



Telus aims Visual Voice Mail at enterprise inboxes

The carrier says it's the first in Canada to bring voice message conversion to e-mail, but an IDC analyst suggests IT managers should be careful about their deployment strategy

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On the heels of Rogers Wireless' recent voice-to-text message service launch, Telus Corp. has announced its own entrance to the visual voice mail market. But the Vancouver-based carrier said it's taking the technology one step further, allowing customers to read their voice mail via text message and e-mail.

With its Telus Visual Voice Mail service, the company said it's the first national carrier to extend the voice transcription technology to e-mail. Jim Senko, vice-president at Telus Business Solutions, said letting customers read their voice mail using smartphones, such as a BlackBerry or PDA, will go a long way in increasing enterprise productivity and efficiency. The service will be offered through SpinVox, which provides a voice message conversion system.

"It's a natural evolution from the productivity that a business professional is getting from their e-mail," Senko said. "What we're seeing is a lot of executives who are in meetings during the day and are unable to take the time to call into their voice mail. By the end of the day, there are often a lot of very urgent messages in their inbox. This will empower customers to receive those messages during these meetings and take action immediately."

Adding to usefulness of voice-to-e-mail in the corporate environment, according to Senko, is the ability to integrate messages with the corporate e-mail system. Senko said the fact that customers will be able to manage their voice messages in the same manner they do with a traditional e-mail platform will help set it apart from rival offerings.

"Whether that's Exchange, Groupwise, or Lotus Domino, the power of the service is that you're able to keep a historical record of your voice mails," Senko said. "You're able to take the translated voice mail and forward back a message to the sender, or on a BlackBerry. You are able to click on the number and return the call right away."

Personally, I can't stand voice mail. Chris Hazelton, analyst, IDC Text One of the potential drawbacks of the service, according to Chris Hazelton, senior analyst for IDC's mobile devices group, is that it would force interested enterprises to tie themselves to Telus. The Framington, Mass.-based analyst said that employees are often free to choose the carrier and cell phone device they buy as long as it

meets the pricing and technical requirements set by the company. And because Telus is currently the only provider of the voice-to-e-mail technology, he said, companies may hesitate to roll out the service.

“As an IT manager, if you want to deploy this you would certainly need to move all your employees to Telus and that might not work for everybody in the enterprise,” Hazelton said. “SMS is huge and has taken off because it’s interoperable and basically works for everybody. If I send you an SMS from T-Mobile you will be able to receive it on your Telus account. But, MMS might not work because two carriers may not share the same standards for multi-media messaging.”

But the issue of interoperability is an irrelevant one, according to Senko, who said most companies have standardized the carriers they buy services from.

“One trend that we’re seeing is that enterprises are moving away from giving employees individual purchasing responsibility and more towards corporate purchase of cell phones,” Senko said. “In most cases, this will not be an issue.”

Despite this potential drawback though, Hazelton agreed that voice-to-text services are a step in the right direction, saying it is only a matter of time before more voice control systems creep into daily enterprise life.

“Personally, I can’t stand voice mail because it’s really slow and archaic,” he said. “Visual voice mail is a big step forward and this is a leading indicator of what is possible.”

And according to Senko, one of those areas could even be outside the traditional enterprise environment and into other fields such as health care industry.

“We have a hospital that’s actually piloting the service and replacing all their in-building paging with this system,” Senko said. “They are using it to forward patient messages directly to their doctors. The fact that our clients are getting so creativity with this service, so early in its launch, already makes me think that this is going to be a powerful application.”

Telus is offering a pay-per-use option priced at 50 cents per message for occasional users of the service, while frequent users can expect to pay \$15 per month for unlimited use.

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