

Crossing the Digital Divide Volume 27

“Mobile”

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for the Observer

My business requires some degree of Internet connectivity, pretty much full-time. Yes, I could check email less often, respond to text (SMS) messages within an hour (instead of almost immediately), and use social media after-hours only. I am often, “heads-down” with a new deployment, or so far off-grid nothing works without Exede or Hughes. If I’m heads-down, the phone may be in my truck, if I’m off-grid, it just won’t work. This means, when I finish a client call, and head into town, my Droid is chirping like R2/D2 once I have coverage. We live in the Coastal Mountain Range, with its numerous peaks and valleys, radio signals don’t do well over hill and dale. Most often, it can wait, but...

For a mobile professional, phone/email/text are critical communication tools. I can get those three media formats on my Android-based phone, I could also receive those calls/emails/texts if I were to use an iOS (Apple) device (iPhone), or something running Windows Mobile. Cell phones, smart or otherwise, are basically miniature computers with a several radios built in; cellular, wireless, Bluetooth, GPS. GPS and Bluetooth are not required to email, text, or make phone calls. Having a current cellular subscription is generally required to place or receive a phone call. Wireless (wifi) requires access to a Wifi router. Text (SMS) works on the Cellular network, but often works when the phone does not. SMS requires very little signal strength. Your old Droid or iPhone, without an active cellphone plan, can still function for Facebook/Browsing/Skype/YouTube, provided you have Wifi at home.

To make a phone call, all carriers base plans include voice. To send or receive email while NOT connected to a Wifi router, you’ll need a data plan to accompany the voice and messaging plan your carrier (Spring, T-Mobile, AT&T, US Cellular, Boost, Verizon, etc.) offers. Not all plans are equal, nor are the carriers all capable of supporting a mobile professional in most of rural Mendocino County. Some providers have better coverage in Long Valley, some better roaming (Verizon and AT&T), others more generous data plans (Sprint and T-Mobile), but may not have ample coverage where you most need data access (5 miles up Spyrock, 4 miles up Bell Springs, 5 miles out Branscomb...).

Take away this week:

Most contemporary mobile phones can support data, and function like a computer
Android-based phones dominate the market, and make life really easy for Gmail users
Apple phones meld seamlessly with an Apple users environment: iTunes, iCloud, iAye
Windows phones are best avoided

Remember all those radios your phone has? If you aren’t using them, turn them off. GPS, Wifi, Bluetooth all use the phones resources (CPU, battery, etc.) Battery life will improve substantially, and your phone will stay cooler to the touch, and cooler electronics lead happier and longer lives.