

1920 - Multi-Frequency Signal concept:

By the 1920's, although the telephone had retained its two basic shapes, the wall unit, which was now slimmer and easier to use, and the newer French desk top model, the underlying technologies had made several large advancements and more than one third of households in the United States had at least a telephone and party line connecting them. Telephones had had a major impact on the way of life over the previous several decades and were no longer considered telegraph replacements or only business tools. Telephone companies were in fierce advertising competition for residential business, promoting slogans such as 'Reach out and touch someone'. Telephone companies realized that once the public had a taste for this modern convenience, they would not want to give it up quickly. Even though it was still considered costly by current day standards, companies tried to lure consumers with low costs, but also low quality services (Fischer, 1992).

With so many customers now using the telephone system, new ways of handling the multitude of calls needed to be handled. Many customers lived in areas where self-dialing capabilities were available, but it wasn't until 1921 that Bell Systems aggressively pursued this market area. Although the idea of frequency multiplexing had been around since the time of the telegraph, it wasn't until the 1920's that AT&T started to more seriously develop the idea using coaxial cables in order to allow several calls to occur on different frequencies along the same wire (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Telephone_numbering_plan).

At this point, telephony has become more common place for the masses. Telephones were used for business and pleasure, mostly by middle and upper-class families. Certain regular occurrences which you might find in face to face conversational exchanges were becoming more apparent. Operators and payphone clerks were known to comment on patron's familiarity and gossip within conversations. Families were beginning to teach telephone etiquette in areas such as length of conversations, respect for party lines, and manners for addressing those on the other end of the line (Fischer, 1992). A new type of socialization was formulating.