

'Please press '0' for reception'

I just got off the phone from talking to a computer. And much as I hate to admit it, I'm somewhat frustrated. It's a phenomena called voice mail that I've encountered, and although I realize it's a valuable and convenient tool in today's office, I think the time has come for some people to rethink the way they use it.

Take the Town of Halton Hills. The staff at the Town office just bounded into the '90s as they had their brand new voice mail system installed a few weeks ago.

And since that time, it seems some of them are so busy they can't answer their phones.

Every time my co-workers or I call, we get a prerecorded voice saying that person is away from his/her desk or on another line.

And they say they'll get back to us. It literally takes days.

Now either some staffers at the town have inherited a huge workload of extra duties, taking up all their available time, requiring substantial extra time on the telephone. Or they just don't know how to take off their messages. And maybe, just maybe, they don't wanna answer the phone. Nah, couldn't be....

Now I'm not for a moment throwing stones at a handful of staffers at the town, but on the other hand, I have a friend who works in Brampton, and he has voice mail in his office.

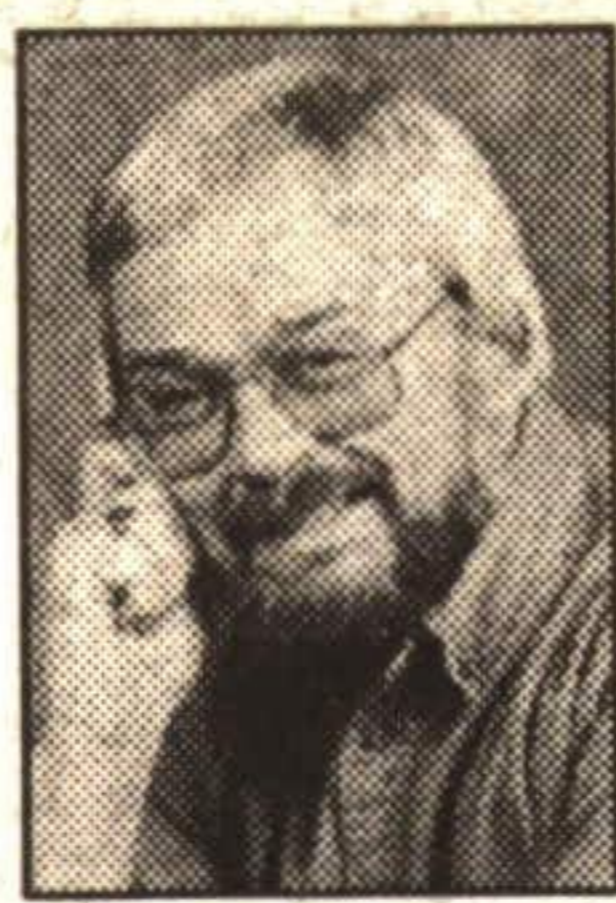
He has had it for years. So there's no novelty. And when I call him, the message will always say "Hi, it's so-and-so, and it's Friday, November the ... and I'm either on another line or away from my desk for a moment. I'll return your call as soon as possible..."

Invariably he does— usually in minutes. And as director of operations at his company, I expect he's as busy as the next person.

I think those guilty of voice mail sins could take a few pointers in customer service.

And you know, when I call those offices that do actually take the time to change and update their greeting every day, I always become

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suspicious when I hear a greeting that is four days out of date. I wonder if anyone ever gave these people pointers in voice mail courtesy.

It seems we have courses in time management, people skills, even coping with stress. But no one seems to offer courses in proper etiquette with an answering system. I truly think some people could really benefit.

Don't get me wrong. I think voice mail is a great convenience to take a message when you're indisposed. In fact, I'd love to have it at times.

But it's only a convenience.

It's not there to screen out unwanted callers, or to allow you to talk to a co-worker about last night's hockey game, or the weekend's activities.

It's there to carry on an uninterrupted conversation with a business client.

Not ignore someone who might just be as busy as yourself, trying to get through before they have to head out the door to another, equally important appointment.

Adding insult to injury, there's one more wrinkle to drive me around the bend.

The end of the glorious greeting often says something like, "if you require more assistance, press '0' to return you to the receptionist's desk.

And when I finally get through that electronic maze to the receptionist's extension, I'm greeted by a message from her voice mail.

Seems she's busy, too.

Busy taking messages from her co-workers' callers, who don't answer their own phones.

MAY WE RECOMMEND ...

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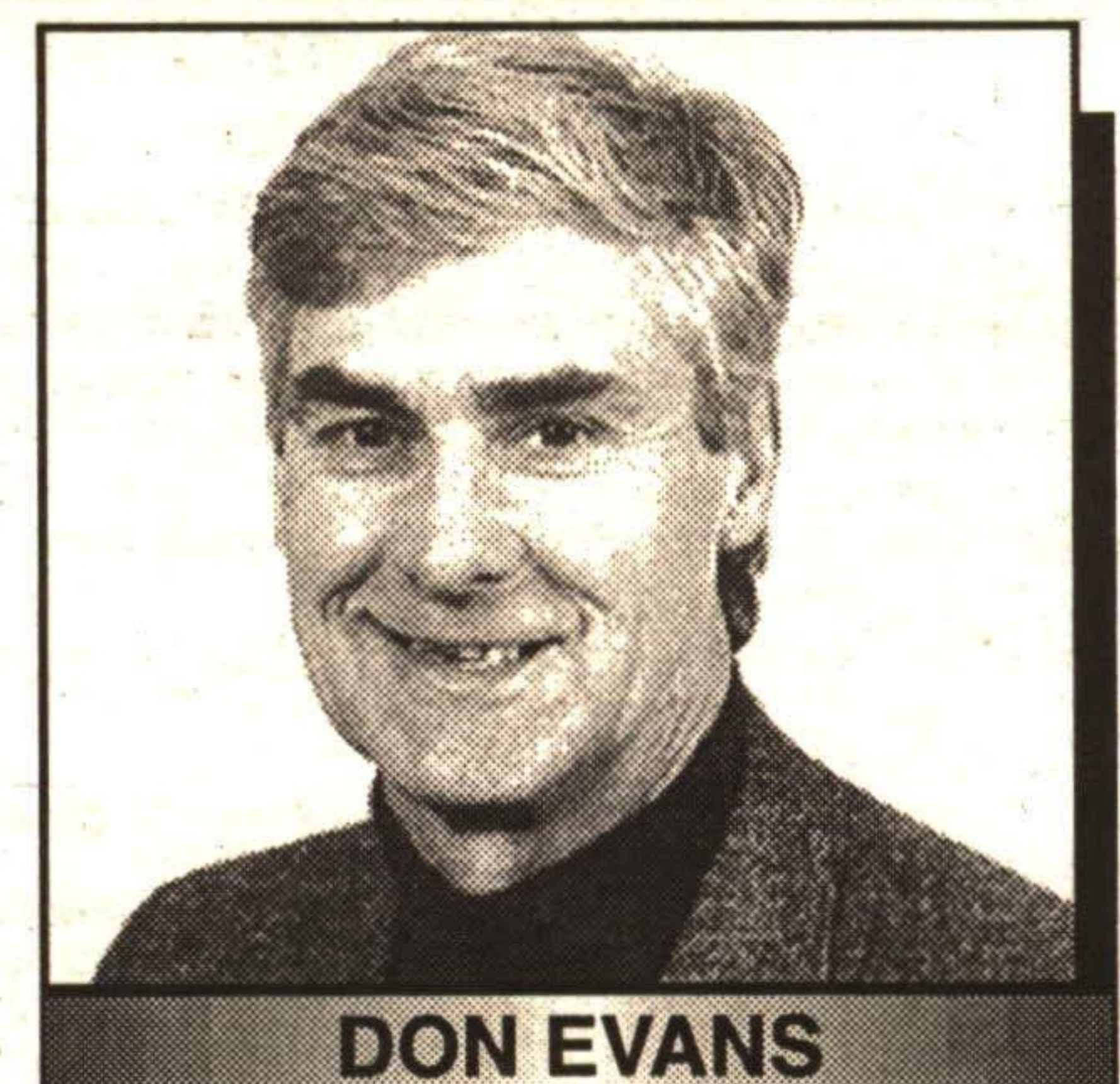
If you plan on travelling anywhere involving horses, I may know just what you have in mind and can probably offer advice you won't get from your average travel agency! As a rider who has sampled equestrian vacations in many countries around the world, I can point you in the right direction and help to ensure that, whatever your destination, there are no surprises! This experience, combined with the expertise of our very knowledgeable counsellors, can find you that perfect sunset to ride off into!

Some of the upcoming events we're preparing packages for include:-

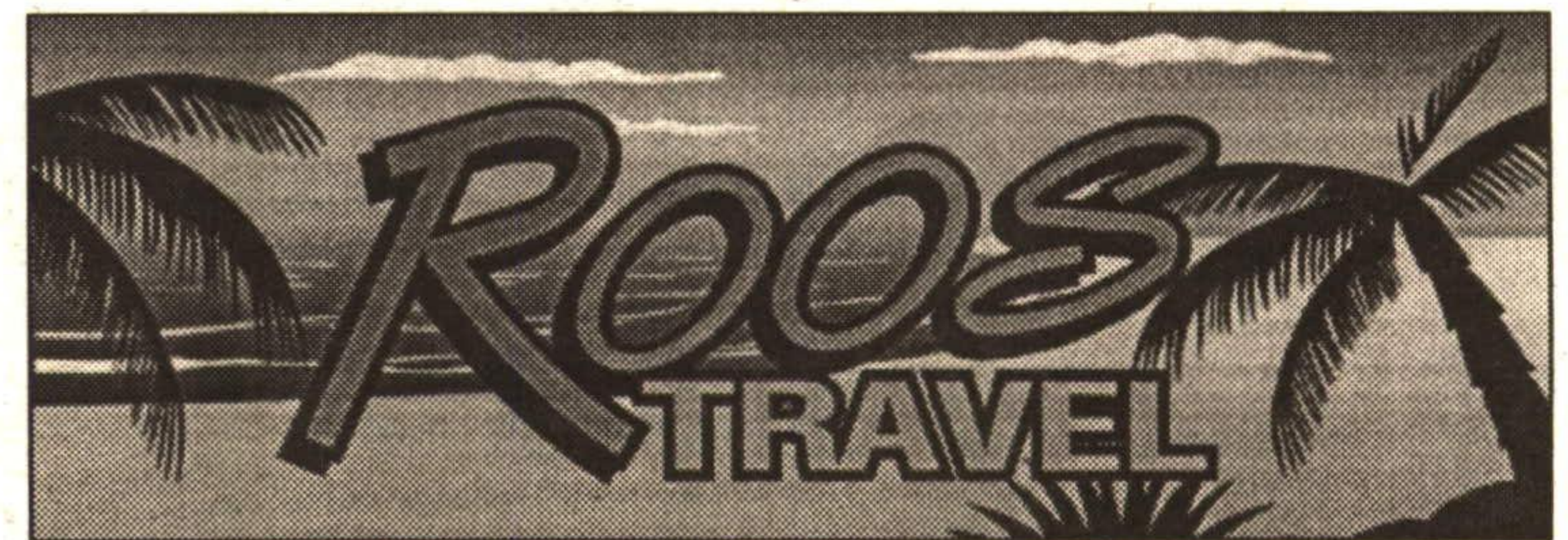
Equitana, THE major 'Equine Extravaganza!!' Louisville, Kentucky, June 1997.

The Calgary Stampede. (We all know where that is, eh!) July 1997. 1998 World Equestrian Games. Ireland's biggest event ever! Plan now!

Take advantage of my contacts and connections in many equestrian disciplines to find the best possible options for your next 'horse holiday', or provide inside information and arrangements for events all over the world.



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