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VIRTUAL PHONE NUMBERS FOR TOPIC AND PRIORITY

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ABSTRACT

A system of virtual phone numbers based on topic and priority is disclosed. The system helps the user to anonymously route a call out so that their own information is not exposed to an unknown party. The user may select a virtual phone number relating to a particular context so that he may be called even if he is not ordinarily available for contact. The advantages of the system of virtual phone numbers is the possibility of setting priority by topic to receive calls from even unknown numbers and to anonymously make outgoing calls.

BACKGROUND

Users configure their devices to allow certain contacts to always be able to reach them, even if they have indicated that they otherwise do not want to be disturbed. However, this relies on the caller contacting the user through a known phone number. If the caller borrows a phone and makes a call, the system may block their ability to contact from the borrowed phone. Conversely, the user may want to give out his phone number to someone else but not want to be interrupted by them, and would like the call to be directed to voicemail. If a call is received from an unknown number the user may have to guess the category of the call to decide whether to pick it up. Virtual phone numbers are proposed to solve the above problems.

DESCRIPTION

The disclosed system comprises virtual phone numbers that are available to a user to assign based on topic and priority. The virtual numbers are all routed to the same account. In one instance the system may choose to route the call out to any of a number of different devices so as

to reach the user. In another case, the user may select a virtual phone number relating to a particular context so that he may be called even if he is not ordinarily available for contact. In a third instance, a virtual phone number could be employed by a user to receive calls by voicemail, so that he is not interrupted by spam or unsolicited calls.

Further, virtual phone numbers could be used by the user to anonymously route a call out so that their own information is not exposed to an unknown person. When such a call is returned, the call is handled according to user configured priority.

In one example, a user who is a parent associates the virtual number (555) 555-1111 with the topic "daycare" and the priority "always interrupt." The user's son falls on the playground, and the teacher closest to him attends to his bloody nose and then gives a call to the user at (555) 555-1111 using her (the teacher's) personal cell phone. The user receives the call on his personal cell phone with the caller ID providing the topic of the incoming call as "daycare", even though the user has set his device not to be interrupted. Thus the system allows a normal "do not disturb" setting to be overridden by a higher priority exception associated with the virtual telephone number.

In a second example, a user is considering buying a cabin in Tahoe, and he wants a local Tahoe area real estate agent to leave him messages regarding the status of sales. The user is wary of his personal contact number being shared with telemarketers and provides the agent a virtual number (555) 555-2222 with the topic "cabin" and the priority "always go to voicemail." The user manages any resulting voice messages from the agent or any telemarketers at his convenience. Later, the user may reuse the same virtual telephone number with the topic

"salespeople" and starts giving out (555) 555-2222 when he wants to test drive cars, knowing that this allocation of the virtual number could also generate a lot of present or future sales calls.

Advantages of the system of virtual phone numbers include the possibility of setting priority by topic to anonymously receive calls from even unknown numbers, and to anonymously make outgoing calls.