Don't talk to me…

by Gianni Anchois

… send me a message

Do you remember good old voice mail? I know, many of you hated it. I kind of liked it. Sort of.

I recall driving to work and calling my desk phone voice mail. Which was kind of twisted — why didn't people just call my mobile? Anyway, I would listen and start working right there. Add comments, forward, share with co-workers, file away for later reference. All with just my voice. I could even drive whilst doing that. Cool uh?

A matter of convenience

It worked for me. By the time I got to the office, I was fully briefed on key areas of my job and ready to get the day started. In many cases, I had even formed a crude follow up plan, if needed, and flagged key action items (on me or others). Email was only a supporting play, and almost none of my voice mail messages were backed up by a related email. And tens of megabytes of attachments to read. Which nobody ever does.

Some of the messages were clear, concise, short and to-the-point. Others less so — rambling on forever. I could learn a lot from the tone of the voice of the people leaving those messages. If the originator was angry, you could tell. If she was happy, you could too.

Urgency, stress, passion, boredom. Try to infer that by reading an email. In the car. Whilst driving.

Killer app: less is more

The winning factor of voice mail was its intrinsic limitations. No bulky attachments of a hundred slides. No endless lists of URL's and portals to click on to find more info. And best of all, no hundreds of emails in your inbox to go through.

But for me the killer feature was that voice mail was leveraging the most unique and natural human capability: the ability to talk to each other, even if in a deferred mode.

The most natural way for humans to interact and communicate is not the web. It's not email. It's not instant messaging. It's not text messaging. It's definitely not Facebook.

Voice mail was also accessible from anywhere, as long as you had a phone line (street pay-phones anybody?). You did not need to lug around smart phones, tablets, laptops, etc. All you needed was a quarter and you were in business. Pretty low tech huh?

Low tech scores a winner

Which brings me to the point of my post. Are all the hi-tech devices and tools that we're taking for granted today really making us so more productive than, say, fifteen years ago? Or are they just over-burdening us (figuratively as well as conceptually), creating layers of complexity and

ultimately of intricacy in the way we relate to and work with each others? Distancing us?

Have we lost the ingenuity and simplicity of using limited tools "because they work best for what we need to specifically achieve" and fell victims of "because it can be done"?

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