

# Mastering Comedian Voicemail

A Revised & Updated Guide for the  
Comedian Voicemail System



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## 1 Table of Contents

<b>2</b>	<b>INTRODUCTION .....</b>	<b>2</b>
2.1	HOW CAN I TELL IF I AM USING COMEDIAN MAIL? .....	2
<b>3</b>	<b>ACCESSING VOICEMAIL &amp; LOGGING IN.....</b>	<b>3</b>
3.1	PHONE BUTTONS.....	3
3.2	ACCESSING PERSONAL VOICEMAIL .....	4
3.3	ACCESSING GENERAL VOICEMAIL .....	4
<b>4</b>	<b>VOICEMAIL: MAIN MENU .....</b>	<b>ERROR! BOOKMARK NOT DEFINED.</b>
<b>5</b>	<b>REVIEWING MESSAGES.....</b>	<b>8</b>
<b>6</b>	<b>THE ART OF FOLDER MANAGEMENT .....</b>	<b>10</b>
<b>7</b>	<b>ADVANCED OPTIONS.....</b>	<b>13</b>
7.1	REPLY (ADVANCED OPTIONS – 1) .....	13
7.2	CALLBACK (ADVANCED OPTIONS – 2) .....	13
7.3	ENVELOPE (ADVANCED OPTIONS – 3).....	14
7.4	DIAL OUT (ADVANCED OPTIONS – 4).....	14
7.5	LEAVE VOICEMAIL (ADVANCED OPTIONS -5).....	15
<b>8</b>	<b>ADMIN MENU: CONFIGURING YOUR VOICEMAIL.....</b>	<b>11</b>
8.1	UNAVAILABLE MESSAGE .....	12
8.2	BUSY MESSAGE .....	12
8.3	GREETING .....	12
8.4	TEMP MESSAGE .....	12
8.5	PASSWORD CHANGE.....	13

## 2 Introduction

How many of us have had an experience similar to the one described below?

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*You look down at your desk phone when you arrive at the office after a few days away. You're thinking about that nice restaurant you ate at last night, and all the work that is piled up waiting for you. You're about to take that first sip of fresh coffee, when your eyes are drawn to the blinking red light on the phone. Your brain does its equivalent of "You've Got Mail" – only its voicemail you're thinking of. Softly, you say to yourself:*

*"Interesting... I have voicemail. I should check my messages – clear them out... How does this all work, again?"*

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Voicemail. We all use it - to one degree or another. Much of the voicemail we deal with is on cell phones these days, and there are hundreds of guides and articles covering how they work. Far less can be found for the various voicemail systems used for business phone systems. This article hopes to help to change that situation for the better, by providing you – good reader – with a solid guide to the Comedian Mail voicemail system.

Comedian is one of the most common voicemail systems out there, being the default voicemail system for several popular phone systems – and yet there is a decided lack of good tutorials or guides for the tool. This guide seeks to help alleviate that lack, and arm you with the information you need to become a confident and productive Comedian Mail user.

### 2.1 How Can I tell if I am using Comedian Mail?

RDI's CityVoIP customers all use *Comedian Mail*, so if you are reading this and are one of our customers, dig in! This is the guide for you. For others, the simplest way to check for *Comedian* is to dial the number to reach your general voicemail system. For most systems, this is **\*98** – though your phone administrator may have chosen a different number to use.

If you are not sure, try **\*98** and if it does not work as expected, then inquire of your phone admin what the code for connecting to general voicemail is. Perhaps try something fun & slightly archaic, like:

---

*"My dear Telephonic Admin – prithee tell me the number that, when dialed, allows this humble user to check the voicemail for any extension?"*

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The moment you dial this number, if you are using *Comedian Mail*, you will hear a business-like female voice state, rather succinctly:

---

**Comedian Mail**

...<pause>...  
Mailbox?

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If you hear this when you connect via **\*98** or the equivalent, then you too are using a version of *Comedian Mail*, and this guide is ready to lend you a hand!

## 3 Accessing Voicemail & Logging In

There are two basic ways you can log in and check your voicemail: Either you press a pre-programmed button on your phone, or you dial the voicemail system shortcut directly. Let's tackle the trusty voicemail button on your phone first.

### 3.1 Phone Buttons

Most phones have a button that is dedicated to accessing voicemail. Most RDI CityVoIP customers use *Yealink* phones, which all have a physical button labeled **MESSAGE** on them. Most buttons also have an icon on them that show a message envelope as well. ☺

In fact, all the major brands have some kind of icon they use to indicate voicemail – we took the trouble to summarize the most popular of these in Figure 1, below:



*Figure 1: Popular System Message Envelope Icons*

**A:** Yealink/Grandstream Phones    **B:** Cisco Phones    **C:** Polycom    **D:** Avaya

Pressing the voicemail button dials the voicemail feature code to access your voicemail account. At that point, you are ready to log in.

### 3.2 Feature Codes: \*97 - Accessing Personal Voicemail

Pressing the button on your phone is the same as dialing the special feature code for accessing your personal voicemail. On most systems this is **\*97**, but the code can actually be anything your phone administrator sets up.

When you connect to the system in this way, *Comedian Mail* assumes you want to check the voicemail for the extension you are dialing from. Because of this, it skips a few steps in the general login process and jumps straight to asking you for the password:

- ⇒ Comedian Mail: **Password**
- ⇒ User: <Dial Password for the extension you are using>

If you do not know the password, the only thing you can do is contact your phone administrator and ask them to either tell you the password or ask them to reset it.

Once you enter the proper password, you are ready to start using the voicemail system's Main Menu (see [Section 4: The Main Menu](#) for all the nitty gritty).

### 3.3 Feature Codes: \*98 - Accessing General Voicemail

It is also possible to log in to *Comedian Mail* and tell it directly which extension you wish to check voicemail for. The standard feature code for this method of logging in is **\*98**, but again this is something the phone administrator can change. If dialing  does not work as described here, contact them and ask what the "General Voicemail" feature code is on your phone system – and then dial that instead of **\*98**.

When you finish dialing the feature code, you are connected to the voicemail system. In this mode, it actually announces itself and then prompts you to dial the extension you want to check for voicemail:

- ⇒ Comedian Mail: **Comedian Mail.**
- ⇒ Comedian Mail: ...<pause>... **Mailbox?**
- ⇒ User: <Dial Extension you want to check the voicemail for>

If you enter an invalid extension, or one that does not have voicemail set up, most systems will not inform you of this. Some do, but for security reasons most just pretend the extension is valid and proceed to ask you for the password.

- ⇒ Comedian Mail: **Password?**
- ⇒ User: <Dial the password for the voicemail account you are checking>

At this point, if you get the password wrong, some systems will send you back to enter the mailbox again. Others will ask you to enter the passcode again. Just follow the prompts until you get this right – each system is different in the exact process, but they all end up either having you logged in successfully or hanging up on you! 😊

Figure 2 below provides a summary for the ways you can log in to voicemail. The Red Star shows where you start when accessing general voicemail, while the Blue star shows how most of us typically log in – by pressing the voicemail button on our phones.

Again, the primary difference is when you log in from your phone it already knows which mailbox you want to access, so the system does not need to ask you.

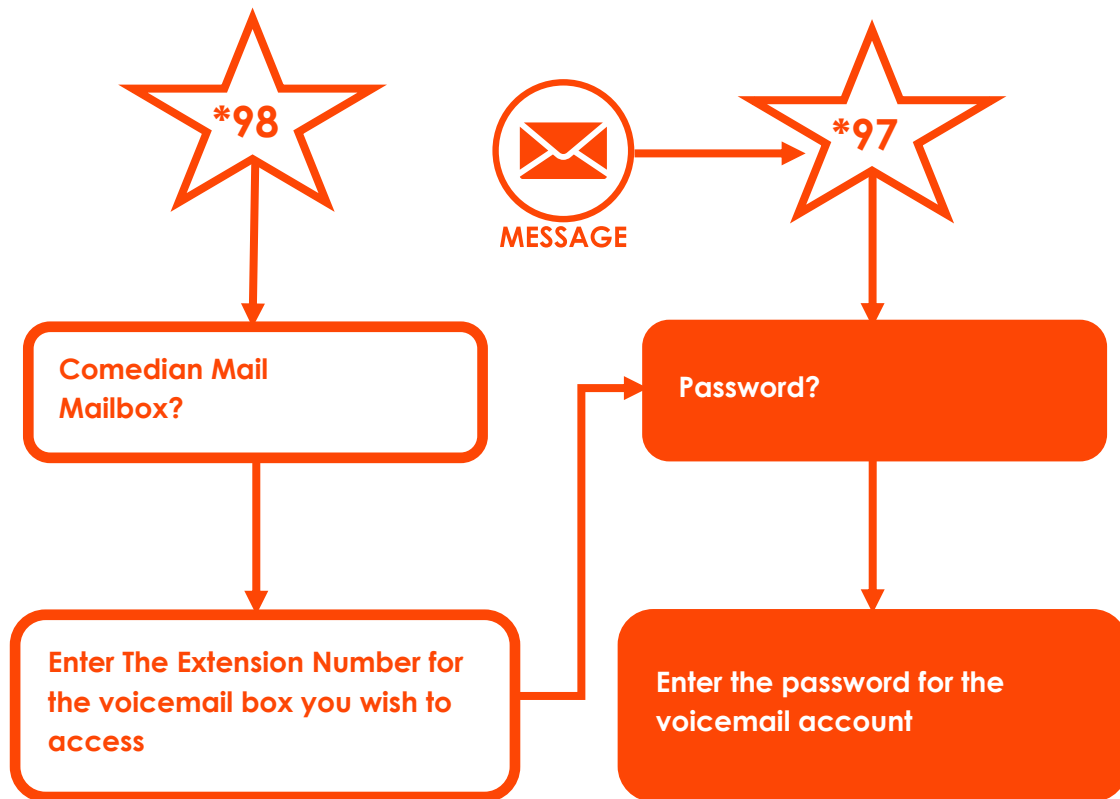


Figure 2: Voicemail Access Paths

## 4 The Main Menu

Once logged in, the system will first provide a quick summary of your voicemail status. This first-time announcement is only done once – and it will inform you of up to three things:

1. If you have a temp message active, it will remind you of this before anything else is said.
2. If you have any new messages to review, you will be told how many new messages there are.
3. If you have any messages in your “Old Messages” folder, the system will tell you how many messages there are in that folder as well.

Once the status announcements are done, the system will enumerate your available commands for the Main Menu. These are summarized in Table 1, below:

Voicemail: Main Menu		
Option	Name	Description
1	Review Messages	Review Messages in Current Folder. This is changed via option 2, but defaults to the New Folder (aka your INBOX)
2	Change Folder	Pick among the standard mailbox destinations, usually defined to be something like: 0 = INBOX, 1 = Old, 2 = Work, 3 = Family, 4= Friends.
3	Advanced Options	Dial out with company Caller ID, other options
0	Mailbox Admin	Change greetings, password, etc.
*	Help	Repeats this menu
#	Exit	

*Table 1: Main Menu*

## 4.1 Reviewing the Main Menu Options

The primary thing you will use this menu for is to listen to messages by pressing **Option 1**. Nine times out of ten you'll dial **Option 1** after logging in and then proceed to listen to your new messages one at a time - filing away any that you wish to keep and deleting the rest. See **Section 5: Reviewing Messages**, for how best to use its features.

**Option 2** – Change Folders is also important, but only for those who take advantage of Folders for categorizing and storing messages longer term. Basic use of the voicemail system rarely calls for using this option except to check old messages once in a while. Compulsive organizers should read **Section 6: The Art of Folder Management** for inspiration on how much is possible.

**Option 3** – Advanced Options - is always listed, but many voicemail systems do not have any items in the menu if chosen. For those lucky enough to have some options listed for this menu, you can find details on each in **Section 8 : Advanced Options**.

**Option 0** – Admin Menu - this is of vital importance, and is the gateway to setting up your voicemail account just the way you like it. Please see **Section 7: Admin Menu**, for further details.

## 5 Reviewing Messages

Selecting Option 1 from the main menu will drop you into *Comedian's* message review mode. This mode lets you play each message in the current folder one after the other and decide what to do with each. Table 2 shows the menu options available when reviewing messages:

Review Messages Menu		
Option	Operation	Description
1	First Message	Play the first message
2	Change Folders	Switch to a different folder – you'll be asked to select the folder to switch to, or # to cancel.
3	Advanced Options	Advanced options for the current message. See Advanced Review Menu
4	Previous Message	Move to the previous message
5	Replay Current Message	Replay the current message
6	Next Message	Skip to the next message
7	Delete Message	Delete the current message
8	Forward Msg	Forward Message to another voicemail account on your phone system.
9	Save Message	Save the message to one of the Message Folders.
Playback Commands		
*	Rewind 3 Seconds	Rewind the message playback by 3 seconds.
0	Pause Message	
#	Jump Ahead 3 seconds	Fast Forward Message Playback by 3 seconds

Table 2: Review Messages Menu

### A few things to note:

You can dial Options 4-9 at any time, even while a message is being played.

- ⇒ When the message is playing, you can continue to enter the commands above. This allows you to press 6 to skip to the next message immediately if you don't want to listen to a message you have already heard. You can also delete the message immediately by pressing '7' the moment it starts playing, etc..

### There are some potentially useful commands available in Advanced Options.

- ⇒ Pressing 3 will take you to the Advanced Options menu, where you can do things such as reply to the message, listen to the message envelope again, callback the person who left the message, or even dial out. See [Section 8: Advanced Options](#) for more details on each of these.

### Saving vs. Skipping Messages

- ⇒ If you want to leave the message you are listening to in the current folder, use **Option 6** to skip to the next message. This will save time compared to using **Option 9** – which will force you to pick which folder you want to store the message in.
- ⇒ Note also: If you are reviewing the New messages folder, then any messages that have been listened to but not deleted or moved, will be automatically moved to the Old Messages folder for you.

## 6 The Art of Folder Management

This is a key concept you want to keep in mind when using the voicemail system: the designation of the “current folder”. When you first log in, your current folder is always set to “New Messages” if you have any new messages to listen to. Otherwise, your current folder is set to “Old Messages” and you start with that as the default instead.

This is important because the current folder determines what set of messages you will be reviewing and working with when you press Option 1 on the main menu.

Use Option ‘2’ – Change Folder – to change the folder you are currently working with and you are well on your way to finding and managing your messages like a pro.

Table 3 shows the various Folders available and what their expected use would be.

Voicemail Folders		
Folder #	Folder Name	Description
0	New Messages	This is the current Folder on log in. This is the folder new voicemail messages are placed by the system.
1	Old Messages	This is the suggested folder for keeping old messages that you have heard but do not want to delete yet
2	Work Messages	Folder for storing work-related messages
3	Family Messages	Folder for storing family-related messages
4	Friend Messages	Folder for storing messages from friends.
#	Cancel Change	Folder for storing messages from friends.

*Table 3: Voicemail Folders*

One last tip -- keep in mind that once you have changed the current folder, Option ‘1’ on the main menu will reflect that folder name. She will say “Press 1 for Family Messages, for example, if you pick the family messages folder.

## 7 Admin Menu: Configuring Your Voicemail

Pressing Option '0' on the main menu will take you to the Admin Menu, where you are able to customize your voicemail box to meet your needs. Table 4 shows the four different voice recordings that are used by the system, as well as the option to set a new password for your account.

Voicemail: Admin Menu		
Option	Operation	Description
1	Unavailable Message	Record a new unavailable message. Played when you cannot be reached for any reason other than being on an active phone call.
2	Busy Message	Record a new busy message. This is played if you are actively on the phone when someone tries to call you.
3	Greeting	Record your name. This is used primarily by the Phone Book to announce your name to the caller when they are searching for a person to call.
4	Temp Msg	Record a temporary message to use for your mailbox – good for when you are away on vacation, etc..
5	Password	Set a new password for your mailbox.

*Table 4: Voicemail Admin Menu*

## 7.1 Unavailable Message

This is the most important recording you will make. It is the message your callers will hear when you are not able to answer the phone and they are about to leave a voicemail message for you.

## 7.2 Busy Message

This message can be skipped if you don't want to have a different message when you are actively on a call vs. other times people try to reach you but are not able to. If you do not record a busy message, the system will simply use your Unavailable message for the purpose.

## 7.3 Greeting

This is meant to be a recording of you saying your name, or the name of the voicemail function that the voicemail box is for. The important thing to note here is that this is the recording that is played when callers use the Directory to search for a given person's name. If you do not record your greeting, then you will have your name butchered by the computer voice that tries to say your name – and trust me it will not sound good. ☹

## 7.4 Temp Message

This is a message you can turn on and off. It is great for out of office messages that you only want to use for a temporary period of time (hence the name). Here is how it works:

When you have a temporary message recorded, it actively replaces your normal unavailable message. The system will announce that you have a temporary message active when you first enter the Admin menu so you know that your normal unavailable message is currently being overridden by the temp message.

This feature is useful for times when you are out of the office on vacation... or er... that Palm Tree conference in Cancun. ☺ You can record your special message, indicate when you will return, and not have to re-record your normal unavailable message when you get back. Simply turn off the temp recording (see below for how) and you're back to normal.

Selecting the Temp Message option will behave in one of two ways:

- ⇒ **Temp Message Active:** If you already have a temp recording created, the system will ask you to press 1 to re-record it, or press 2 to remove it.
- ⇒ **Temp Message Not Active:** If you do not have an active temp recording, the system will not prompt you but will launch right into recording a new temp message. If you complete the recording and 'accept' it, then the message will immediately become active and replace your normal unavailable message from that point forward, until you invoke the Temp Message option again and press '2' to remove it.

## 7.5 Password Change

This is **IMPERATIVE**. You should pick a passcode of at least five digits, and make sure you don't just pick repeating digits. If someone is able to guess your voicemail password this can cause you a lot of grief down the road. Avoid the problem by picking 5-8 digits with a sequence not easily guessed.

## 8 Advanced Options

When you are listening to a message, or even when you are at the main menu, you can press '3' to access the advanced options. Table 5 shows each of the possible options available here, but keep in mind that **many of these will only be available if your phone administrator enabled them**.

Advanced Options Menu		
Option	Operation	Description
1	Reply	Reply to the message - only works when you reply to a voicemail left from a local extension.
2	Callback	Using the caller ID information for the voicemail message, call the user back on your phone automatically.
3	Envelope	Have the system describe all the delivery details about the current message.
4	Dial Out	Dial an arbitrary 10 digit number using the voicemail system as the springboard.
5	Leave Voicemail	Enter an Extension – Leave a Voicemail message for it.
*	Return To Main Menu	Return to the top level menu

*Table 5 : Advanced Options Menu*

### 8.1 Reply (Advanced Options – 1)

This option is available only if there is a current message *and* that message was left by someone using an extension of the local phone system. If that is the case, then this feature lets you record a reply to the current message right then and there. When you are finished recording, the message is placed directly in the target mailbox without ever needing to leave the menu.

## 8.2 Callback – A Cell Phone’s Best Friend

This is a handy option to have around. When available, it will automatically dial the number of the person who left the current message. This outbound call can even be arranged to mask your true caller ID with your company’s phone number – a great feature for those who use cell phones to check their voicemail and wish to call people back without revealing their personal cell #

The one drawback to this feature is that it usually is not available. It requires the mailbox account to be specially set up ahead of time, in addition to custom dialplan code to handle the outbound call and set the caller ID values as desired. In other words: if you find this feature is available, be sure to thank your phone admin for going the extra mile for you.

## 8.3 Envelope – Tell Me About It...

This option is always present if there is a current message available to play. The system will inform you of the following information about the current message, if available:

- ⇒ Message Number
- ⇒ Date & Time Message was left
- ⇒ The Caller ID number and name of the caller, if known
- ⇒ The length of the message, in seconds

During the playing of the envelope information for a message, pressing 1 will skip straight to the recording itself – avoiding the need to listen to them all the way through.

## 8.4 Dial Out – Call out using voicemail system to mask Caller ID

This option lets you make an outbound call to an arbitrary 10 digit phone number using the voicemail system as a kind of bridge for the call. If set up properly, the feature can be used to make calls from your cell phone with your caller ID masked behind your company’s caller ID.

Alas, this feature is rarely available – for the same reasons as the Callback feature. Those with ambitious phone admins are able to take advantage of this powerful capability, though we recommend putting in place additional security measures to avoid the potential for abuse this opens up.

### Recommended protections:

- ⇒ Block high-toll area codes
- ⇒ Limit the max number of outbound calls allowed

- ⇒ Make sure everyone has solid passwords with at least 5 digits.. otherwise you're just asking for hackers to abuse your voicemail system using this feature.
- ⇒ Create a customer-specific password to protect the dialout feature on top of the above protections, and you should be fairly safe from abuse.

## 8.5 Leave Voicemail: Enter Extension, Leave Voicemail

This option asks you for the extension you want to leave a voicemail for. The extension must be part of the local phone system and have a valid voicemail account set up. After the extension is entered, *Comedian Mail*, the system will allow you to record your message and confirm or reject it before