

Google preparing to steer more telephone traffic

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(AP) -- Internet search leader Google Inc. is preparing to steer more telephone traffic through an online command center that it acquired nearly two years ago.

The Mountain View, Calif.-based company is heralding the expansion on Thursday by [rebranding](#) GrandCentral Communications as [Google Voice](#). [Google](#) bought GrandCentral in July 2007 for an undisclosed amount.

As part of the transition to the new identity, Google is upgrading the service for GrandCentral's current users to include automated transcriptions of voicemails and discounts on international calls.

For now, Google Voice only will be available to the people who already have been relying on GrandCentral to manage [incoming calls](#) on their office, home and mobile phone lines. Google says several hundred thousand people have GrandCentral accounts.

The free service has been closed to new users while Google retooled the technology to handle a wider audience. Within the next few weeks, Google Voice will begin welcoming people who had signed up to be on the service's waiting list, said Vincent Paquet, a GrandCentral co-founder who is now running the service for Mountain View-based Google.

Here's how it works: Google Voice assigns a unique phone number to each user. Calls to the Google Voice number can then be directed to any other phone line. The service also provides a hub for all messages. The online command center also enables a user to customize greetings for friends and family or ward off unwelcome callers.

"Google is all about helping you manage your information and one of the big holes right now is in the management of voice communications," Paquet said.

This isn't Google's first attempt to become a bigger player in the [telecommunications market](#). The company has also built a [software platform](#) for mobile devices, called Android, that's designed to ensure that people on the go can easily access Google's services when they are away from home or the office.

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