



Exploding The Phone

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Bibliographic Cover Sheet

Title	Original phone freak still a pain to Ma Bell
Publication	<i>Chicago Today</i>
Date	1971-12-00
Author(s)	McHarry, Mark
V/I/P	p. 23
Abstract	Overview of phone freaking circa December 1971 focused on Joe Engressia. describes Engressia's history with phone freaking and his life in Millington TN. Discusses his conviction for theft of services in Memphis, TN, his publicity at the University of South Florida, and his relationship with the Bell System.
Keywords	Joe Engressia; Millington, TN; FBI; phone phreak; AT&T; Memphis, TN; University of South Florida (USF); blue box; credit card fraud; tandem stacking; Captain Crunch
Notes	Article contains some good quotes including one about Captain Crunch and tandem stacking and wastes of circuits. Publication date is estimated.

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The big dial-tone rip-off

Original phone freak still a pain to Ma Bell

By Mark McHarry

Special to CHICAGO TODAY

NEW YORK — Joe Engressia sounded tired, his voice dry and peculiarly fuzzy as it traveled over the wires between New York and Millington, Tenn., where Joe had taken refuge at the end of a long battle with police, telephone and federal agents.

"It's just that I'm a little drunk, that's all. The FBI was just here," he said.

Engressia is the original blind phone freak. This begins, but does not fully describe, his escapades with the American Telephone and Telegraph Co., an adventure that has cost the utility thousands of dollars.

Joe has made free calls all over the country and the world at the company's expense. He would do it also, he says, to improve service, clear up technical difficulties, and otherwise help the system do its job of providing service to millions of customers.

The phone company takes a different view, however. They called in the FBI to keep watch on Joe after they won his conviction for theft of service in Memphis, Joe's base of operations.

ENGRESSIA is not the only person involved in phone freaking. He may be the most altruistic of those involved, but he also was, to the phone company's dismay, the catalyst that brought many scattered individuals together into a cohesive unit that possesses the potential for seriously damaging Ma Bell.

The publicity Joe received after the University of South Florida warned him about whistling into his dormitory phone catapulted him briefly into the national limelight. His whistles match perfectly the signals of Bell's switching equipment and enable him to make free calls.

When phone freaks found out about his special ability they got in touch with him. Joe, happy to hear about the vagaries of the phone system in every part of the country, swapped information with anyone who called, putting people

and are hit at the beginning and the end of the sequence to tell the tandem when to begin waiting for the number, and when the number has been completed.

Once the tandem hears the ST signal it begins work, calling wherever the blue box owner wants it to, even to Japan or Europe, automatically, without going thru the operator.

The frequencies used in the blue box for KP, ST, numbers one to 10 and 2600 are all public record, having been published in several technical journals.

The blue box owners don't stop at free phone calls, tho. Some like to send their voices racing back and forth across the country, tying up circuits while impressing their friends with their technical prowess.

IT IS this process, known as "tandem stacking," that frustrates the system.

Engressia talked about it, and about one of his fellow phone freak's use of it. "When the tandems stack they busy

"I think Ma Bell is probably making a bigger thing out of that than it really is . . ."

out that trunk. When you stack 60 tandems you're busy out 60 different circuits . . . Two hundred persons could really handicap the system.

"Bell is fighting phone freaks now that they know the potential . . . but I think Ma Bell is probably making a bigger thing out of that than it really is, and I think Capt'n



JOE ENGROSSIA, one of the first phone freaks, does what he likes to do best. His ability to place long-distance phone calls for free has gotten him into trouble with Ma Bell and the law.

the other person's shoes, and I think, gosh, if I was the phone company I'd be losing this money and everything. but then I think if I was the phone company I might try to be more broadminded and see if I could use some of these people.

"YOU KNOW, I used to idolize Bell immensely, and when I was seven or eight I used to play like I was this big telephone man with boots on going thru the hurricane, you know, wind blowing about 90 miles an hour . . . I really wanted to work for 'em, and when a security man first came down to talk to me about what I had done with telephones, and I offered to help him and report troubles and everything, he just told me to keep away from telephones and that just turned me off.

"I thought I could get the message across, telling them how I liked to report troubles with the equipment, being more than happy to help the phone company for nothing and everything . . . that's my first big thing that radicalized me, it really threw me, you know; now, shocks like that are just normal, but at the time I guess I was just an over-idealistic kid. I didn't know how the business world worked, but if they would have hired me or something, then there might never have been a phone freak organization.

"I used to be gung-ho for Bell's rate increases, you know, things like this . . . if they would have harnessed

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When phone freaks found out about his special ability they got in touch with him. Joe, happy to hear about the vagaries of the phone system in every part of the country, swapped information with anyone who called, putting people in touch with one another and holding back only extremely sensitive information.

HE GLADLY gave information on "blue boxing," on the theory that if people were going to rip off the phone company by giving the operator a fake credit card number, a widespread practice, they might as well be more efficient about it. A blue box does electronically what Joe can do with his whistle. It controls the phone switching equipment just as the operator does except that as it is used with a pay phone there is no way of tracking down its location.

A blue box has 10 buttons on it, just like a Touchtone phone, plus three extra ones. A user merely dials a toll-free call to an 800 number from any pay phone. He waits until it's ringing, then pushes a button on the box which emits an audible frequency of 2600 cycles per second. This frequency tells the phone switching equipment that the user has hung up the pay phone, which, of course, he hasn't.

The switching equipment stops ringing the 800 number. The blue boxer then takes his finger off the button and the switching equipment [called a tandem] is fooled into thinking another call has come in and waits for instructions.

THIS THE user provides by punching out the area code and the number he wants on the buttons numbered one to 10 on the box. The other two buttons are labeled KP and ST

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"Bell is fighting phone freaks now that they know the potential . . . but I think Ma Bell is probably making a bigger thing out of that than it really is, and I think Capt'n Crunch [a fellow phone aficionado, so named because of the Capt'n Crunch cereal whistle which reputedly blows a perfect 2600 cycle] is making a bigger thing out of it than it really is.

"You know, he's the only phone freak interested in tandem stacking just for the sake of tandem stacking. Once he called me and said, 'Man, you wait 'til I hang up. I've stacked 33 trunks.' "

AND HE was just so hot about it and I said, 'Well, hang up, man, so I can hear it.' So he hung up and I sat there and drank half a coke while all the trunks released. Just sitting there yawning and kind of bored . . . I mean 33 trunks don't release very fast. So I told him, 'my God, I thought it was an extreme waste of circuits.' "

Phones have always held a special fascination for Joe; from the day he was four and first whistled into a telephone. He set out to learn about phones and the equipment behind them. When the phone company removed his parents' phone for nonpayment of bills, young Joe saved up his school lunch money for two years to have it replaced.

After his experience at the U. of South Florida, he was paid a visit by a telephone company security agent. Joe explained how he felt about the matter.

"I think of myself, you know, I like to try to put myself in

when I was seven or eight I used to play like I was this big telephone man with boots on going thru the hurricane, you know, wind blowing about 90 miles an hour . . . I really wanted to work for 'em, and when a security man first came down to talk to me about what I had done with telephones, and I offered to help him and report troubles and everything, he just told me to keep away from telephones and that just turned me off.

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"I used to be gung-ho for Bell's rate increases, you know, things like this . . . if they would have harnessed that . . . if I would have worked for Bell, you know, I wouldn't have even wanted to talk to phone freaks."

A PHONE freak's relationship with Ma Bell is curiously symbiotic; he at once wants to learn about it, seeking to comprehend its beautiful total complexity, while trying to cure piecemeal the system's multitudinous minor faults. Yet, to learn, he must blue box all around the country making thousands of calls at Bell's expense.

Bell could change its switching system to make it invulnerable to blue boxes. This would take at least 20 years by Engressia's estimate, however, and that might not be time enough for Bell to deal with the freaks. If the trend keeps to its present course, Bell may well find the phone freak network a major threat.

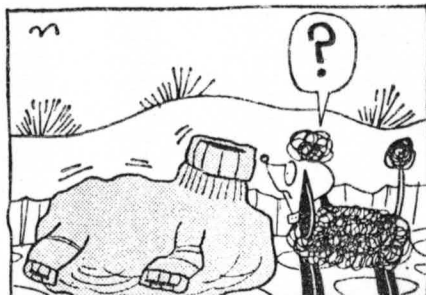
Meanwhile, Joe is down in Millington, not phone freaking and unhappy, but still being called by friends, still learning about the system and still gathering information.

Wishing Well.

7	5	4	2	3	8	7	6	5	7	4	2	3
O	S	J	A	C	M	P	A	K	E	O	N	A
2	8	7	6	5	2	3	8	7	3	7	6	4
U	E	N	H	I	N	P	N	A	I	R	U	Y
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8	7	8	6	3	5	4	7	4	2	3	5	2
L	G	A	S	L	P	U	R	S	F	S	R	F
4	3	2	7	8	4	2	6	5	7	8	3	6
C	U	L	E	B	H	E	T	O	E	I	C	E
5	2	6	8	4	2	5	3	7	8	6	7	3
F	D	P	L	E	D	I	C	T	I	U	Y	E
6	8	3	4	7	8	3	2	5	4	7	2	5
P	T	S	E	O	Y	S	A	T	R	U	Y	S

Here is a pleasant little game that will give you a message every day. It is a numerical puzzle designed to spell out your fortune. Count the letters in your first name. If the number of letters is 6

Plain Jane



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3	2	5	4	6	7	8	2	3	5	6	8	7
T	R	L	O	G	M	T	U	A	L	E	A	S
8	7	8	6	3	5	4	7	4	2	3	5	2
L	G	A	S	L	P	U	R	S	F	S	R	F
4	3	2	7	8	4	2	6	5	7	8	3	6
C	U	L	E	B	H	E	T	O	E	I	C	E
5	2	6	8	4	2	5	3	7	8	6	7	3
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12-23

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