

# How the death of voicemail is changing the way we connect

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Don't wait for the beep: Voicemail is going the way of the dinosaurs.

Although [phone](#)-message technology advanced steadily from cassette recorders attached to landlines to services offered by phone companies to cloud-based message storage for mobile devices, it's now running up against a changing American society that places increasing value on saving every possible moment of time.

The landmark bail-policy case that could free the Ghost Ship defendants, fire danger from electric-car batteries, and a program to help military veterans and rescue dogs are all in today's Current.

With the prevalence of mobile phones, texting, chat apps and email, [voicemail](#) just isn't as what it used to be.

"Let's say I get a phone call from my brother," said Nora Lara, a 50-year-old employee at Santa Clara County Superior Court, who is no fan of voicemail and prefers texting to talking on the phone. "I'll ignore it. And then he'll text me. When people leave me voice messages, I just delete them without even checking. If they want to get hold of me, they can text me."

Roman Basinschi, a 26-year-old software engineer, never uses voicemail. "I don't think it's even set up," he said. Occasionally he'll leave a voicemail—but only for older people and only in more formal situations.

Lara and Basinchi illustrate a profound and widespread change, one that is re-shaping personal and professional communications and creating a whole new set of rules for how to connect. Voicemail is now seen viewed as inefficient. And for many, that feeling extends to phone conversations in general. These days, a phone call often requires advance scheduling.

The frantic pace of life and work is pushing out phone-based voice communication in favor of text, chat, email and other options seen as more efficient, said Mary Jane Copps, a Canada-based phone-communication consultant known as "The Phone Lady" who gives workshops and consultations across North America.

"We're all feeling more and more overwhelmed," Copps said. "We all have less time."

Businesses began adapting in the past few years to the trend away from voicemail, according to Naomi Baron, an American University linguist who studies language and technology.

In 2014, Coca-Cola scrapped voicemail for employees in a move designed to increase productivity. JPMorgan Chase followed suit in 2015, stripping the service from its consumer-bank workers. Baron said her own university two years ago stopped automatically providing employees with voicemail, and made it an opt-in service.

"There is a death knell being sounded for voicemail in business," said Baron.

If you're looking to point a finger at those responsible for the looming demise of voicemail, and the change ways we use our phones, Millennials are an appropriate target, experts said. That's because they cut their communications teeth on text messaging and emailing, Baron

said.

"This is a large generalization, but they don't feel that comfortable in face-to-face spoken interaction or its derivative over the phone," Baron said. "They haven't had the practice. You have far greater control when you can type something out ... and then read it again before you send it, and then edit if you choose to."

Copps sees people under 40 or so as the leaders in the movement against voicemail. Leaving messages for them is usually a waste of time, she said. "They've stopped listening to voicemail, so if your phone number shows up on their phone and they recognize your number they'll call you back, but they won't listen to your message," Copps said.

Advertising account manager Tiffany Sung, 24, said she used to talk on the phone a fair amount, but that was back when it cost a dime to send a text. "When texting became unlimited, I stopped making phone calls as much," said Sung, who typically doesn't leave voicemails and rarely listens to them except those from her doctor's office.

Not only is texting usually faster, "You can do it wherever, whenever," said Cici Tong, 26, an accountant from San Jose.

With people moving away from voicemails and phone calls, we face a whole new series of decisions about how to get in touch with someone, said Anne Ricketts, a communications coach and founder of Lighthouse Communications in San Francisco. It all depends on whom you're trying to reach, she said.

Among younger adults, a phone call can come as an unwelcome surprise. "If you don't schedule it beforehand ... people think it's an emergency, their heart rate goes up," Ricketts said.

"If it's more of a formal relationship, I don't think you text—you email," Ricketts said. "If it's a colleague I was comfortable with, I'd just shoot them a text, but I wouldn't do that with someone I didn't know very well."

For matters too complicated to sort out effectively via email or text, a phone call may be required. But that call is best arranged in advance—via email, text or an app, Ricketts said. That's because voicemail will most likely go unheard.

"In the last three to five years the majority of phone calls in my world are booked ahead of time, just like a meeting," Copps said, noting that a host of apps are now available to make scheduling calls even easier.

But not every social revolution results in positive change.

"I'm not sure we're moving toward more efficiency," Copps said. "We've been seduced by text communication. It makes us feel more efficient because we can finish our part of the conversation. We've developed a discomfort with conversation."

In many cases, especially when making logistical plans, text-based communication can actually steal far more time from participants than a quick phone call would, Copps said.

It's also lot harder to convey and understand emotion and nuance in written language than through spoken words, Copps added. "If I send a client a proposal and they email me back and they say, 'No,' or 'not right now' ... are they saying, 'No, we don't have the budget,' or, 'No, but in three weeks we'll be ready?' You need tone of voice."

If you're going to leave a voicemail, it's important to hedge your bets, Baron said. She suggests that if you leave one, you should also send a

text or email to make sure your message gets through.

In the end, different people and different businesses have different communications practices, which means trial and error is often necessary to figure out how to contact someone, Copps said.

For San Francisco lawyer and California Republican Party national committeewoman Harmeet Dhillon, the decisions depend on the work she's doing.

"Like any good lawyer, I target my communications according to who is my market and my listener," Dhillon said. "If I am calling someone in their 80s I leave them a voice message. I don't text. Frankly, sometimes I don't even email them."

But when she's contacting other lawyers, she said, "An email is likely to be received and processed more promptly than a voice message." For confidential communication, Dhillon often relies on [phone calls](#), but she won't answer her phone unless she recognizes the caller's name.

Ultimately, experts say, talking on the phone may become a prized ability that gives people a leg up in their careers.

"Fewer and fewer people are going to have that skill," Copps said.

Varun Bhansali, a digital marketer from San Jose, uses text messaging, apps or a gaming platform for most communications. But he admits that spoken conversation still matters in important relationships.

"That's why, for the people that are close to me, I'll make sure to pick up the phone and call them once in a while," said Bhansali, 32. "It gives you a little more of a connection."

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