

Voice mail in decline with rise of text, loss of patience

September 7 2012, by Roger Yu

Technology's ceaseless pursuit of efficiency appears to be claiming another victim: voice mail.

With the rise of texting, instant chat and transcription apps, more people are ditching the venerable tool that once revolutionized the telephone business, displaced armies of secretaries and allowed us to eat dinner more or less in peace.

The behavioral shift is occurring in tandem with the irreversible fading of [voice calls](#) in general, prompting more [wireless carriers](#) to offer unlimited voice minutes.

In data prepared for USA Today, Vonage, an Internet phone company, says the number of voice-mail messages left on user accounts was down 8 percent in July from a year ago.

Checking one's voice mail seems to be considered an even a bigger chore than leaving a voice message. Retrieved voice mail fell 14 percent among Vonage users in the same period.

"They hate the whole voice-mail introduction, prompts, having to listen to them in chronological order," said Michael Tempora, [senior vice president](#) of product management at Vonage. One response by the company to the trend is a new voice-mail transcription service that converts [voice messages](#) for delivery as email or text.

The service also emails a direct link to the voice-mail audio file, letting users bypass several steps to listen to it. "Voice transcription isn't perfect," Tempora said. "But they understand who called and what the message is about."

The transcription tools make skimming through messages easier for on-the-go users such as Dmitri Leonov, an executive at SaneBox, a maker of email inbox management software. "Email (etiquette) says to respect your friends' time," said Leonov, who rarely listens to messages. "And I should stop leaving voice mail, as well. Practice what you preach."

As with most declining technology, the exodus is led by younger, more impatient users who are quicker to embrace alternatives - someone such as Neveen Moghazy, 33, who, unlike her voice-mail-loving father, rarely leaves messages but juggles texting, chat app WhatsApp and Google Voice.

"If my friends call and I'm busy, I text them asking if it's urgent, or I just call them back later without checking voice mail," said the designer for an ad company in Atlanta. "It's just one less thing for me to go through."

The last [voice mail](#) Moghazy left consisted of she and her husband singing Happy Birthday to a friend last month. "He texted me back, saying he'll call back later."

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