

The revolution will not be televised... but you will be able to have a free chat about it with your smartphone

Many years ago a friend of mine predicted the end of landline based calling. I asked him why, and, using the following solid logic, he replied: "You're calling a person, not a house, aren't you??!!"

Impeccable. His prediction is being borne out as we speak. These days, almost everyone has a cell phone. So, when leaving your parents' house because you bought or started renting your own house or room, and you already have a cell which you use to call everyone else, then why pay extra for a landline when every need you have is taken care of?

The younger generation has gotten used to cellphones. And now they're getting used to smartphones, which will start a new, different kind of revolution. A revolution that's taking place as we speak. More and more smartphones are being introduced into the market, for lower and lower prices. Smartphones are now entering the upper part of the prepaid market. This has a few very important consequences.

Smartphones, advanced mobile phones with PC-like functionality, have a habit of being able to access the internet. In Holland, 'unlimited' access to the internet is available for not much more than €15. This jeopardizes the telephone companies, for they are offering services that are becoming outdated as we speak.

A few months ago I read about American Blackberries that were able to use Skype, which is an obvious result of smartphones with OS's that are able to run gadgets. The



Skype-company originally meant to introduce a cheap (free!) alternative to previously costly international calls. It's simple logic. Basically speaking,

what does calling come down to? Sending information to and fro...! Telephone companies charge a lot for the exchange of what are basically just a few bits 'n bytes. If you have access to the internet, you are also able to send and receive information, so why wouldn't you use the internet to exchange

bits and bytes representing sound waves? This meant that Skype was introducing an alternative to home-made telephone company-based calls (because you needed a PC, or a laptop, which isn't really convenient to carry around with you all the time). But, this now means, that Skype is introducing an alternative to calls from anywhere. For smartphones can have cheap 'unlimited' access to the net, and can run gadgets like Skype, thus making telephone companies obsolete.

A perfect example of the revolution I'm talking about is [fring](#). fring is a cost-free program that integrates so-called social networks like Skype, Facebook, MSN Messenger, Google Talk and ICQ. As their website states it is 'totally free to download and free to use - the only cost incurred by the user is the mobile internet connection.'¹ This means that instead of sending a text message, you can use a chatroom or send an email. Instead of calling via your telephone company, you can make a call using Skype. This, of course, presupposes the receiving person to have a smartphone with the proper gadgets installed, which, obviously, doesn't represent any kind of serious problem. I have previously imagined it as follows. If you own a Gmail account, you can download an add-on called Gmail



Notifier. It places a small white envelope in your taskbar, which turns blue when an email reaches your inbox, and it also engages a popup showing the sender, the subject and the first few lines of the content. If you could install a

similar program on your smartphone, which, instead of just popping up and turning blue, activated your ringtone or vibrating alert, you'd have a very adequate text-messaging alternative.

So, as more and more people are buying smartphones, more and more people can start to chat instead of text, and more and more people are able to make Skype-calls instead of telephone company-based calls.

Obviously, the cost of all this is very important. But a quick analysis of the costs provides a positive outlook for the future. In ideal circumstances (all your friends have smartphones with the proper gadgets installed), you could cut your telephone company out of the loop. Just end the subscription to your telephone company, and subscribe to an unlimited internet-access deal. That would be enormously cost-reducing. I'll take my own current situation as an example. I pay €40 a month for a limited amount of phoning and texting. If I bought (e.g.) the Nokia 5800 XpressMusic, which is

¹ http://www.fring.com/about/about_us/

able to run Fring, it'd cost me less than €230 (Dutch price). If I then subscribed to an unlimited internet-access deal for €15 a month, I would be saving €40 a month (assuming that I would regularly speaking, have taken the €15 internet access-subscription on top of the €40 I pay for my calls and texts). This means I can earn the €230 I would've payed for the 5800 back in under 6 months! This is bound to be no less than a revolution, technologically and economically speaking.

A Few Possible Consequences

- The definition of a smartphone will be turned upside-down. The term 'smartphone' currently means 'a smart phone,' which means: A device that has a telephone company-based-phoning ability, and *also* has assorted functions like access to the internet, the ability to run gadgets, a photo-/video-camera etc. In time it will come to mean: A device which can access the internet, thus making it possible to exchange information representing text and sound (email, text-messaging, MMS, phonecalls etc.).
- Internet providers will try to fill in the gaps, perhaps by constructing SIM-cards that give access to the internet and the internet only.
- Telephone companies will have to start downsizing their radio-based telephone offerings, and will instead start to supply the market with more bandwidth. Just like the regular mail companies, which are being downsized because everybody uses electronic mail instead of paper, pens and stamp-'hardware'.
- I don't know how much of the current (smart-) phones' hardware is dedicated to the sending and receiving of radiowaves which old-school phonecalls are based on, but, obviously, future smartphones and their users will be able to live without it.

www.fring.com

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