

Desk Phones 'A Dying Thing' In Canadian Offices

TORONTO: Toronto marketing specialist Elaina Falcone laughs as she thinks back to about a year ago when executives at her company started walking around the office having phone conversations on headsets, resembling drive-thru employees.

"I would be like, 'Can I take your order?' while walking by them," recalls Falcone, who works at Accessible Media Inc., a not-for-profit media company aimed at Canadians who are blind or partially sighted.

"Literally imagine a McDonald's worker with a little mouthpiece in the front."

Such headsets are now omnipresent at the company and many others in Canada as more organizations get rid of their, analogue desktop phones in favour of cloud-based and Voice over Internet Protocol (VoIP)-powered service on wireless devices.

The days of cranking one's neck to the side to hold a receiver in place, and using up precious desk space with a bulky phone and spiral cord, are quickly fading as businesses switch over to VoIP and cloud-based providers like RingCentral and Microsoft's Skype for Business.

Desk phones are also going the way of the dodo as more employ-



ees work from home or remotely, and companies replace assigned work stations with shared offices known as agile workspaces, where anyone can sit anywhere.

Many employees use laptops and smartphones and want that mobility and flexibility, says Falcone, noting it felt redundant having a personal cellphone, a work one and a desk phone.

According to an online survey of 400 small, medium and large companies released in July by IDC Canada, close to 90 per cent

of Canadian firms have wireless phones and 49 per cent of their employees have substituted their landline phones entirely with wireless devices.

"It's almost like the last resort is a paperweight, tethered desk phone," says Lawrence Surtees, vice-president of communications research at IDC Canada, which does market research on information and communications technology.

Surtees say smaller businesses in Canada went wireless earlier

than larger ones, which are now making the switchover due to cost, convenience, increasing trust in cloud computing, and an overall rise in cord-cutting in daily life. Saving money is another key reason companies say they're making the switch.

That's what happened when AMI added Skype for Business to its Microsoft Office 365 subscription, says Kevin Sharpen, who oversaw the project as manager of application development.

"We probably saved over 60

per cent of our phone costs," says Sharpen, adding employees were able to keep the same work number. Sharpen says those with accessibility needs often prefer a system like Skype as it's easier for them to use and they can incorporate it with special devices, like custom-made headsets.

With Skype for Business, employees can integrate all of their Office products, record a call, notify others of their location and calendars, and collaborate through methods including video chat, instant messages and screen-sharing.

For those who still prefer desk phones, some companies that have switched to VoIP systems still have a few of them kicking around, usually web-powered ones like those from Cisco.

"I could see hypothetically wireless substitution in business getting up around 75 per cent or so, maybe a little touch more," says Surtees. "But I think it would hit a ceiling."

Falcone says she loves the portability she now has and rarely gets work-related voicemails anymore, because she's usually reachable on her cellphone.

But being so accessible can also feel like you're taking your work home with you, she adds.

New 'Rewritable Paper' Is Long-Lasting & Easy-To-Use

BEIJING: Scientists have developed an easy-to-make "rewritable" paper that can be drawn or printed on over and over again, an advance that can help reduce paper consumption and potential pollution.

The rewritable paper demonstrates excellent rewriting performances and messages written on it can last more than half a year, compared to other rewritable papers whose messages fade after a few days or a few months, said the team led by Luzhuo Chen from the Fujian Normal University, China. The rewritable paper, reported in the journal ACS Applied Materials & Interfaces can also be wiped clean simply by changing the temperature.

While the idea for rewritable paper is not new, many previous approaches have drawbacks, such as complex fabrication, chemis-



try that relies on ultraviolet light to erase the writing or a constant need for energy.

To overcome these limitations, Chen and team used a new material consisting of three layers in a sandwich-like structure. The researchers painted one side of a piece of paper with a blue dye that becomes colourless upon

heating, while the other side was coated with a black toner layer that produces heat upon excitation with light.

The colour of the paper rapidly changes from blue to colourless when the temperature is higher than 65 degrees C, and the colourless state can be maintained at room temperature.

Blackberry Secure Tools At Las Vegas Show

TORONTO : Anyone who has seen an "Intel Inside" label on a piece of computer technology will instantly grasp what BlackBerry Ltd. is aiming to achieve with its "BlackBerry Secure" branding strategy.

The Canadian technology company, based in Waterloo, Ont., unveiled the latest components of BlackBerry Secure on Monday at the annual Consumer Electronics Show in Las Vegas, Nev.

The announcements were aimed mostly at manufacturers that want to assure their customers that their products have privacy and security features endorsed by BlackBerry.

Alex Thurber, a BlackBerry senior vice-president and its general manager of Mobility Solutions, acknowledged that younger consumers may not be as aware of the company as in its heyday before the arrival of the iPhone

a decade ago. But Thurber said BlackBerry still makes the security software and other features that go into phones and other devices in return for licencing fees.

"Of course, businesses and enterprises and governments are still very aware that BlackBerry is out there because our software management and security has continued to be deployed everywhere," Thurber said Monday.

Speaking by phone from Las Vegas, Thurber said one of the BlackBerry's achievements has been its accreditations by the National Information Assurance Partnership administered by the U.S. National Security Agency.

That accreditation has opened government doors for BlackBerry in the United States _ the company's biggest market _ and around the world.

"It really is all the G7 governments that use BlackBerry technology, be it the older hardware phones or now the software-protected devices. I think that's important," Thurber said.

"At the end of the day, people realize that governments need to secure classified information and companies that they trust are companies that have proven themselves." In today's world of internet-connected consumer electronics and social media, Thurber added, consumers are also concerned about who is collecting and re-selling their personal information.

Google To Retire Messaging App Allo

SAN FRANCISCO: Google has said its smart messaging app Allo will not work after March 2019 as the company focuses on improving its Android Messages app and video calling app Duo.

"Allo will continue to work through March 2019 and until then, you'll be able to export all of your existing conversation history from the app," Matt Klainer, Vice President, Consumer Com-

munications Products at Google said in a blog post on Thursday.

Launched in September 2016 with much fanfare, Allo -- Google's messaging rival to WhatsApp and Apple iMessage -- is an instant messaging mobile app for the Android and iOS mobile Operating Systems (OS), with a web client available on Google Chrome, Mozilla Firefox and Opera browsers.

Google paused investment in Allo earlier this year and brought some of its most-loved features - like Smart Reply, GIFs and desktop support - into Messages, which has over 175 million users.

"Given Messages' continued momentum, we've decided to stop supporting Allo to focus on Messages," Klainer said.

"We've learned a lot from Allo, particularly what's possible when

you incorporate machine learning features, like the Google Assistant, into messaging," Klainer added.

Google said it will continue to bring more quality improvements based on Machine Learning that make video calls with Duo simple and reliable. This year Google launched Duo support for iPad, Android Tablet, Chromebook, and Smart Displays.

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Beddit Sleep Monitor

SAN FRANCISCO: Apple has released its new Beddit 3.5 sleep monitor for \$150, the first since the tech giant bought the company in 2017.

The new sleep monitor, with extremely thin, flat, and soft 2 mm thin sensor strip, can automatically track sleep, Apple wrote on its website. It works with the Beddit app on both iPhone and Apple Watch (requires iOS 12 or later) to help measure, manage, and improve sleep.

Besides measuring sleep time, it can also accurately track heart rate, breathing, snoring, and bedroom temperature and humidity.

Data from sleep analysis and heart rate gets stored in the Health app on the users' iPhone. The sleep monitor also sends sleep report notifications, bedtime reminders and nudges on Apple Watch.