

The Phone Call Is Dead

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Nov 13, 2010

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(via: [Wyllo](#))

In the tech industry **saying that something is dead** actually means *"It's on the decline."* And yes, the phone call is on an inexorable decline.

My original title for this post was "The Phone Call Will Be Dead In ____ Years" but as consumer inertia is somehow still keeping our parent company AOL in the dialup business, I thought it might be prudent not to include an ETA on the death of the call.

Less obsolete but more annoying than a handwritten letter, the phone call is fading as a mode of communication even if the nostalgic will be singing its praises for awhile. We reached a breaking point in **2008 when text messaging topped mobile phone calling** in usage, and we've been living in a world dominated by text based communication ever since (Thanks Twitter).

If old media has taught us anything, it's that it takes most industries at least a generation to be completely disrupted, especially something as powerful as Big Telco.

But we are definitely on our way there. According to Nielsen data, voice usage has been dropping in every age group except for those past the age of 54. Text is just easier.

"Now, 78 percent of teens recognize the functionality and convenience of SMS, considering it easier (22 percent) and faster (20 percent) than voice calls (though still fun). Voice activity has decreased 14 percent among teens, who average 646 minutes talking on the phone per month."

Interest in voice calling is now **sharply differentiated by age**, and few technological advancements have ever survived while failing to capture the interest of 22 year olds.

Mike likes **to rub it in MG's face** that the iPhone can't actually make calls due to terrible AT&T reception, but the truth is that we iPhone users (and to greater extent smartphone users in general) are not primarily using our phones to make calls. We may carry around things we call "phones" but to us they're just pocket-sized computers.

MG's response to Mike, *"It doesn't need to. I use the phone mostly for apps and browsing, not calls."* On background: MG is in his 20s and Mike is around 40. As if we needed more proof, MobileCrunch editor Greg Kumparak's AT&T usage data is indicative of the voice habits of an entire generation.

Sorry Telcom industry, we are increasingly provided with reasons to not use your voice services. While still not exactly mainstream, we now have access to a plethora of free, internet-based calling options like **Google Voice**. When I'm interviewing startups and ask to *"get on a call"* they usually direct me to their Skype usernames.

When I do cold call someone for information (and am more often than not directed to an automated message) companies send back their responses via email. And I have countless times declared a fatwa on PR people who think it's cool to cold call me, especially before 9 am.

It's not just job related calls that are annoying. The other day somebody from my bank called me to talk about my 401K. Fair enough. The problem is I wasn't exactly expecting the call as I only get 3 or 4 a week now. And I picked up right as I was trying to write a post breaking news (One thing a phone call does signify is EMERGENCY). I ended up mumbling something rude and hanging up on the person. I still don't even know what a 401K is even though I'm sure I'll eventually get around to Googling it.

The saddest thing is that since I became a millionaire in the TC/AOL sale (not) it really is about time I started to do stuff with my money other than pray that I'll still have a paycheck tomorrow. That phone call might have actually provided me with useful information had its unabashed interruption not been so abhorrent.

Ideally, here's how that interaction should have gone down: Chase Bank should have sent me an EMAIL about the fact that it noticed I had more money in my account, with a link directing me to my 401K option plan. There I could decide BY READING and not listening to some customer service rep's scripted drivel on what plan was right for me. Now, as it stands, I've got a random phone number in my Stickies that I will never call back. I won't give a second thought to my 401K until I'm up late at night surfing the Internet and find out it's like important five years from now.

What's maybe sadder than the 401K episode is what this phone call generational schism means for people who are older than you. Much like Mike thinks **his mom is silly for using chain emails to get in touch**, I dread the inevitable Sunday phone calls from relatives I have to return lest they think I'm dead. I wish they would just @reply me on Twitter or something. Instead I've now got 18+ voicemails I have no desire to deal with.

Maybe I should start making people write me handwritten letters?

Teaser image: **Alexandre Dulaunoy**