

# AT&T Exits Telegraph Business

AT&T Press Release  
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BASKING RIDGE, N.J. -- Familiar to the world over through the clickety-clack of ticker tape machines and teletypewriters, telegraphy has been gradually bowing out of the telecommunications picture during the last twenty years.

The nonstop chatter has been replaced by the hum of laser printers and the electronic beeps on computer screens. AT&T, a leading innovator and major service provider of telegraphy, announced this year it is withdrawing the service due to the universal availability of lower-cost, higher quality digital telecommunications services.

"The incredible advances in our industry means customers can get more for less," said Wes Bartlett, AT&T district manager, Business Communications Services. "Today's digital technology can transmit information hundreds of thousands times faster than telegraphy and is considerably more cost-effective for users.

"Telegraphy has been to the twentieth century what state-of-the-art digital telecommunications services will be to the next century," Bartlett added. "We are proud of our contributions in both areas."

The transmission of telegraph service is based on analog technology, which sends information by continuous electrical waves. Today's digital technology breaks information into its smallest components, the binary "ones and zeros" of computer language.

However, telegraphy was the actually the first digital service -- although a very simplified version compared with today's technology -- since it was produced on the customer's premises in terms of "on or off," or "dash or space." It was converted to analog for transmission.

Telegraphy usage accelerated rapidly during the 1920s when the financial industry adopted the technology to send records of transactions. At this time, news organizations began using telegraph service for transmitting stories between offices.

In November, 1931 the Bell System inaugurated the teletypewriter exchange service, often called the TWX (pronounced "twicks") service. It provided a complete communications system for the written word, including teletypewriters, transmission channels and switchboards.

Telegraphy was adopted by many kinds of businesses, including utility companies, alarm companies, airlines, and brokerages as well as government agencies. It was used heavily through the 1960s.

Most of AT&T's telegraph service customers have been converted to digital private line services such as DATAPHONE (R) Digital Service and ACCUNET (R) Spectrum of Digital Services.

"Our name remains American Telephone and Telegraph," Bartlett said. "It is an historic name and our legacy. We are proud to have a corporate name that spans generations of communications technology.

"Despite rapid technological change, AT&T remains focused on helping people communicate," Bartlett added. "Telegraphy helped bring us to this point. Digital technology is taking us into a new era of global messaging."

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## Background

### WHAT WAS TELEGRAPH SERVICE?

Telegraph service made it possible to communicate large volumes of information between two or more locations. Telegraph circuits permitted customers to send to each other a printed or hard copy version of the information at reasonable cost, which was impractical with the telephone.

A telegraph circuit consisted of four components: station equipment installed on the customer's premises, such as a teletypewriter and teleprinter; the local loop, or wires, between the customer location and the AT&T central office; the central office equipment in the AT&T telegraph serving test center (STC); and the wires connected to the telegraph STC serving the other customer.

Here's how it worked: Customer A sent information to customer B by typing the information on a teletypewriter keyboard. The teletypewriter converted the message to a coded signal which was sent out on the local loop to the STC and central office equipment. There the signal was converted to make it compatible with the carrier's lines and sent on to the STC serving the distant city. The central office equipment then converted the signal again and sent it over the local loop to customer B's teletypewriter which decoded the signal and printed the information.

The procedure was reversed if customer B wanted to send information to customer A. This method of sending information, where only one station could send at a time, was accomplished over a simple half-duplex, or two-wire circuit. When both customers wanted to send and receive

at the same time a full-duplex, or four-wire circuit, was used.

At its peak in 1970, telegraph service could transmit data at 150 bits per second.

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### AT&T and Telegraph Service

1887: First private-line telegraph service, for L. H. Taylor & Co., brokers, between their offices in New York and Philadelphia.

1888: First service for news media customer, Globe Newspaper Company, between New York and Boston.

1915: Teletype offers speeds of 30 or 50 words per minute.

1920s: Press and financial markets create a boom for usage of the service.

1939: Speed reaches 75 words per minute.

1944: Speed reaches 100 words per minute.

1957: Teleprinter introduces speeds of 300 words per minute.

1970s: Decline in usage begins as electronic data processing replaces many telegraph functions.

1980s: Wireless and digital methods accelerate decline.

1991: AT&T exits telegraph service.

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### Document Notes

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