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On Technology

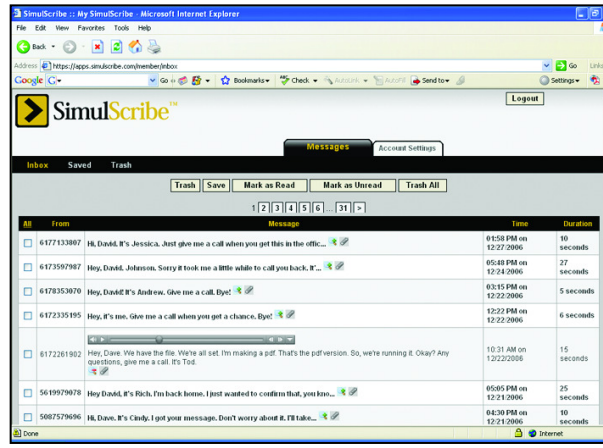
## Turning Voice Mail to E-mail

By PHIL BAKER

Daily Transcript Technology Correspondent

If you love your BlackBerry, I have a product for you! And if you hate voice mail, you'll like this even more. Designed for those who live their lives around e-mail, SimulScribe, from the company of the same name, is a service that works on almost any phone with e-mail capability. The company began life in Del Mar and is now located in New York City.

SimulScribe's concept is very simple: It turns your voicemails into e-mails. When you miss a call made to your mobile phone, the call is forwarded to SimulScribe instead of voicemail. It takes the caller's message, transcribes the



SimulScribe takes a caller's message, transcribes the voice into text and sends the message as an e-mail.

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voice into text and sends the message as e-mail. (It can also send it as a sequence of text messages.)

The e-mail also attaches the voice file of the caller's message, in case you want to listen to it or the text message is unclear. (Note that some smart phones are unable to play back sound files, so while



SimulScribe is also able to send the messages as a series of text messages to your phone.

you'll get the e-mail message, you'd have to listen to the audio file from your computer.)

The e-mail is delivered a minute or two after the message is taken. It's a lot easier to access than voicemail; you no longer need to enter a password, listen to your messages sequentially or scramble to take notes.

SimulScribe allows you to scan through your e-mail messages in any order and have a visual record of the message and call back number.

Transcribing voice to text, which is not an easy task, is done on SimulScribe's computers using some very sophisticated transcription software. I've tried speech-to-text products over the years and it's impossible to obtain 100 percent accuracy. Sometimes the software needs to be trained to the voice and you need to speak very slowly.

But SimulScribe's software had none of these issues. I called my own number and left numerous messages including ones where I read paragraphs from the newspaper. The resulting text messages were accurately transcribed most of the time. Occasionally it missed a proper noun such as the name of a person or city. In these cases, it did its best and added a "(?)" after the word to alert of a possible error. It did well in transcribing phone numbers and

dates and even worked accurately transcribed a softly spoken voice with a barking dog in the background.

It did fail in one case when my Chinese-American friend, who has a moderate accent, left a message. SimulScribe sent an e-mail saying the message could not be transcribed and to listen to the attached sound file. Also, SimulScribe only transcribes English.

To set it up on your phone, follow SimulScribe's directions, which vary for each carrier. The process involves hitting a few keys to toggle on the Call forward/No answer feature, which is a service the cellular carriers offer that reroute incoming calls to another number after four rings. (It's not dependent on the make or model of the phone.)

Forwarding is free most of the time. Sprint, however, requires that you call them to turn on this option and charges an additional 20 cents per minute for as many minutes each forwarded conversation lasts. AT&T charged me 40 cents a minute for forwarding from my BlackBerry with its data only plan.

SimulScribe provides you with your own Web page that displays a list of all your calls, showing the number, the first dozen or so words of the message, time of the call and duration. You can delete

the messages if you wish or SimulScribe will archive an unlimited number forever.

With SimulScribe, like e-mail, you need to consider the privacy issue. While all transcription is done by machine and no human listens to your messages, there is no guarantee that archived messages cannot be accessed. And based on recent court cases, these messages, like your e-mail, can be subpoenaed.

SimulScribe service is not cheap. It costs \$30 per month for unlimited messages or \$10 per month for 40 messages plus 25 cents for each additional message. It performed well and lived up to its promise. I've spoken with some users who consider this product to be life changing in managing their messages.

Baker has developed and marketed consumer and computer products for Polaroid, Apple, Seiko and others. He is the holder of 30 patents and was named San Diego's Ernst & Young Consumer Products Entrepreneur of the Year in 2001. Send comments to phil.baker@sddt.com. Comments may be published as Letters to the Editor. Phil's Blog is blog@philipgbaker.com

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