In the last two decades there have been various new technologies and software that make the lives of Americans simpler. This is evident especially when observing modern means of communication. The process of sending mail through the postal service is becoming obsolete. Bills can now be paid online and newsletters are primarily sent by e-mail. Since the early 2000s, home phones have lost popularity and it now seems that even land lines may be coming to a swift demise. Americans want things in their lives to be done as quickly and efficiently as possible. With the recent advancements in fiber optics, it seems that their desires may be fulfilled.

There are significant numbers of people that still value and use home phones. The question is: how long will they be able to keep them? Continued use of land lines and failure to switch to newer technologies is a serious problem. With lower quality calls and higher prices for the same service line, the number of land lines purchased has dropped significantly. Now with faster internet speeds, extended cell phone coverage, and corporations switching to fiber optics, the life span of the land line grows shorter by the day.

**Increased Pricing**

In populated areas with great wireless coverage, home phones are not being used as frequently. Often customers will pay for a home phone, even if it is not used regularly, simply to make the cable bill cheaper. People that live in rural areas are the ones that are suffering the most, because it is more difficult for the cable and phone companies to meet the needs of the few versus the needs of many. In states with a higher percentage of rural areas, the cost to companies of providing telephone and internet services rises for a simple reason. Rural areas require miles of land lines underground, yet they reach only a few households. This becomes a problem for the companies because they are spending maintenance time on lines that service a small percentage of their customer base. Since the lines are such a burden for the companies, they have begun to bully residents by increasing prices.

If the land lines are no longer the highest demand, then the citizens believe that the pricing for them should stay the same or decrease. According to the Citizens Utility Board of Chicago, “Depending on where you live, the charge has
gone up anywhere from 27 to 63 percent” (Schlesinger, 2011). It found that AT&T was one of the worst companies when it came to land line policies. In fact, customers of AT&T were receiving charges on their bill for not meeting the long distance call quota. It appears that the large well known companies have aspirations to do away with their land lines. The companies are raising prices in small percentage increments each year to achieve this.

Quality

Fiber optics networking revolutionized the way that data is shared through media lines. Instant success came from using the new technology to improve internet speeds. Now phone and cable companies have begun improving the quality of their services as well by using fiber optic networks. Their new products are having success, however the pre-existing products are being neglected. More of the workforce’s energy and financial resources are being exerted on the fiber optics, and the old land lines are being neglected. For example, Wisconsin previously had regulations stating that a citizen’s current telephone service company would have to provide them with a land line, if no other company would (Vinehout, 2011). The overturning of this bill not only left rural residents without home phones or internet, but also allowed the cable, internet, and phones companies to operate without completing quality surveys in the areas that they service, another provision of the overturned bill (Vinehout, 2011).

Verizon Wireless is using its reputation to help fiber optic networks become a common product in American homes. Verizon’s current advertisements speak about the improvements made with the new LTE wireless coverage. The advertisements also speak of FiOS, the new internet service Verizon provides, which has double the speed previously available. “That snipping sound you hear around copper phone lines is just going to get louder”, says Ivan Seidenberg, Verizon’s Chairman and Chief Executive Officer (Hansell, 2009). Other major players such as AT&T and Direct TV are working on the same fiber optic technologies. The difference between them and Verizon is that Verizon’s Seidenberg, has directly stated that he is no longer concerned with land lines (Hansell, 2009).

The major internet and cable providers are switching to fiber optic networks to save money. The fiber optic cables are cheaper to install than the old copper land lines. Also, the fiber optic cables are directed through the internet making them easier to install and repair. Copper lines are more difficult to fix, because often times it is hard to pinpoint the exact location of the problem. Seidenberg said, “Once I shed myself of the burden of chasing the inflection point in access lines and say ‘I don’t care about that anymore,’ I am actually liberated” (Hansell, 2009). It is clear that the land lines are not only problematic to the consumer, but also to the provider. Instead of offering consumers an alternative service, the providers are ig-
noring the problems of the land lines and letting the quality grow worse with time.

**Alternatives**

There is evidence that the use of wireless technology is overtaking the population even at young ages. Goldman states, “Many Americans now have two or more devices with a wireless plan. The number of active U.S. smartphones increased 57% to 95.8 million” (Goldman, 2011). With almost 32% of children growing up with wireless phones and internet, it is likely that in future generations the percentage of consumers without landlines will go even higher. Combining this fact with the social norm of tablets and web cam communications that are available, the new generation will likely not purchase a land line until they purchase a home.

Cellular phones have become the new land line. They are often the technology of choice to replace a land line. Frequently, cell phones replacing land line use is due to the person not having a permanent residence. In 2007, about 31% of adults that were renting apartments or homes had only a cell phone number (Blumberg & Luke, 2008). Just three years later in 2010 that number increased to over half the adult population at 50.3% (Blumberg & Luke, 2011). This is an extremely large jump in a short period of time. With the continuous release of extended wireless coverage all across the nation, numbers are expected to keep rising.

Another popular alternative to land lines are the bundle packages that internet, phone and cable providers are offering. These bundles offer combinations of two of the services or all three together at a reduced price. When consumers choose to bundle, providers can combine phone and cable lines with internet fiber optic cables. The availability of this combination is reducing the number of land lines because if consumers have the internet, they now have various means of communication. “In the past couple of years, Internet access has reached 75 percent of the U.S. population”, says Felicia Rogers, a decision analyst.

Online video communications are at an all time high. This, in addition to cell phone companies, further eliminates the need for land lines. With services such as Skype, consumers can talk via web cam while at home. A large part of the land line industry comes from long distance calling, and with Skype and related services, long distance calling has been replaced. Using the internet, consumers see and talk to family members who may be down the street or in another country. The services can even work directly with cellular companies to use call forwarding to advance Skype calls to mobile phones when the consumers are away from their computers. These services just became available within the last decade. It is believed that numerous new wireless alternatives will be created in the future.
Conclusion

The technologically savvy younger generations are accustomed to mobility and convenience, which correlates directly with the plummeting number of land lines. Alternatives such as tablets, smart phones, and online video chat are becoming the preferred choices of younger generations. Fiber optic networking is growing at an astonishing rate and is being used to combine internet with phone service. This advancement has improved phone call quality, as well as provided cheaper service. The people that still own a land line are experiencing difficulties with their land line’s quality. Combine this with the prices rising in steady increments each year and it is apparent that land line use will continue to decline in the future.
References


