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New service helps callers avoid awkward cell-phone moments

- Story Highlights
- New service lets you connect directly with another person's cell phone voice mail
- Service, called Slydial, helps callers bypass live conversations to leave messages
- Unlike some cell-phone services, Slydial works with any major wireless carrier
- Service can only be used in the U.S. right now

NEW YORK (AP) -- The old song had it right: Breaking up is hard to do. But a free new phone service called Slydial might make it easier to get through that and other awkward moments -- without actually having to talk to anyone.

Slydial lets you connect directly with another person's cell phone voice mail, bypassing the traditional ringing process that often results -- sometimes disastrously -- with someone picking up on the other end.

Users call (267) SLY-DIAL from either a cell phone or a landline, and are prompted to enter another person's cell phone number.

After playing a short advertisement -- unless users pay a subscription fee or 15 cents per call to skip ads -- Slydial puts callers directly into their target's voice mail.

Recipients should then get a voice mail notification, and sometimes they will see a caller's number show up as a missed call, too.

Gavin Macomber, co-founder of MobileSphere Ltd., the Boston-based communications company behind Slydial, thinks it can be useful not only in the dating scene, but also in the hectic business world.

"Everybody has gone through the scenario where they've called somebody and just hoped they got voice mail so they didn't have to have a conversation," he said.

Indeed, Nora Rubinoff, 45, who runs an administrative support company, At Your Service Cincinnati Ltd., has found Slydial helpful both for business and personal situations. She has left reminder [messages](#) for people one of her clients intends to interview.

And when her husband travels to a different time zone for work, she can leave him a Slydial message without disturbing him at an odd time of day, she said.

"It's been really handy," she said.

Macomber said the idea for Slydial came up while MobileSphere developed the voice mail routing component of a service meant to lower the cost of international roaming on [cell phones](#).

The company rolled out a private test phase of Slydial in March, and has added about 5,000 users since then. The service opened to the general public in a "beta" testing phase on Monday.

The ability to call straight into someone's voice mail is not new. Most [major cell phone carriers](#) offer subscribers the option of sending voice messages to other people, but usually only to customers of the same wireless company. What's different here is that Slydial makes it possible to do it with any major wireless carrier's customer.

There are constraints to this service. It can only be used in the U.S. right now, and generally won't work with prepaid cell phones. Also, sly dialers must have the caller ID feature activated on their phones, which Macomber said is meant, in part, to prevent people from using it to harass people undetected.

It's also not always super sly. Several test calls between cell phones made the recipient's phone emit an abbreviated ring before leading to voice mail. That might make people think the person on the other end really wanted to speak -- and could result in a quick call back. Horror of horrors: A real conversation might ensue after all.

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