

# Finding My Voice

I've long preferred written forms of communication to voice. Live face-to-face or phone discussions are fine, but if a conversation isn't in real time, I'd rather use e-mail than voice mail. I think poor function and inconsistent commands have been the main contributors to my attitude toward voice-mail systems.

I can't count the number of times I've sent incomplete messages by pressing the wrong key on my phone or have been forced to send voice-mail messages through another person because I didn't know the necessary extensions. Or how much time I've wasted forwarding or summarizing messages so that a larger group could participate in the "conversation." With most voice-mail systems, I've had to review messages in the order decided by the system and have had very little information to help me prioritize the task.

Trying to save time, I used to review voice-mail messages while driving. If they were informational or simple requests, I could dispatch or return many messages in this time. But if they were complicated, I would have to listen to them again once I got to the office, looking up the extensions of people I needed to forward messages to. How annoying is it to have to listen to long-winded messages a second or third time?

Thankfully, all of that is in the past. I've been using a voice-mail system that can be accessed from a Web page as well as from the phone, and my attitude toward voice-mail conversations has improved dramatically.

Now, sending or reviewing voice mail has all the advantages of e-mail while retaining the benefits of voice communication. I can see all the messages in my mailbox at a glance, who the messages are from (by name if they are internal, by phone number if external), any priority or privacy markings, and even a subject line for some of the internal ones, allowing me to choose the order in which I review them.

Long messages no longer surprise me because I can see how long each message is before I start listening. VCR-like controls let me fast forward, rewind, and skip to any place in the message. Replying to

a message is simple, and I can easily add recipients by choosing their names from the corporate directory. Deleting recipients is even easier; all it takes is a click of the mouse.

This tool even makes sending complex or difficult voice-mail messages easier. The controls for recording and reviewing the message are the same as any consumer electronic device, and so I have no fear of accidentally sending a message I meant to redo.

Another boost to my voice-mail attitude comes from the software phone on my laptop. Anywhere I can get an Internet connection, I can make phone calls. It doesn't matter if I'm at home, in a hotel, or a coffee shop; all my calls look as if they are coming from my office. When I leave a message internally, it shows up with my name, and people can use the reply feature without having to look up my extension.

I use voice mail more often now, benefiting from the subtle nuance that voice can add. For me, the new voice-mail functions have turned the technology from a frequent conversation-stopper to a conversation-starter. These improved tools have certainly helped me find my voice.



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