Business Before Pleasure on the Wire

Effect of 'Phone Philandering' on the Call Frequency Curve of the City and Some Suggested Mitigations

By JOHN WALKER HARRINGTON.

MILICENT MALINGER, who is a stenographer in an of- fice, tells us, with a smile, that this small city, our key town, is a well-known 'phone prodigal.' It takes her just about an hour's time of conversation on her waxed, the busy hour when all the rest of the town is quiet, and the equipment is relatively free from the powder losses on the tip of her retreating noise, and get the novels piled in naught against the typewriter and do over so many things! Her employer is still reading the mail and there is plenty of work to do. In the few calls at 4 o'clock, why not call Mabel? She does.

"Guess who this is!"

"Ah, you don't know me?"

"Well, Ah wouldn't do a thing to come between you and so, honest, cross my heart."

"Keep off. You're on a busy wish!"

"Some parties is pretty thin, isn't it?"

"That you, ole dear. Somebody was sick, I guess, in jinny. Like the serve of some people!"

"Wher ya goin' lunch?"

"Don't like that--lunch--meet Paddy Ann--"

"Oh, say, ya don't mean--!"

"Why didn't you ring for her? Engaged--holding--"holding" it on me, your best friend! Say, Mabel--you are the one--at a minute--somebody--put your ringing, Well, good-bye, Mabel--see you lunch."

Mrs. M. is only one of a class of women who use telephone service in large quantities for no apparent good, in these days when the demands for wires for the ordinary transaction of the business of a great city is evident. Her employer is amiable and it really doesn't make so much difference in the case of Milicent, whether she be so, or there are so many of her, and also so many male philanderers of the phone, that there is so limit to strain the line, and not the least of the inconsequential matters.

Telephone service may be considered as a pack mule, going up a mountain with a load on its back. As he goes higher he increases his burden and at the peak of a business day, which occurs at that busy hour of the exchange between 11 and 12 o'clock, the creature is panting and bear-eyed, but still working along as best he may.

When emergencies or the demands of war required that the operators should ask its help, it was none too soon, in the offices on the wares of the wire, but even then not too much. The tele-

phone in pre-war days had become as much a feature of the office as the ear of an ever present friend, that never occurred to anybody to limit itself or to reserve the use of it, or to employ it in less busy hours.

What an index of the city is the rise and fall of thefigure, which records the frequency of the telephone calls of a single business day! The daily average of calls in New York City is now over three million, which means that the 850,000 stations or instruments go into use at least four times each every twenty-four-hour period, and some of them keep steadily at it all through a working day. The strain at times is tremendous, and we hear many complaints of the inadequacy of the service, the slowness of operators in responding, and the tardiness of making connections.

As a matter of engineering record it now takes about ten seconds on the average to get the echo of "Number, please," and from twenty-five to thirty seconds to reach the exchange. Secure Sequences are operators are far from numerous than they should be; it takes a year to train one so that they will have "pale in on the board," or, in other words, so that she will not lose her head in emergencies, and equipment lacking in account of the war. The laborious task of the operator is just being got in. In the fall of the next day Century is used to answer an average in three or four months, and the burden on the switchboards was not too heavy.

To show the situation with regard to wire waxstixt and phone philanderers and to be sure of getting uninterrupted wire service before the man declare. The arrival of the man between the time and the wire that I phone will be kept down, or deferred, if there are employers too complacent to adopt a rule against the private use of the telephone during business hours, there are still ways in which the means best be bettered.

Suppose, for instance, that housewives went out to market. It would be fine for them and would strain off the service in the hours in which the load is piling high. Much of it of calls at 9 o'clock, when the service swings into 300,000 calls an hour, is due to the orders given to the butcher and grocer. Wall Street conducts a business which

The Operators Are Far Less Numerous Than They Should Be.

The wire, and there are (in ordinary) times hurried calls upon the box offices of the theaters or upon the wires of the fa-

The Speculators in theatrical paste board.

On again the downward trend until at 9 o'clock there are only a few tinkling of

The bells.

It is no easy task to reconstruct the manners of people, and already estab-

Theish telephone customs are hard to mend. There is a disposition to treat as

To the height of importance any interfer-

ence with one's using the telephone just when he or she thinks of it and regard-

less of who is paying for the service. Many a time Miss Malinger actually goes back to her office to phone from her employer's station, and in some offices the bell to these unnecessary calls is strangle.

However, the road to relief from tele-

Phone congestion, while there is so great a struggle to keep pace with the de-

Mands of service, lies in the direction of control. If the needless and useless calls at 9 o'clock cannot be kept down, or deferred, if there are employers too complacent to adopt a rule against the private use of the telephone during business hours, there are still ways in which the means best be bettered.

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The complications they create for busi-

ness folks who think that a telephone is not a social adjunct, a chart has been prepared, based on the reports of tele-

phone engineers.

When New York begins to sit stilly at 6 o'clock in the morning only a few operators are on duty and the demands on the wire are appragh, less than 20,000 calls an hour. Business awakens at about 8 o'clock and the markets and the fac-

tory workers begin to phone. The upsurge is startling.

"I'll call you in the morning," Milicent Malinger remarked to Florence last night when they parted at the subway which conveyed Florence to Carnegie. And so she did. Also she called Mabel and thereafter she office a little before 9 o'clock in order

must have the touch and go of communica-

tion as instant as it is possible to get it. Watching the fluctuations of lights in the Rector Street exchange which show how the service is proceed-

ing, the operators often come within two or three seconds. But it may be that the exchange will be 100 busy lines, or more than his share of telephone wast-

ing. Of course, social matters, have their place in oiling the machinery of business, but Mr. Housanetl, who lives in the suburbs, does talk lot at times about golf and poker and fishing.

In the curve devoted to telephone re-

The system then has been to indicate how a more uniform service may be maintain-

Suppose that just a little more service is employed before the hour of 9, and then at 10 the calls are kept down to 340,000 an hour and are kept running along at that rate until 4. It would be rather hard on the telephone operators, perhaps, to abridge their leisure time and perhaps take fewer holidays as they do, but if the frequency of calls was not permitted to rise so high and was held down, the police in the afternoon, many of the unnecessary, that is, the social and business calls would be postponed until the less busy period of the afternoon.

A system such as this would insure a well-knedle telephone service, which would make a great many operators more comfortable and would ease the strain on the system in many directions.

It is often necessary or desirable, of course, to telephone at certain periods of the day, and in the theatre, but a little forethought would save half such messages. Also, if you telegraph at all, you can't call in the public and can't possibly see him again till 8 o'clock this evening, it is hard not to bring the get the get to the great little harmless exchange of dive notes over the phone. But with a little self-

discipline that also can be managed without too much trouble,--of course--a simple one--is to make the calls the night before.

There is one practice which might be

advantageously encouraged. If clerks and stenographers did not phone their private telephoning at the lunchen hour that would greatly facilitate business. By the same token, don't phone the local exchange of a telephone at his table in the club.

The telephone exchange is a facility which should respond to the slightest variations of service. Its hammer may be a reflection of the matters of business and the day of a Chantamaster, as the tide of traffic on the wire rise like a flood. There are so many persons to be told on the instant that somebody else, cannot get home as promptly as usual and desires to be not at the subway by a steel youth carrying umbrellas.

A trip of the street railways or the subways, a strike on the public utilities; the holding of a great celebration, especially by the city, all these are factors which are constantly reflected at the switchboards.

The presence of many tourists this Summer in the hotels and the necessariity of using the return trips, dent the daily peak of calls to mountainous heights.

The influenza epidemic of last Autumn

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raised the daily average from 3,100,000 calls in September to a high peak of 3,200,000 a day in October, and this when the telephone company was expostulating in the news columns of the papers, in paid advertisements and in many other ways against the unnecessary calls.

Just how events of all kinds affect the telephone communications of a city may be shown from the record of a downtown exchange in which the curve of the calls is very marked. Here are some examples:

Average traffic in May, 1915........ 71,526
Traffic on May 7, 1915, Sinking of Lusitania .......................... 92,055
Average traffic in October, 1918.... 99,921
Traffic on October 5, 1918—Morgan Explosion ............................ 116,180
Average traffic in November, 1918., 91,804
Traffic Nov. 1, 1918, B. R. T. wreck ........................................ 101,775

Traffic on the telephone is normally at its height in Winter and in Fall, but this rule did not hold good for this year, as the Summer was one of the busiest which the exchanges had to face. When the demobilization of the troops has been finished, the usual demands for increased traffic which come with the cold weather will be made upon the system.

When relief will come from the present congestion and one may talk to his or her heart's content without the slightest misgiving that unnecessary language is interfering with the use of the telephone for something useful, is indeed hard to say. The telephone school for operators down in Houston street has tripled its capacity, and raw materials for the building of switchboards also are being received in large quantities now that the war ban has been lifted.

New telephone exchanges are nearing completion and many new switchboards, the installation of one of which is nearly a year's job in itself, are being built. By the first of the year probably something like the pre-war time efficiency of the telephone will have been reached, but all that is on the knees of the gods. Many of the skilled mechanics have returned from France, where they were in the Signal Corps, and the company is getting back many of its skilled head operators who were behind the lines, but these readjustments proceed gradually.

Meanwhile something might be done in the direction of restricting the activities of those persons who disturb the tide of business by private telephone conversations whose content is nil and which impose a burden upon the system of communication that to many of us has become an actual business necessity.