

Visual Voicemail for Everyone

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Voice messaging services have seen a renewed interest lately due to the broad introduction of Visual Voicemail to mobile telephony subscribers. This was started by AT&T and the iPhone and was further accelerated by other carriers in the U.S. and beyond. Consumers have shown a strong affinity for this service because it makes managing voicemail easier and faster. Visual Voicemail provides consumers with the details of their voice messages without having to place a call. They are able to select which messages they want to listen to in the order they want to listen to them. The availability of Visual Voicemail, though, has been limited to a handful of phones. This paper will discuss how Visual Voicemail can be made available to any mobile subscribers with any handset.

Voicemail is Foundation for Innovation

Voicemail is a standard service for most mobile service plans. Due to its high penetration in most markets, voicemail is often the target of new innovations that leverage its exposure and attempt to try to bring differentiation to it. Niche features like celebrity greetings have been introduced in an attempt to make voicemail more personal and fun. Web-based Unified Messaging applications have been introduced to improve productivity by enabling consumers to both modify their voicemail settings, as well as listen to their voicemail messages while online. The latest voicemail based application to receive attention from carriers and consumers is Visual Voicemail.

While available for a number of years, 2008 was the year the adoption of Visual Voicemail began to take off. This was driven initially by the Apple iPhone but has also become a feature of other new high-end, high-adoption mobile devices. The graphical user interface (gui) on the phone enables subscribers to see details on all of their voicemail messages and



select the messages they want to listen to in the order that they choose (see Figure 1). It also enables them to bypass or even delete messages that they don't want to listen to. The result is a user experience which is very similar to the experience an individual has when reviewing and managing their email messages.

Visual Voicemail Today

As deployed today, Visual Voicemail is a client-server based implementation that requires a unique solution for nearly every phone model. While it is possible for one solution to work on multiple devices with the same operating system, this is usually not feasible due to the differences in screen size and other form factor limitations. Therefore, Visual Voicemail is a great solution for a high volume smart phone, but it isn't viable for the vast majority of mobile subscribers today.

Visual Voicemail solutions also require the carrier to introduce a Visual Voicemail Gateway into their network to act as the intermediary between the number of Visual Voicemail clients on their network and their voicemail messaging platform. This gateway will need to support the multiple client interfaces that a carrier will ultimately have on their network.

The underlying attraction of Visual Voicemail is that it improves the efficiency of using voicemail. It gives subscribers a better means to manage their messages and allows them to access their most important messages first. It eliminates time wasted by going through unwanted messages.

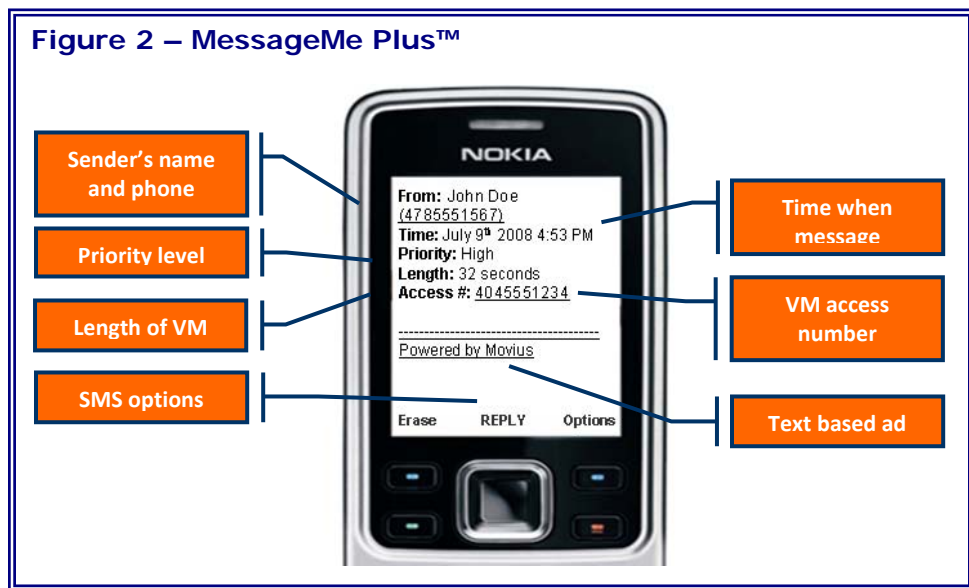
Visual Voicemail for Any Device

The benefit of the current handset specific clients is that they enable the user experience to be optimized for specific devices. Users of high-end devices want and expect this. For Visual Voicemail to reach the majority of users, though, a solution is needed that can be deployed on nearly any handset.

This can be achieved by utilizing the most common messaging solution used today by mobile subscribers, SMS. With a text-based Visual Voicemail solution, the subscriber's SMS inbox becomes the universal inbox for all messages. Clientless Visual Voicemail is more than message waiting notification via SMS. With a clientless version of Visual Voicemail the SMS message includes a link directly to the specific voicemail message. This allows direct access to the particular message a person wants to hear.

An example of this type of solution is MessageMe Plus™ from Movius Interactive Corporation. MessageMe Plus sends the subscriber details on

each voicemail message including who called, when they called, the length of the message, as well as the priority setting (see Figure #2). The subscriber can scroll thru their SMS messages and select what they want to listen to based on the



information provided. The SMS includes a unique access number so that the subscriber can go directly to the voicemail message of interest.

Expand to MMS for Richer Experience

For customers or markets where MMS is widely used, this concept can be taken a step further by utilizing MMS. With MMS the user sees the same information about the caller that they see with SMS and in addition the message is actually delivered directly to the handset as an attachment. This results in even a faster retrieval of the voicemail messages as well as the ability to access messages when the phone is offline. It also makes saving of messages easier as they are able to be stored directly on the handset.

Build Brand Loyalty

Visual Voicemail provides a better voicemail experience. Like any real solution improvement, this helps build brand loyalty and reduce churn. This approach to a Visual Voicemail solution provides a number of new revenue stream opportunities to carriers beyond simply reducing churn, though.

The simpler user experience actually encourages people to utilize their mobile service more thus increasing minutes of use. The convenience of SMS or MMS as the "voicemail inbox" will also increase the value of these services to subscribers thus likely increasing the data plan usage as well. For those demographics that have yet to become heavy users of data services, this is a great educator of the value of these data services thereby expanding the market opportunity.

Any new mobile service should be designed to support the evolving mobile advertising market. Clientless Visual Voicemail is a good example. Whether it is a simple message in the SMS header or, in case of MMS, a colorful third-party advertisement, this can be a great tool to accelerate adoption as well as overall revenue. This enables carriers to launch a new service that is subsidized by advertisements thus decreasing or even eliminating the need to charge subscribers an additional fee for the service.

Clientless Visual Voicemail is much more cost effective than the client-server Visual Voicemail solution. Because there is not the need for multiple client software loads nor additional specialized hardware (e.g. Visual Voicemail Gateway), the upfront as well as ongoing expense is less.

Visual Voicemail for All Subscribers

Visual Voicemail provides subscribers with a much better voice messaging user experience so they are seeking out this service. Carriers need to have a plan to expand its availability to meet this demand as well as to capture the associated revenue stream from this service.

Embedded clients will continue to provide the optimized experience for high-end devices. New solutions do exist that enable carriers to offer a Visual Voicemail solution to all their subscribers utilizing existing messaging infrastructure. These multiple approaches enable carriers to offer Visual Voicemail to everyone and begin to profit from this today.