
MyPVA Web: Messaging UI Brief

Introduction

Our usability review of the original MyPVA Web user interface design revealed a need for greater efficiency and clarity of elements. For example, the previous design used multiple panes to present filtering options, a message list, and message preview.

The revised design efficiently consolidates this messaging functionality in into a single pane that offers significant usability improvements. These include:

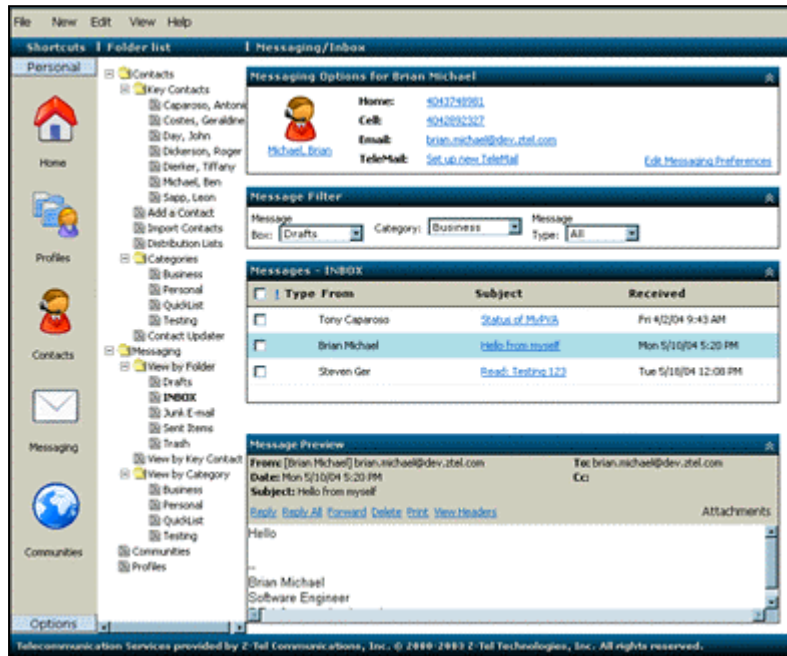
- A messaging-specific toolbar with message category-based filtering.
- A visually encoded link between the selected message and the Messaging Options pane.
- A “document type” icon to efficiently differentiate text and voice messages in the folder list view.
- All functions previously presented in a standalone “filters” pane are now provided through the messaging toolbar and sorting-capable column headers.
- The context-specific toolbar provides list-specific sets of messaging actions, including Delete, Forward, and Move to Folder.
- Sort-capable column message list headers; sort messages by email, voice, heard/read, unheard /unread.
- A optional preview pane for quick review of message contents.

The first two sections of this brief provide overviews of the interface design refinements so far identified for messaging components (i.e., message folders and message viewing). The balance of this brief provides considerably more detail on UI functionality and behavior.

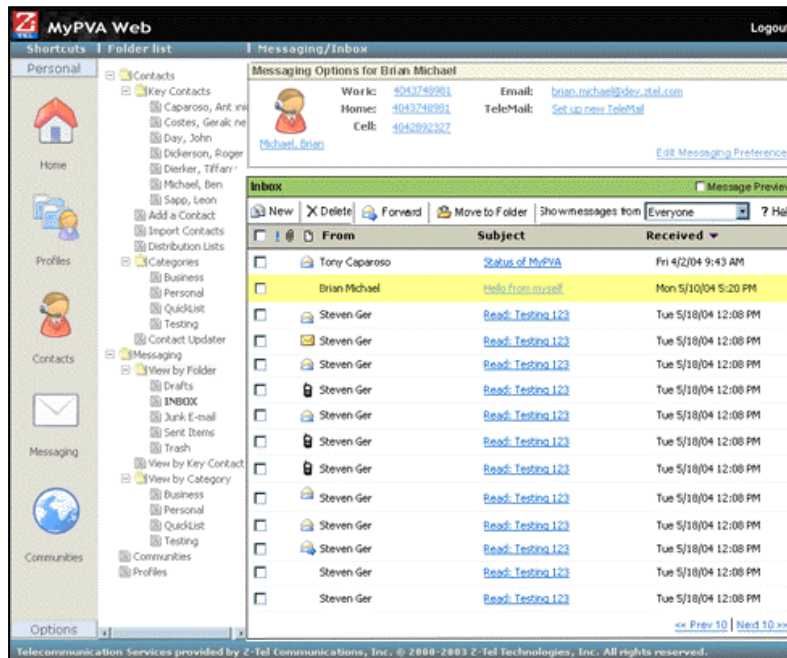
Note: The UI designs presented in this document are working layouts; the colors, icons, and specific organization and content shown are not finalized.

Original vs. Refined

The original multi-pane messaging layout:



A mock-up of the refined messaging layout:



Refined Layout Detail

The following mock-up represents the main landing page. Note that the selected message highlight color matches that of the Messaging Options pane's title bar. This helps to further emphasize the connection between the selected message and options for contacting its sender.

The screenshot displays the MyPVA Web interface. The top navigation bar includes 'Shortcuts', 'Folder list', and 'Messaging/Inbox'. The left sidebar contains navigation icons for Home, Profiles, Contacts, Messaging, and Communities. The main content area is divided into two panes. The top pane, titled 'Messaging Options for Brian Michael', shows contact information: Work (4043748981), Home (4043748981), Cell (4042892327), and Email (brian.michael@dev.ztel.com). The bottom pane, titled 'Inbox', features a toolbar with 'New', 'Delete', 'Forward', 'Move to Folder', and 'Show messages from' (set to 'Everyone'). Below the toolbar is a table of messages with columns for 'From', 'Subject', and 'Received'. The second message, from Brian Michael with subject 'Hello from myself', is highlighted in yellow. At the bottom of the inbox, there are pagination controls: '<< Prev 10 | Next 10 >>'. Annotations on the right side of the image point to the 'pane title', 'toolbar', 'column headers & sorting controls', and 'pagination'.

	From	Subject	Received
<input type="checkbox"/>	Tony Caparoso	Status of MyPVA	Fri 4/2/04 9:43 AM
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Brian Michael	Hello from myself	Mon 5/10/04 5:20 PM
<input type="checkbox"/>	Steven Ger	Read: Testinq 123	Tue 5/18/04 12:08 PM
<input type="checkbox"/>	Steven Ger	Read: Testinq 123	Tue 5/18/04 12:08 PM
<input type="checkbox"/>	Steven Ger	Read: Testinq 123	Tue 5/18/04 12:08 PM
<input type="checkbox"/>	Steven Ger	Read: Testinq 123	Tue 5/18/04 12:08 PM
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<input type="checkbox"/>	Steven Ger	Read: Testinq 123	Tue 5/18/04 12:08 PM
<input type="checkbox"/>	Steven Ger	Read: Testinq 123	Tue 5/18/04 12:08 PM
<input type="checkbox"/>	Steven Ger	Read: Testinq 123	Tue 5/18/04 12:08 PM

The following section provides detailed wireframes and functional descriptions of the messaging user interface.

Pagination controls are provided at the bottom right corner to identify the current page (Page x of y) and to enable direct navigation to specific message sets. If the number of messages to be displayed within a folder view exceeds the available browser window real estate, the application relies on the browser's own scrolling facility to provide access to the full message list. For users with high-resolution displays, scrolling is usually eliminated by resizing the browser window.

The last viewed message is highlighted in yellow above, which matches the color of the title bar for the Messaging Options pane (final color choices are pending). This affords a direct visual connection between the selected message and options for contacting the message sender.

The header for the message folder content view pane has identifying and control elements subdivided into three rows. From top to bottom, these are:

- the title bar with pane-specific controls (the "Inbox" is shown in this example)
- message controls toolbar (new, delete, etc.)
- column headers and sorting controls

The following Message Folder Pane sections describe the content and function range of each row.

Message List Pane Title Bar

The title bar for the folder pane shown in Figure 1 shows the message Inbox as the selected folder. As described in Table 1, folder content title bars in the message pane contain a maximum of two element types.

Element	Functional Description
folder name	The name of the folder: Inbox, Sent Items, etc. The typeface style and color is the same as for the Messaging Options pane above it, but the background color differs.
folder controls (if any)	Panel-wide controls are right justified. In the case of message folders, this control is a checkbox for toggling message preview on/off.

Table 1: A list of messaging pane title bar elements and their functional descriptions.

Message List Pane Toolbar Controls

Message controls appear in the toolbar above the message list column header and are listed in Table 2. With the exception of New, these controls can be used with one or more selected messages within the displayed message set/page. For example, if the user selects five messages and then clicks the Delete control, the five selected messages will be deleted (after user confirmation).

Message Folder Controls	Functional Description
New	Used to compose new messages. Launches the main message editor pane in the entire content display area, replacing the Messaging Options and Inbox panes (until message composition is completed).
Delete	Deletes checked messages from the currently displayed message set. All messages in the current set are deleted if the column header checkbox is checked.
Forward	Forwards selected messages from the currently displayed message set. User is provided with a standard "send" window for defining the recipient(s).
Move to Folder ▼	Moves checked messages into the selected folder. This drop-down menu lists all application and user-defined folders, and provides a "new" option for adding a folder (see Figure 3).
Show messages from [list]	Filters by category to restrict the types of messages shown in the message list pane. Can be set to Everyone, Personal, Business, Key Contacts, and user-created categories. (The category list is managed elsewhere.)
Help	Context-sensitive help (appears in separate, pop-up window).

Table 2: Controls and functional description for message controls for the folder content toolbar.

Note that the message controls in the folder content view do not include Reply or Reply All. These are single message-specific actions that appear in the message preview pane (if displayed) and in the expanded message view window.

Figure 3 shows a more detailed view of message controls, with the "Move to Folder" menu expanded. Note that the "New Folder" option appears at the bottom of the list, under a separator line.



Figure 3: Detail of the toolbar selections for viewing received messages. The Move to Folder drop-down affords direct selection of an existing folder or creation of a new folder.

Message List Pane Column Header and Sorting Controls

Most column headers for the message list pane do double duty as content sorting controls. With the exception of the checkbox, clicking on any sort-enabled column name sorts the *entire folder contents* (across all pages) according the contents of that column. The primary sort is by column element; the secondary sort is by message date and time.



Column Name/Icon	Supports Sorting	Functional Description
<input type="checkbox"/> (checkbox)	no	Standard checkboxes for selecting one or more messages for group actions, like moving multiple related messages into a folder. Clicking the checkbox in the toolbar selects all messages in the displayed message set. (Messages on other “pages” are <i>not</i> selected.)
! (priority)	yes	If present, this symbol indicates the message was sent with a priority setting.
 (attachment)	yes	Messages with attachments are marked with the paper clip symbol.
 (msg type)	yes	Provides an iconic representation of the message type and whether or not the message has been read or heard. For release 2.0, this includes email message read/unread and voice message hear/unheard icons. (A later release will also indicate messages that have been replied to and forwarded.)
From	yes	The name or email address of the message sender. If the content of the From field does not fit within the column width, the content is truncated and appended with an ellipsis.
Subject	yes	The subject of the message. If the content of the Subject field does not fit within the column width, the content is truncated and appended with an ellipsis.
Received	yes	The date and time of message receipt.

Table 3: The column headers for the message list used in folder content view panes.

Sorting by Message Type

Message type sorting is carried out in the following order, with “received” date and time as the secondary sort:

- unread e-mail messages
- unheard voice messages
- read e-mail messages
- heard voice mail message

Selection by Checkbox

The message selection column allows users to select one or more messages *from the displayed message set* for an appropriate group action. Checking the column box selects all messages from the currently displayed list. Supported group actions are:

- Delete
- Forward
- Move to Folder

Folder View with Message Preview On

Figure 2 shows the messaging inbox view with Message Preview selected. When Preview is on, the message list contracts to show only those messages that fit within the available message pane area (regardless of the number of messages-per-page user preference), and the pagination (the Page X of Y element) is recalculated as Message Preview is toggled.

The relative screen split for the message list and the preview pane is roughly 60:40 (more space is allocated to the message list).

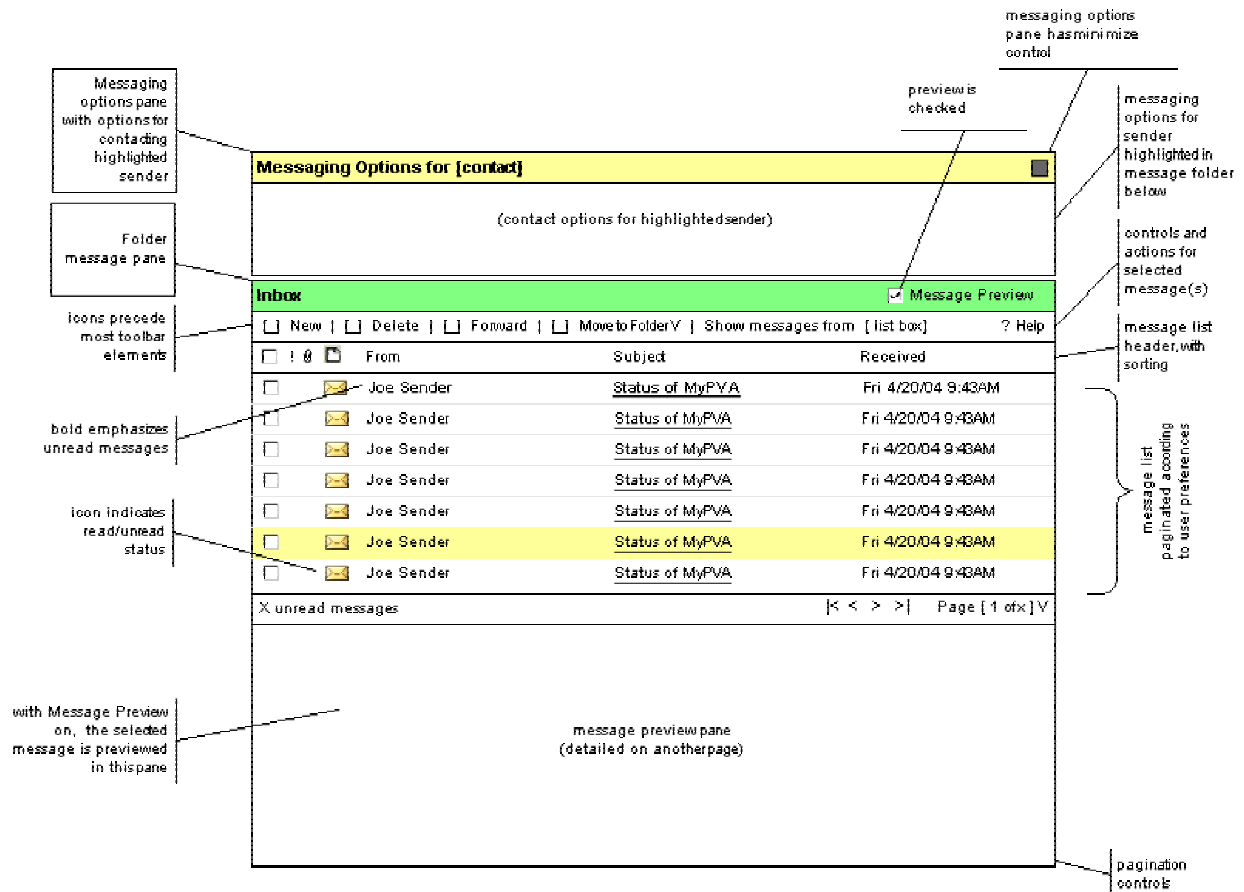


Figure 2: The messaging/Inbox view with the Message Preview and Messaging Options panes open.