three Rivers Chapter, which covers Sutter, Yuba, Butte, and Nevada. September also saw an unusually large number of residential fires. The local chapter served a state Red Cross spokesman in Sacramento. The number of residents turned to RED CROSS for help was up.



Gabe Davidson of Yuba City started a Web site - 1800shortcuts.net - after he got tired of spending his day calling composite phone numbers and working his way through automated phone systems to get to a live person. He's compiled more than 400 phone numbers of businesses and agencies with shortcuts to get to a live person.

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ON THE NET
www.1800shortcuts.net

A sampling of companies' phone numbers and shortcuts to a live person:
 ■ AAA, 800-22-4357; Press 6 after the beep
 ■ Columbia Medical Funds, 800-345-6811; Say "representative"
 ■ CIGNA, 800-541-3000; Press 6-5-4
 ■ CVC, 800-983-9444; Press 6
 ■ Western Bell, 800-567-4789; Say "agent" repeatedly.

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VOLUNTEER OF THE WEEK

By Kim Fox
 Whether drop in my wife and I teach our children the importance of giving back to the community.