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# Cellphones Now Used More for Data Than for Calls

By **JENNA WORTHAM**

Liza Colburn uses her cellphone constantly.

She taps out her grocery lists, records voice memos, listens to music at the gym, tracks her caloric intake and posts frequent updates to her [Twitter](#) and [Facebook](#) accounts.

The one thing she doesn't use her cellphone for? Making calls.

"I probably only talk to someone verbally on it once a week," said Mrs. Colburn, a 40-year-old marketing consultant in Canton, Mass., who has an [iPhone](#).

For many Americans, cellphones have become irreplaceable tools to manage their lives and stay connected to the outside world, their families and networks of friends online. But increasingly, by several measures, that does not mean talking on them very much.

For example, although almost 90 percent of households in the United States now have a cellphone, the growth in voice minutes used by consumers has stagnated, according to government and industry data.

This is true even though more households each year are disconnecting their landlines in favor of cellphones.

Instead of talking on their cellphones, people are making use of all the extras that iPhones, BlackBerrys and other smartphones were also designed to do — browse the Web, listen to music, watch television, play games and send e-mail and [text messages](#).

The number of text messages sent per user increased by nearly 50 percent nationwide last year, according to the CTIA, the wireless industry association. And for the first time in the United States, the amount of data in text, e-mail messages, streaming video, music and other services on mobile devices in 2009 surpassed the amount of voice data in cellphone calls, industry executives and analysts say.

"Originally, talking was the only cellphone application," said Dan Hesse, chief executive of [Sprint Nextel](#). "But now it's less than half of the traffic on mobile networks."

Of course, talking on the cellphone isn't disappearing entirely. "Anytime something is sensitive or is something I don't want to be forwarded, I pick up the phone rather than put it into a tweet or a text," said Kristen Kulinowski, a 41-year-old chemistry teacher in Houston. And calling is cheaper than ever because of fierce competition among rival wireless networks.

But figures from the CTIA show that over the last two years, the average number of voice minutes per user in the United States has fallen.

Still, even the telephone design industry has taken note. Ross Rubin, a telecommunications analyst with the NPD Group, said cellphones outfitted with numerical keyboards — easiest for quickly dialing a phone number — were no longer in vogue. Touch screens, or quick messaging devices with full "qwerty" keyboards, on the other hand, are. On the newest phones, users must press several buttons or swipe through several screens to get to the application that allows them to make calls.

"Handset design has become far less cheek-friendly," Mr. Rubin said. Mr. Hesse of Sprint said he expected that within the next couple of years, cellphone users would be charged by the data they used, not by their voice minutes, a prediction echoed by other industry executives.

When people do talk on their phones, their conversations are shorter; the average length of a local call was 1.81 minutes in 2009, compared with 2.27 minutes in 2008, according to CTIA. For some, the unused voice minutes mount up.

"I have thousands of rollover minutes," said Zach Frechette, 28, editor of Good magazine in Los Angeles, who explained that he dialed only when he needed to get in touch with someone instantly, and limited those calls to 30 seconds. "I downgraded to the lowest available minute plan, which I'm not even getting close to using."

Mr. Frechette said part of the reason he rarely talked on his phone was that he had an iPhone, with its notoriously spotty phone reception in certain locales. But also, he said, most of his day was spent swapping short messages through services like Gmail, Facebook and Twitter. That way, he said, "you can respond when it's convenient, rather than impose your schedule on someone else."

Others say talking on the phone is intrusive and time-consuming, while others seem to have no patience for talking to just one person at a time. They prefer to spend their phone time moving seamlessly between several conversations, catching up on the latest news and updates by text and on Facebook with multiple friends, instead of just one or two.

"Even though in theory, it might take longer to send a text than pick up the phone, it seems less disruptive than a call," said Jefferson Adams, a 44-year-old freelance writer living in San Francisco. By texting, he said, "you can multitask between two or three conversations at once."

Nicole Wahl, a 35-year-old communications manager at the University of Toronto, estimates she talks on her phone only about 10 minutes a month.

"The only reason I ever call someone anymore is if I don't have their Twitter handle or e-mail address," Ms. Wahl said. "Like my hairdresser to see if she has a last-minute appointment or my parents to say I'm dropping by."

American teenagers have been ahead of the curve for a while, turning their cellphones into texting machines; more than half of them send about 1,500 text messages each month, according to a recent study by the [Pew Research Center's](#) Internet and American Life Project.

Mrs. Colburn, from Massachusetts, said she caved to the pleading of her 12-year-old daughter Abigail for a cellphone to send text messages with her friends after she and her husband discovered it was hindering her from developing bonds with her classmates.

"We realized she was being excluded from party invitations and being in the know with her peers," she said.

Mrs. Colburn said texting had also become a much easier way to stay in touch with her daughter and receive quick updates about after-school plans.

"The other night she texted me from upstairs to ask a vocabulary question," she said with a laugh. "But I drew the line there. I went upstairs to answer it."