

CALL ME any time!

Tired of missing important calls or reading messages off the refrigerator? Did anyone tell you about the messaging capabilities of your PC?

Lucky you! With a convenient computer and a speedy modem at your cosy residence, you are one of the chosen few who can boast of 'working-from-home'. But how do you end the fear of missing out that important call (while away from house) which has the potential of catapulting your one-person-show to a super success story?

Would you believe if you were told that the answer to this lies in your PC? The perfect secretary you need, needs just a modem with voice and fax transmission capabilities and messaging software to warrant that you never miss an important call or fax message.

What's better is the fact that most software (such as BitWare and SuperVoice) that you are likely to need, ship with most modems. Alternatively, you could use freeware programs like the software Control Center (freeware). Many of the available software also have the message forwarding capabilities.

Record the talk

But should you want a more powerful and easy to use messaging solution, buy the shrink-wrapped TalkWorks Pro from Symantec or SuperVoice Pro. Though this article uses the software TalksWorks PRO from Symantec as an example, the general procedure remains the same for most messaging software.

Besides the software and modem, you would need a soundcard to record and play recorded messages, and a microphone to record your personal greetings. In fact, a typical 'Multimedia Home PC' or the 'Internet PC' with a modem that can

receive and sort data, voice and fax messages, would be fine.

The critical element here is the modem. The modem should be able to differentiate between the three different types of calls. Else, it will not be able to discriminate among the incoming calls and will not save the respective messages in the voice, data or fax format.

To check if your modem is capable of call discrimination, look up your modem's manual, or try issuing commands to it through a data communication program such as the Windows HyperTerminal. To do so, start HyperTerminal (Start > Programs > Accessories > HyperTerminal > Hypertrm). In the HyperTerminal dialog box initialise the modem by issuing the ATZ command. The modem should respond with an OK.

Next, issue the command AT+FAE=1. As before, if the modem responds with an OK, it supports call discrimination in Class 1 fax mode. If an error is reported, it does not. If your modem responds with the latter, don't panic issue the command

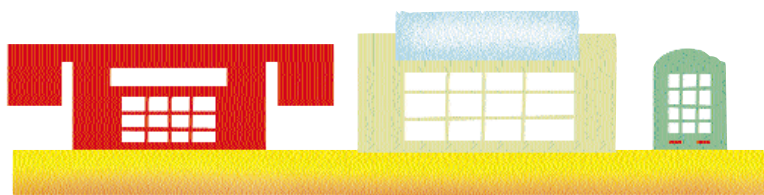
AT+FAA=1. If the modem now responds with an OK, it means that it supports call discrimination in the Class 2 fax mode. In case this fails, your modem does not support call discrimination in either Class 1 or Class 2 fax mode. You would, in such a case, need to get another modem that can support call discrimination.

Getting started

Once you have all the pieces in, setting up a basic messaging system is virtually a no-brainer. Very often, the installation process itself is a part of setting up a basic messaging system.

While you are installing the software,





most software will usually pop up multiple dialog boxes for you to fill in as the installation proceeds. These dialog boxes request details such as your name, telephone and fax number, address, and in case of some software like TalkWorks a numeric password. These are used to create a default profile for both voice mail and fax messages. Most software even offer a number of pre-recorded messages that you can use to greet telephone callers. Usually, this suffices for the average individual user.

But the heart of all good messaging systems resides in two programs—the first is the so-called ‘manager’ and the other is the system’s ‘agent’. In TalkWorks, the Message Manager performs the first function. It offers a one-stop interface to access all the messages that you have received or sent, as well as the associated utilities such as phone book, personal message recorder and fax cover sheet editor.

The ‘agent’ is a tiny application that runs in the background and is always depicted as a small icon in the Windows

Task Bar. In TalkWorks, this agent is the Controller. Always active in the background, its only function is to decide whether the incoming call is a voice or a fax call. Accordingly, it plays the welcome message and records the voice message, or saves the incoming fax. The Controller has to be set to Automatic Receive to be able to do the job without human intervention.

Incoming messages are then stored in the Receive Log of the Message Manager. These can then be viewed in the Message Manager or, alternatively, in the case of voice mails, through the Answering Machine program.

If you are not satisfied with the standard recorded message greeting, which has an American accent, you can access to the Audio Editor from the Message Manager and record your own greeting. This can be found under the Message Manager’s Tools menu. You can then record your own personal greeting through the system’s soundcard using the microphone which offers superior quality as compared to the telephone handset.

Once you have recorded your message, go to Program Setup by selecting Tools > Setup > Program Setup. Here select Answering Machine icon. This will



Illustration: SEAN D SOUZA

SOFTWARE
Software such as TalkWorks determine how the system manages incoming messages, be it data, voice or fax. Depending on its capability you can configure it to route your fax to a different location or check your messages from a remote location.

MODEM
Data, voice and fax transmission capable. It should also be able to discriminate which of the three category does the incoming call belong to. This will allow you to share one telephone line for data, voice and fax.

MICROPHONE & SOUND CARD
To create personal welcome messages. Also useful when you are creating a complicated messaging system with multiple mail boxes and options.



V3 Inc's CallCenter 3.5.8



This freeware is a scaled down version of the shareware CallCenter Pro. This is apparent when one loads the program and discovers that there is no agent (a tiny application that runs in the background and handles incoming calls) and the fax cover page editor cannot save changes. The drawbacks notwithstanding, CallCenter is suitable for home users and allows them to receive both fax and voice messages.

The product, unlike TalkWorks, also includes a data communication program. Surprisingly, despite

this, it does not have a host mode that allows callers with any data communication program to upload or download files. And though the program has a telephone interface to simplify the learning curve, configuring it was a problem and performance somewhat erratic.

But then, should one really expect so much from a freeware?

and call forwarding that Small Office Home Office (SOHO) users would typically want. Finally, a note of caution, manufacturers state though the 30-day demo is compatible with Windows 3.x, 95 and NT, it does not support Windows 98.

SuperVoice Home

Going by its name, one would expect SuperVoice Home to be an easy to use product. And the product does not disappoint. It was one of the simplest messaging systems to install and use. The downside of this simplicity is that it does not support voice mail accounts. And besides fax and voice calls, the product does not support data calls and, of course, comes without any data communication program.

What further brands the product as a home user only, is the absence of features like fax on demand

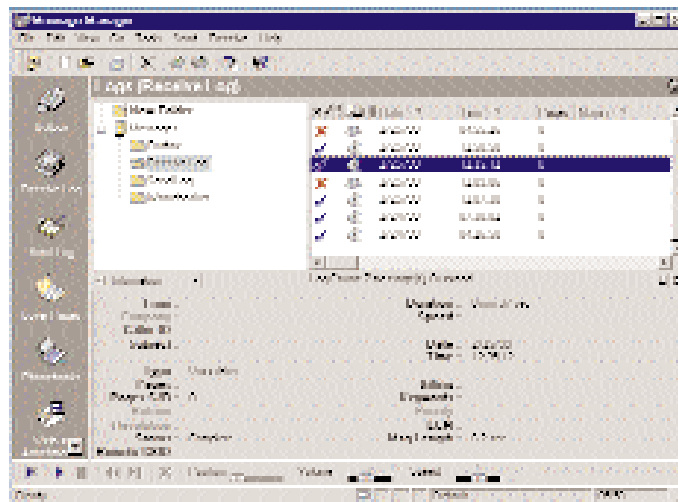


bring up another TalkWorks PRO Properties dialog box. Select the user profile My Sample Mailbox Profile (default name or whatever you have named it). Now select the Mailboxes tab and click the Properties button. This will bring up the Receive Log -Voice Mailbox Properties dialog box and select the Greeting tab. You can now change the greeting to any other sample or choose the one recorded by you.

Even available remotely

Now your PC is ready to receive calls for you...but what do you do if the messages are time dependent—like your college buddies call to inform you about the extra pass they managed for the rock show tonight?

Time-dependant calls would require you to use the remote message retrieval features to check your messages from any location. All you need is a touch tone telephone and your password—the same one that you entered when you installed the software.



Manager programs such as Message Manager offer a command-and-control access and view of all the functions in a messaging system.

In most cases, to retrieve messages, you have to dial your home telephone number. When the call is picked by the system and the pre-recorded message starts playing, you have to press one of the non-numeric special keys on the phone. In TalkWorks this is the [*] key, but this may vary from one software to another (check the manual or help file). You are then prompted for your pass-

word. After entering your password, not only can you retrieve your messages, you can even change the recorded greeting and your password.

While you can retrieve your voice messages by 'listening' over the phone, fax messages can only be transmitted to another fax machine. So you have to use the phone to select the fax messages you want by pressing the [#] key, and punching in the number of the nearby fax machine on the phone keypad. The selected message(s) will then be faxed by your PC to the fax number you have provided.

But a messaging system is not just all about being able to get messages when you are not around, it can also be Cupid's best friend. You can create multiple mailboxes for all the members of your family, while reserving one just for yourself, and thus keep your naughty *bhatijis* from listening to sweet nothings meant only for you. After all, what good is technology if it cannot make a difference to your life?

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