

# Drowning in a sea of messaging apps

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We've got too many ways to talk digitally. WhatsApp, HipChat, Slack, Facebook Messenger and more.

Just when I thought I had more than enough methods for pinging and texting, Microsoft upended the communication basket. The software giant announced Microsoft Teams, a workplace tool for multiple people to chat and collaborate online.

Another week, another way to communicate that promises to make me faster, smarter, more responsive. When will it end?

It used to be the decision to talk to someone was rather simple: email, that much-derided digital workhorse of the office. Or texting. Sure, you had to know a person's preferences and if you couldn't get them, one might, though really as an absolute last resort, pick up the phone.

Those choices seem so quaint now, liberating in their crude limits. How did we survive?

Email was supposed to free us from the shackles of work, protect us from constant interruptions. But many of us spend the day rapid-responding to it. It makes us cranky.

Silicon Valley has long been trying to kill email, upend its dominance in the workplace, punish it for being stiff, formal and asynchronous in our informal, quick check-in world.

Now we've got a wave of new communication tools. Messages are coming at us from multiple directions like baseballs in a batting cage. Snapchat, Skype, LinkedIn, Twitter, Facebook, Aloo.

I live in fear of missing something, finding an unread message waiting for me in some app I didn't even know I had. This has happened. As a kind of messaging insurance, I always set up a new service to receive email notifications about texts and chats I receive.

Yes, the irony.

Even Waze, Google's traffic navigation app, has a texting feature. I can see little icons of fellow drivers, even how fast they are going, then message them (devildawg2136, why are you going less than 10 mph on I-80?), or just pass on a friendly "Beep Beep." Safely, of course.

True, it's not deep but "only connect," as E.M. Forster said long before Snaps disappeared in seconds.

In this new world, I have to remember who lives on Google Hangouts and who would never step foot in the place. Who stubbornly only uses SMS and expects everyone else to as well? Who likes to start massive group chats using Facebook Messenger among hundreds of people who may not know each other?

I try to understand. We're in a period of unprecedented digital communication choices. We're all trying it out, learning new rules and protocols, even as we are migrating to new tools.

I was happy enough with Google Voice, the Internet giant's phone and texting service. Then Google came up with Hangouts and recommended users head over there. I recruited friends and colleagues to join me.

But then the Slack craze started building. It was like seeing people head off to Burning Man to have a raucous good time while I stayed home to respond to email. The problem is you can't use a newfangled communication service unless others will sing Kumbaya with you there.

So I joined Slack. My husband and I created channels for scheduling, home improvements and shopping. We said goodbye to Hangouts, which was as easy as throwing the keys through the mail slot at an Airbnb.

Now, I thought, I just have to get the rest of my personal and professional life on to Slack.

But just a few weeks ago, Facebook unveiled its Slack killer, Workplace, a collaboration tool. And now Microsoft has its Slack killer, Teams.

I don't know which services to embrace, which ones to reject or whether to do nothing and hope some just go away. Eventually, there will be a shakeout, right? And all of these services will be rolled up into Microsoft's Office 365, Google Apps, and Facebook. One can hope. Until then, we are in the woods on our own.

In an open letter to Microsoft, Slack said it was part of "a revolution" and that its service was "the only tool preferred by both late night comedy writers and risk & compliance officers."

Really, risk & compliance officers already have a preference in this digital revolution? I'm so behind. Most likely, until the great communication shakeout happens, we're all going to have to keep sorting through the tangle of choices and use everything.

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