

Text Messaging on Rise With Young People



Rachel Quizon chats by instant message on her T-Mobile Sidekick from her home in Norwalk, Calif., Friday, July 14, 2006. E-mail is so last millennium. Young people see it as a good way to reach an elder, a parent, teacher or a boss, or to receive an attached file. (AP Photo/Oscar Hidalgo)

(AP) -- E-mail is so last millennium. Young people see it as a good way to reach an elder - a parent, teacher or a boss - or to receive an attached file. But increasingly, the former darling of high-tech communication is losing favor to instant and text messaging, and to the chatter generated on blogs and social networking sites such as Facebook and MySpace.

The shift is starting to creep into workplace [communication](#), too.

"In this world of instant gratification, [e-mail](#) has become the new snail mail," says 25-year-old Rachel Quizon from Norwalk, Calif. She became addicted to [instant messaging](#) in college, where many students are logged on 24/7.

Much like home postal boxes have become receptacles for junk mail, bills and the occasional greeting card, [electronic](#) mailboxes have become cluttered with spam. That makes them a pain to weed through, and the problem is only expected to worsen as some e-mail providers allow online marketers to bypass spam filters for a fee.

Beyond that, e-mail has become most associated with school and work.

"It used to be just fun," says Danah Boyd, a doctoral candidate who studies social media at the University of California, Berkeley. "Now it's about parents and authority."

It means that many people often don't respond to e-mails unless they have to.

Boyd's own Web page carries this note: "please note that i'm months behind on e-mail and i may not respond in a timely manner." She, too, is more easily reached with the "ping" of an instant message.

That said, no one is predicting the death of e-mail. Besides its usefulness in formal correspondence, it also offers the ability to send something from "one to many," says Anne Kirah, a senior design anthropologist at [Microsoft](#) who studies people's high-tech habits. That might include an announcement for a club or invitation to a party.

Quizon e-mails frequently in her corporate [communications](#) job at a hospital, and also uses it when she needs documentation - for instance, when dealing with [vendors](#) for her upcoming wedding. In those cases, she says e-mail "still holds more clout."

But when immediacy is a factor - as it often is - most young people much prefer the telephone or instant messaging for everything from casual to heart-to-heart conversations, according to research from the Pew Internet & American Life Project.

"And there is a very strong sense that the migration away from e-mail continues," says Lee Rainie, the director at Pew.

For many young people, it's about choosing the best communication tool for the situation.

You might use text messaging during a meeting that requires quiet, Rainie says, or make a phone call to discuss sensitive subjects so there's no written record.

Still, some who've gotten caught up in the trend toward brevity wonder if it's making things too impersonal. "Don't want to see someone? Then call them. Don't want to call someone? E-mail them. Don't want to take the trouble of writing sentences? Text them," says 33-year-old Matthew Felling, an admitted "serial texter" who is also the spokesman for the Center for Media and Public Affairs in Washington.

"It's the ultimate social crutch to avoid personal communication."

But others don't see it that way. They think the shift toward IM and text is simply more efficient and convenient.

Chintan Talati, who is 28, often uses instant message with other younger peers at his work, a California-based Web site that provides automotive information to consumers. He prefers IM over e-mail. "It's a way to get a quicker answer," he says.

His baby boomer colleagues don't necessarily share that view - and often find instant messaging overwhelming.

Boyd has found much the same in her research at Berkeley.

"Adults who learn to use IM later have major difficulty talking to more than two people at one time - whereas the teens who grew up on it have no problem talking to a bazillion people at once," Boyd says. "They understand how to negotiate the interruptions a lot better."

Kirah, at Microsoft, even thinks young people's brains work differently because they've grown up with IM, making them more adept at it.

For that reason, she says bosses should go right ahead and use their e-mail - and shouldn't feel threatened by IM.

"Like parents, they try to control their children," she says. "But companies really need to respond to the way people work and communicate."

The focus, she says, should be the outcome.

"Nine to 5 has been replaced with 'Give me a deadline and I will meet your deadline,'" Kirah says of young people's work habits. "They're saying 'I might work until 2 a.m. that night. But I will do it all on my terms.'"

*By MARTHA IRVINE, AP National Writer
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