

WHAT IS GOOGLE VOICE?

By Chris Pepper

Ever since I got my Google Voice account, I've had to explain to friends and colleagues what Google's free phone service is and (more importantly) what it isn't. If you too have heard about Google Voice but still aren't completely clear about how it works and why you should care, here are some quick explanations.

How It Works To sign up for Google Voice you need an invitation. Go to the Google Voice invitation request page (macworld.com/5685) and fill out the form. Once you sign up and have service, you can invite others.

You can associate your Google Voice number with your other phone numbers—work, home, mobile, whatever. That means you can still make calls from those handsets through your regular phone service; their individual numbers will show up on the receiver's caller ID screen. But you can also choose to have your Google number show up instead.

What It Is In addition to having one number that can reach all of your physical handsets, Google Voice offers some intelligent phone features that your existing handsets and services might not. For starters, you can get call forwarding, by setting up rules for how you want your calls routed. You might, for example, want calls received before 5 p.m. sent to your office phone, and calls after that to go to your cell phone. You also get customizable ringing: Calls from some callers might ring only at home, while others go straight to voicemail.

Google Voice gives you a Web interface to your phones and services. You can manage your voice messages online, filing and archiving them much the way you do in Gmail (mail.google.com). You can customize greetings by caller and by group. You can also dial from any of your associated phones through a Web interface or a helper program.

What It Isn't Google Voice is not the be-all and end-all of telephony services. It isn't a Voice-over-IP (VoIP) service like



Skype (www.skype.com) or Vonage (www.vonage.com). You still need a standard phone connection (cellular or landline) to and from Google Voice.

Nor is it fully integrated (yet) with the iPhone. As I write this, Apple does not allow Google Voice iPhone apps. There is, however, a very good iPhone-optimized version of the Google Voice Web application. Google's native Voice applications for Android and BlackBerry phones are very capable.


The Bottom Line In many ways, Google Voice turns your "dumb" phones into smartphones. You can understand why cell phone vendors and carriers might not be too thrilled about the service: It allows Google to insinuate itself between you and your carrier, and it provides free replacements for many of those vendors' premium services.

QuickBooks 2010

By Jeffery Battersby

REVIEW QuickBooks 2010 offers several new features that are sure to make it a hit with both new and upgrading users. The setup process has been greatly streamlined. Plus, it's finally possible to accept credit card payments from within the program. This integrated-for-fee service feature (\$20 per month, \$60 setup) allows you to process and securely store client credit card information. You can now send e-mail invoices to your customers and provide more-personalized messages when you send out bulk e-mail.

A new customizable reporting tool called Snapshot gives you an overview of your company's financial health. QuickBooks 2010 adds a free application called My Time that lets you track time and then push the data to specific clients and jobs in QuickBooks. Unfortunately, the program still lacks some seemingly basic features, such as multi-user capabilities, online bill paying, and cross-platform data files. Without these, QuickBooks is a good—rather than a great—business accounting application.

 | **PRICE:** \$200 | **COMPANY:** Intuit, www.quickbooks.intuit.com

Malcolm Frontier Diplomat

The slim and stylish Diplomat, available for 13-, 15-, and 17-inch MacBooks (\$195, \$245, and \$295, respectively; www.malcolmfrazier.com), gives you the look and feel of leather with no actual animal products: The bag is made of stain-resistant, polyurethane-coated canvas, with a natural linen liner. While the Diplomat won't hold a lot of big gear, it offers plenty of organizational touches, along with the requisite padded laptop sleeve and sturdy, brushed-nickel hardware. The company donates 1 percent of its annual proceeds to environmental organizations.—**DAN FRANKS**

