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Telephone Use

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Telephone Use

Am Anfang war das Telefon nichts weiter als eine Verbesserung des Telegrafs. Es dauerte über 50 Jahr bis die Menschen den sozialen Nutzen dieser Erfindung erkannten und das Telefon damit unser Leben verändern konnte.

My father grew up in the little Swiss-American community of Nauvoo, Illinois. He told me about coming home from school one day in the late 1890s to find his mother shouting into a strange box *mounted* on the wall. It was the first time he'd seen a telephone. I've often wondered why she'd bought it. What'd she seen in that strange new *gadget*? Not long before that, President Rutherford B. Hayes first used a telephone and then said, "That's an *amazing* invention, but who would ever want to use one ...?"

Alexander Graham Bell received his telephone patent in 1876. By 1880, one American in a thousand had a phone, and when my father came home that day, the number was still only about one in seventy. In its first quarter-century telephones did not *by any means sweep* the country. Historian Claude Fischer recently went back through old telephone *advertisements* to see what'd been involved in turning this *novelty* into what it's finally become.

The telephone seemed at first to be a mere *improvement* on the telegraph. *Advertisers* pointed out that telephones were better for transmitting news, ordering *groceries*, and sending urgent messages. And so they were. But a telegraph message, with its *dots* and *dashes* of Morse code, took a long time to *deliver*. *Brevity* had been awfully important in using it.

If the telephone was no more than a sort of *juiced-up* version of the telegraph, then telegraph *conventions* would seem to *apply*. So *gossip* and *chit-chat* were *discouraged*. Telephone companies complained about frivolous use of telephones and told their users to be businesslike. Their machines were, after all, important.

Not until the 1920s did the phone companies catch on to what people really wanted from this wonderful new machine. They wanted to be drawn into a kind of living *tether* with one another. The Bell Company started telling long-distance customers, "Your voice is you!" In the '30s, AT&T first told us to "Reach out and touch someone." Today, even in business, that's how we use telephones. Telephones *unite* our *scattered* families and keep friendships alive.

	foresaw
	disturbed
	essential
	developing
installed	
apparatus	change
astounding	
in any case ... carry away	
commercials	
*see list	
upgrade	
*see list	
foodstuffs	
periods ... strokes	
send ... Shortness	
*see list	
customs ... be relevant ... rumors	
small talk ... advised against	
rope	
connect ... separated	

Oddly enough, Alexander Graham Bell himself *predicted* the social use of the telephone, but early makers and users didn't catch on. It *bothered* me that my father never did learn to relax and chat with me on a long-distance phone call. It took the next generation to see that the *inherent* use of the telephone was social.

Our machines teach us. But they take their time *evolving* a role in our lives. Commercial software has been changing us year after year ever since it burst on the scene around 1980, and we're still being changed by it. We can't begin to see where the Internet is taking us. So it's small wonder that the telephone took fifty years to show us how it would *alter* the very fabric of everyday life. ■

Prof. Dr. John Lienhard, University of Houston

<i>advertisement</i>	Anzeige, Werbung
<i>advertiser</i>	Werber, Inserent
<i>alter, to</i>	verändern
<i>amazing</i>	unglaublich, erstaunlich
<i>apply, to</i>	gelten, passen
<i>bother, to</i>	stören, umtreiben
<i>brevity</i>	Kürze
<i>by any means</i>	auf jeden Fall
<i>chit-chat</i>	Geplauder
<i>convention</i>	Konvention, Sitte
<i>dash</i>	Strich
<i>deliver, to</i>	zustellen
<i>discourage, to</i>	entmutigen, abraten
<i>dot</i>	Punkt
<i>evolve, to</i>	entwickeln, entstehen
<i>gadget</i>	Apparatur, Gerät
<i>gossip</i>	Tratsch, Klatsch
<i>groceries</i>	Lebensmittel
<i>improvement</i>	Verbesserung
<i>inherent</i>	innewohnend
<i>juiced-up</i>	aufgemotzt, verbessert
<i>mount, to</i>	befestigen
<i>novelty</i>	Neuigkeit
<i>predict, to</i>	vorhersagen
<i>scatter, to</i>	verstreuen, zerstreuen
<i>sweep, to</i>	hier: mitreißen
<i>tether</i>	Leine, Spannseil
<i>unite, to</i>	verbinden, vereinen

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