

Google Voice 'light' works with existing cell phone numbers

October 30 2009, By Mike Swift

Google Voice, the service that can route calls to multiple phone numbers and access voice mail, is now available on users' existing cell phone numbers.

Until now, to use the Internet search giant's suite of telephone services, you needed to choose a special [Google Voice](#) phone number. The change is short of true number "portability," however, because not all Google Voice services -- recording a phone call, for example -- will be available via an existing cell phone number.

The free service for existing mobile numbers will still include online voice mail, automatic text transcriptions of voice mail and custom [voice mail](#) greetings. Mountain View-based Google says its "lighter" version of voice is meant to appeal to people who don't want to have to distribute yet another telephone number to their family, friends and colleagues.

"We realize there is always going to be a subset of our users who would want to keep their number, even though it means fewer features," said Vincent Paquet, senior product manager for Google Voice.

To access some features -- including call screening, converting a cell phone text message to an e-mail or recording phone calls -- users will need to continue using a special Voice number. But starting today, both existing and new Voice users will have the option of having the service based on an existing cell phone number, or the specially designated number.

Launched in March, Voice already has more than 1 million users, Google says. However, the service has been a source of friction between Google and some telecommunications providers, such as AT&T, who say Google blocks Voice in rural and other high-cost areas, providing an unfair competitive advantage with other telecommunications providers.

Google argues that Voice is not a telecommunications service, but a means of saving time and simplifying life by providing a way to unite all your telecommunication lines under one umbrella.

"We're not replacing your existing telephone line," Paquet said. "Google Voice doesn't do anything unless you have a phone line."

Calls to a Google Voice number are not tied to any one location or telephone; a call can ring through to a user's cell, home or work phone number, or to all three phones. The service also offers international telephone calls for a fee, although Google says there are substantial discounts for its international calls compared with standard services.

Users must go to google.com/voice to request an invitation to use the service.

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