COMPARE VOICEMAIL PROVIDERS

Contents

1   Abstract

The purpose of this resource is to compare and organize information about the leading Voicemail service providers. Voicemail is a system that allows people to exchange personal voice messages and process transactions by using a telephone. An answering machine is part of a voicemail service, as are more complicated features like transcribing voice to text. Most cell phone providers offer voicemail as a basic feature.

2   What Is Voicemail and Why Should You Use It?

Voicemail is a system that allows people to exchange personal voice messages and process interactions with other people and organizations. It allows people to leave lengthy, secure, and detailed messages in natural voice.

A voicemail service allows for two different modes: telephone answering and voice messaging. Telephone answering is a feature most individuals are familiar with; calling a person who doesn't pick up will give you the option of leaving a message. Voice messaging allows you to send a voicemail without having to call.

Corporations have noted huge savings as a result of implementing voicemail systems. General Electric found that over $1,100 per employee per year was saved upon implementation.

Traditionally corporate voicemail systems integrated directly into a company's PBX. Of late messaging services are being unified with VOIP technology (Voice Over Internet Protocol) due to the increased capabilities of the digital system.

Unified voicemail refers to the combination of different voicemail services into one standard system. This would allow an individual with a phone line at home, the office, and a cell phone to have one voicemail for all three different lines.

A growing trend for voicemail is the use of transcription technology. This allows audio to be converted into text and sent to you via email or SMS.

3   How to Choose a Voicemail Service

Whether you're an individual or a corporation there are several things to keep in mind when choosing a voicemail provider:

- Do you need voicemail to text?

- Is a virtual number important?

- Do you want to be able to route calls?

- Is unifying multiple phones under one number necessary?

- Does it need a mobile application?

Be sure to keep these thoughts in mind as you consider different services. Businesses should take the time to create a formal list of required features and then match them against our chart. We've also included definitions below in case you run across any terms you are unfamiliar with.

3.1   Standard Features of Voicemail Providers

Through our research, we have found that voicemail services typically share a few standard features:

- Voicemail to text transcriptions

- Caller blocking

- A web panel to manage and control your voicemail

- Offer a free trial

- Prices typically start around $5.00 – $10.00

3.2   Definitions

Type – There are different kinds of voicemail systems. The two main ones are VOIP (Voice Over Internet Protocol) aka cloud based PBX which utilizes the internet for digital transfer, and PBX, which is the traditional system.

Free Trial – Many providers offer a free trial so individuals and corporations can analyze the service and ensure it is up to their quality standards.

Voicemail to Text – The ability for voicemail systems to automatically translate voice into text. This service can be accessed through email, mobile app, or online service. Sometimes called "visual voicemail."

Virtual Number – A telephone number that is not directly associated to a telephone line.

Shared Voicemail – Allows multiple people access to one account. Great for teams.

Call Routing – If you have multiple phones call routing gives you the ability to direct calls to them. You can allow (or not allow) specific phones to ring in an order you prefer.

Mobile App – Companies with a mobile app make it incredibly easy to access your voicemail on your cell.

Developer Community – Some voicemail providers have people developing extra greetings and features for people. It's a nice and normally free way of adding onto a service.

Caller Blocking – Just like caller ID on a regular phone it gives you the ability to decline receiving voicemail from certain people.

Advanced Reporting – Some providers allow advanced versions of call logs, which give statistics and demographics on who your callers are. Some providers such as SimplyONE can do this in real time.

Web Panel – A standard feature of voicemail providers that allow voice to text is the presence of a web panel where users can view their messages. They are very similar to an email inbox.

3.3   Voicemail Service Providers

3.3.1   VOICECLOUD

Pros

Voice cloud expertly converts voice messages to text with 99% accuracy. Allows you to convert voicemail to mp3 files with no cost. Web panel allows you to play voicemails in browser. Good pricing.

Cons

No free voicemail to text options. Lacks YouMail's content creation community.

Conclusion

VoiceCloud's claim to fame is its ability to accurately convert voicemail to text. For those who receive loads of voicemail this can be the ultimate time saver. This accuracy derives from the fact that humans and computers work in conjunction to transcribe the messages.

Setting up VoiceCloud is a breeze. Once you select your carrier and enter basic information all you have to do is enter a code into your cell – then you're good to go.

You have the ability to set up your own greeting but really, that's a standard service included on all plans. One nice perk is that there is unlimited storage so you never have to worry about deleting old messages. It's also wonderful that the transcribed voicemail is sent to the subscriber by either email or a text message.

With good prices, a solid mobile app, and the inclusion of standard features such as call routing VoiceCloud is a strong contender in the voicemail market. VoiceCloud is a recommended provider.

3.3.2 YOUMAIL

Pros

Accurate transcriptions. Can respond to voicemail with email or text messages. Many free greetings premade to utilize with the service.

Cons

Word limit for free transcriptions and lack of unlimited storage; contact organization is lacking

Conclusion

With stellar pricing and a community releasing free tidbits, YouMail stands above the crowd. Setup is simple, the transcriptions are accurate, and there are plenty of plans to select from.

The development community is one of the best parts of YouMail. There are literally thousands of free or paid greetings that you can utilize. They run from standard professional greetings to comical or even bawdy in humor. Definitely worth checking out.

There are two different types of plans under YouMail. You can opt for one that works with your current voicemail and enables it to send text transcriptions. The other type of plan is the standard comprehensive voicemail service

Like VoiceCloud there is the option to select either computer or human transcriptions (depending on the plan you choose). Human transcriptions are spot on while the computer struggles with complex words or words like too, to, or two.

Storage is not unlimited with YouMail, but you do have the option of downloading your voicemail to the computer. The lack of an ability to route calls or have a virtual number may be a deal breaker for some but if you have an existing line and don't need those features, YouMail is a very attractive option.

3.3.3 PHONETAG

Pros

Accurate transcriptions. Setup is very easy. Compatible with Skype.

Cons

Pricey plans. Is strictly a transcription service and voicemail service

Conclusion

Like YouMail and VoiceCloud, PhoneTag uses a web-based interface to navigate your voicemail. It can push these out to either email or SMS.

The web interface is easy to use (it looks like an email inbox and works in virtually the same way). You have the option to download your messages if you like, but by default cannot play them in the browser. You can reply to contacts using email, which is nice.

Rather than develop its own recognition software, PhoneTag opted to utilize IBM's proprietary system. This in combination with human assisted transcription means the voicemail to text option is very accurate. Accuracy may not seem like the biggest thing, but if people are trying to book appointments or give you directions, you need that voicemail to be as accurate as possible.

As expected, you have the ability to record your own greeting. PhoneTag also allows you to upload files from your PC which allows you to do further customization if you so desire.

The biggest downside of PhoneTag is that there are very few features compared to other providers. You can receive messages as text and audio, record a greeting, and that's it. It is nice that the service is compatible with Skype, but that's the only advantage it has over other similarly priced services.

3.3.4 VOICENATION'S SIMPLYONE

Pros

Loaded with features. Expandable to full virtual PBX for businesses.

Cons

No voice to text transcriptions. Will pay activation fees.

Conclusion

SimplyONE is oriented more towards the business market but comes with completely reasonable prices and loads upon loads of features. Seriously, there is a giant list of them.

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Some of those features are pretty advanced. Comprehensive intelligence reports and the ability to change your voicemail settings on the fly (i.e. "I'm in a meeting," or "I'm on a plane") make it an amazingly rich service.

If you're wondering why there are so many features unique to SimplyONE, it's because this isn't just a voicemail service. It has standalone voicemail, but if desired, a business can integrate it with other teleservices. Really, it's a virtualPBX that has a hotline, redirect service, and virtual personal assistant.

That said, voicemail can be used on its own. For a growing business that might need additional features later on, SimplyONE may be an attractive option. If you ever want those features, they'll be available to you without having to change providers. As long as it's not important for you to have voice to text transcriptions and you don't mind paying an activation fee or two, SimplyONE is a great provider.

3.3.5 GOTVOICE

Pros

Very highly reviewed. Great web based interface. Easy to use and setup

Cons

Discontinued support for consumer market, now only available to enterprise

Conclusion

Until January 31, 2011, GotVoice was a stellar voice to text service. It was one of the first companies on the consumer market and it did its job very well. Unfortunately, the company has discontinued support for the consumer level, making their service only available to enterprises.

Beyond having all the standard features such as the ability to record your own greetings and a web interface, the service lets you pre recorded messages and then send them so you don't have to call that person first – you can even send messages to multiple users at the same time.

The service is rock-solid, so if you run a medium or large business, GotVoice comes highly recommended.

3.3.6 CALLWAVE

Pros

Works fantastic with cells, utilizes its own superior voice mailbox, integrates to PC, easy set-up

Cons

Only works with cells

Conclusion

For individuals with cellphones and not landlines who are looking to ramp up their voicemail service, Callwave is an excellent choice.

It doesn't have the largest gambit of features but it does have the important ones: voicemail, amazing voice to text, even the ability to answer a call while someone is leaving a message. Basically every feature the average user would want to have is included in the service.

There is a web interface as well as a program you can download to your PC. The PC application allows you to answer the phone, which makes it a handy way to receive calls from your cell without utilizing it. Great for if you ever run out of battery and don't have a charger handy.

Callwave is reviewed much higher than GotVoice due to the fact that it goes above and beyond with its standalone voice mailbox and better features. The service is highly recommended.

3.3.7   ACCESS DIRECT

Pros

Solid list of features. Many different plans to choose from (each plan has different subsets)

Cons

Many of the more advanced features are only included with the more expensive plans – basic plan is very limited.

Conclusion

Access Direct has a very comprehensive service and is very professionally oriented – great for business. If you were to choose one of the more expensive plans, it would likely meet just about anyone's means.

Access Direct's shared voicemail allows you to connect multiple locations and phones together. It can handle simultaneous calls without giving the user a busy signal and will give instant voicemail notification on any internet-connected device.

While the service is good, the plain and simple truth is that with the scaling of voicemail features to the amount you pay, there is no reason to choose Access Direct over competitors. With that said Access Direct does target the business market and enterprises would likely select the more expensive plans anyway. Recommended for businesses.

3.3.8 GOOGLE VOICE

Pros

Absolutely fantastic service. Manages multiple phones easily. Completely free.

Cons

US only

Conclusion

Formerly GrandCentral, Google Voice is a huge player in the voicemail market, helped by the fact that it is a free service. The best part about Google Voice is its ability to manage multiple phones. Like other providers, you can get your voicemail sent to a unified mailbox but Google takes it a step further.

Imagine having a business number, a cell phone, and a landline. With Google Voice, all of these integrate into a single number. That's rather amazing, and all thanks to the face that Google Voice isn't tied to any one particular geographic location. Need to change service providers and get a new number? Not a problem. With Google Voice, the number you give to contacts does not change.

This might raise concerns of some who wonder if anyone could add any number. You can't, there is a security code Google sends to your phone which must be entered before the service will work.

Like all modern voicemail providers, Google Voice makes use of a web interface. As is customary of Google, it's very clean looking but the plethora of options can be confusing. The service also allows you to record calls – simply push 4 on your phone to begin recording. Once that's done, the audio is saved to your voice mailbox.

Unfortunately, Google Voice is only available to people living in the US. The rest of the world will have to wait. If you do live in America, since the service is free and comprehensive it's our number one recommended choice.

4 Voicemail Service Providers Overview

	VoiceCloud	YouMail	PhoneTag	VoiceNation's SimplyONE
Type	Cloud based PBX	Cloud based PBX	Voicemail to Text	Cloud based PBX
Free Trial	Yes	Yes	Yes	No
Voice-mail to Text	Yes	Yes	Yes	No
Virtual Number	Yes	No	No	Yes
Shared Voicemail	Yes	Yes	No	No
Call Routing	Yes	No	No	No
Mobile App	Yes	Yes	No	No
Developer Community	No	Yes	No	No
Caller Blocking	No	Yes	No	Yes
Advanced Reporting	No	No	No	Yes
Web Panel	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Pricing	From $9.95	From $4.99	From $9.95	From $9.95
Pay As You Go	Not Available	Not Available	$.35c/message	Not Available

	GotVoice	Callwave	Access Direct	Google Voice
Type	Enterprise Only	Voicemail to text	Cloud based PBX	Phone Enhancement
Free Trial	No	Yes	No	Free Service
Voice-mail to Text	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Virtual Number	No	No	Yes	Yes
Shared Voicemail	No	No	No	Yes
Call Routing	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
Mobile App	No	Yes	No	Yes
Developer Community	No	No	No	No
Caller Blocking	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
Advanced Reporting	No	No	No	No
Web Panel	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Pricing	Contact for Pricing	From $14.95	From $9.95	Free Service
Pay As You Go	Not Available	Not Available	Not Available	Free Service