

How email2phone.net has helped a person of blindness become more 'connected' and self-sufficient

Summary:

Application: Persons of blindness and/or visually impaired

Challenge: Improve quality of life through the application of assistive technologies

Methodology: Identify and evaluate the use of email2phone.net service over a four month period by a blind person

Result: Significant improvement in connectivity and self-sufficiency

email2phone.net and How it Works:

email2phone.net is marketed as a general purpose service to a wide variety of markets. Some members of the blind and visually impaired community adopted it as a new tool to help overcome some of the unique communication challenges posed by their condition. They discovered that email2phone provides a means to utilize and participate in the email connection without visual devices.

email2phone.net works by using computer software and modern speech technology to convert ordinary text emails into phone voice messages and deliver them to any phone, anywhere. It also provides the user with the capability to dial-in and listen to their email voice messages and to access messages online via computer.

Case Study Subject:

'Julie' is a middle-aged person of blindness and has been blind almost all of her life. She is a part-time educational system employee and student and has been a user of email2phone.net for the past four months. Motivation for subscribing to email2phone.net came from a need to find new ways to communicate with her employer, school, family and associates. Also motivating her was a strong desire to learn more about computers and other assistive technologies that are available to the blind. She had been fearful of computers and other technical devices, but made the decision to 'plow ahead' and try to grasp whatever knowledge and benefits that she could.

Using email2phone.net:

After a brief investigation into what kinds of aids were available and with some assistance, Julie was able to sign up with email2phone.net and begin using the system. She instructed her friends and associates to send emails to her email address at email2phone.net and in doing so initiated an interesting new experience that has made her feel 'connected' and more self-sufficient. After a short 'getting used to it' session or two, she felt comfortable with the phone navigation and interaction required when either receiving voice messages or dialing into email2phone.net.

email2phone.net Benefits:

The two areas of her every-day life that experienced the most impact were first, her being able to receive voice messages informing her of the numerous activities and requirements associated with her enrollment as a student and secondly, her ability to both receive messages from her employer and to respond with a return voice message (email2phone.net converts the return message to an email with a .WAV file) when necessary. Although Julie owns a computer it does not play a significant role in her ability to communicate using email2phone.net.

Julie's response when asked how email2phone.net worked for her was "it has opened a new world in communications for me. I am kept informed of what is going on at the campus where before I felt alone. I have never felt so connected and self sufficient. It's a tool to help persons of blindness and/or visually impaired to keep in touch with work, friends, and family. It has given my boss and me an opportunity to communicate on a more structured basis."

Additional features and benefits of email2phone.net that Julie cited were not having to maintain anything, ease of interaction via the telephone (she compared it to common voice mail systems) and the cost of \$10.00 per month, which she felt was more than affordable.

Additional Requirements:

email2phone.net has solicited comments and recommendations from various organizations serving people of blindness and the visually impaired. We will evaluate all recommendations and implement them when feasible to do so.