

Tech Talk

Navigating the world of technology one gadget at a time
A service of the Hinsdale Public Library

Enhancing the Functionality of Your Cellular Phone

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My phone is a basic model. Don't I need a smart phone to do cool things?

Smart phones like the Apple iPhone have impressive features like Web browsers, multimedia players and visual voicemail. While basic phones don't have all of these bells and whistles, they can still do cool things in conjunction with innovative (and often free) services.



What kinds of useful things can I do with my basic cellular phone?

- **Text a librarian:** Get help from one of the friendly information professionals at the Hinsdale Public Library. Simply send a text message to 265010 and start your question with "askhpl:"

Like this:

- **askhpl: is the book Into the Wild by Krakauer in the library?**
- **askhpl: when does the library close on Saturday?**

Just text us and we'll get you the 411.

If you'd prefer to speak to a librarian over the phone instead of texting, we are happy to take your call. Add 630-986-1976 to your speed dial and we'll be look up the information while you wait.

You don't need an iPhone (left) to perform useful and impressive cell phone feats; a basic phone (right) will suffice.

- **Take notes:** One interesting and useful service available for all mobile phone users is a free voice transcription service called Jott (Jott.com). Imagine you're riding in your friend's car and you suddenly remember that you need to feed the fish when you get home. Simply call Jott (866-JOTT-123) and leave a voice message for yourself. Jott will then transcribe the voice note into text and email it to you. You can even set up additional contacts and send transcribed notes to your friends (e.g., "Did you know that *The Bank Job* is coming to DVD on July 15th?") Jott can be a great boon if you don't have paper and pencil handy.



- **Capture whiteboard information and scan documents:** Sometimes you need to capture visual information, but you're a long way away from a scanner and don't have a fancy computerized whiteboard. A service called scanR (scanr.com) can help. You simply take a picture with your cameraphone and send it to scanR, which will straighten it, improve the contrast, and email it back to you as an Adobe Acrobat (.pdf) file. It also works with documents and business cards. Here's a scanR example:



Original cameraphone image of a whiteboard



The scanR enhanced whiteboard exported to a PDF file

scanR is free to try and a few dollars per month to subscribe to the service. For a free alternative, try Qipit (qipit.com), which shares most of the main features of scanR.



- **Send money using PayPal:** If you've used eBay recently, you probably have seen references to a payment service called PayPal (paypal.com), which allows you to send money to and

receive money from other PayPal account holders. It's become the de facto standard for private-party financial transactions over the Internet.



How is this relevant to mobile phones? PayPal now allows you send money via text message from your mobile phone. Once you've configured your PayPal account to validate your mobile phone, you simply send a text message to 729725 (PayPal's SMS number) saying something like: **send 15 to 6301234567** [the desired recipient's phone number]. Alternatively, you could text **send 15 to judyz@copperplate.net** if your desired recipient doesn't have a phone number associated with her PayPal account. How could this be useful?

- If you're out of checks and cash, and would like to pay a friend for house sitting over the weekend
- You need to share the cost of a gift with a friend, and you forgot your pocketbook

It may not be worth it to set up a PayPal account just for the ability to send money on your phone, but if you've already got an account, it's worth considering.

- **Get Weather, Stock Quotes, or other information:** Google SMS is a fantastic source of information when you're on the go. Send a simple query to Google SMS (466453) in order to get an automated reply. Here are a few examples:

- **weather 60521** — provides local weather information for Hinsdale
- **stock aapl** — gives a stock quote for Apple Inc.
- **Flight aa 457** — shows the status of American Airlines flight 457, including whether it's on time and the location of its arrival gate
- **57.50/3** — uses Google's calculator function to split your dinner tab three ways



If you define your location, you can SMS even shorter requests for information like these:

- **Set location 60521** — tells Google that you want information for Hinsdale
- **Weather** — gives weather for Hinsdale
- **Chinese or pizza** — gives addresses and phone numbers for restaurants in Hinsdale by cuisine
- **Plumber** — locates plumbing services in Hinsdale
- **Movies** — gives a list of movies showing at the closest movie theater (in this case, the AMC Loews Quarry theater in La Grange). Simply select a movie from the list for movie times today.

This information can be exceptionally useful when you're on the road or otherwise away from a computer.

That basic mobile phone that you use to call home to find out which size of laundry detergent you are supposed to buy can do a lot more than you think. Smart phones are fantastic, but a basic phone can do all sorts of cool things like transcribe notes, clean-up whiteboard text, send money, as well as help you quickly find a wide variety of information while you're on the go.

If you have questions, comments or suggestions, you can visit me at the Reference Desk, contact me via email (moetting@hinsdalelibrary.info), or call me at 630-986-1976.

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