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By Adrian Michaels

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The mobile phone continues to take over the world. If the media and telecommunications companies are right, we will all soon be watching films, live television and operating our garage doors with one. The mobile will be the universal all-purpose device.

This is especially true in Italy, in some senses the spiritual home of the mobile and the place where many new services are trialled first. Italy is the only country where you can end a phone call by shouting "Ciao!" and not be pretentious. The Italians do not say "Ciao!" though, they say "Ciao-ciao!" or even "Ciao-ciao-ciao-ciao!" almost as if they do not know how many are suitable.

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Wireless Intelligence, the research group, says the ratio of mobile phone connections to people in Italy is higher than any other western European country except Luxembourg. "Mobile penetration" is 118 per cent, meaning that one in five Italians has two phones. You can see them and all the wires unloaded from pockets before they sit down for their aperitivi.

As the mobile becomes ever more powerful, though, we must learn some etiquette if we are to remain sane. After more than a decade of common mobile phone use, the basic courtesies are still comprehensively ignored, as highlighted in the growing debate about use of BlackBerries in meetings or in bed.

I dearly love my friends and colleagues but here is my festive season wish: I want them all to make friends with someone called Adam. Or Abigail. Or Aaron. Before mobiles, I never thought that being called Adrian was much of an encumbrance. It's not flash but I get by.

But now my name is too frequently the first entry in people's mobile phone address list. A mobile or several mobiles in a pocket, without the keypad locks activated and with a bit of rustling about, can easily call me. In the middle of the night. Several times a week.

A colleague in Madrid once sent me more than 300 text messages, one after the other. Quite often all I hear is a squelching sound while someone is walking up the street with mobile in pocket. It was quite a strain once to catch my friend ask a companion over the background noise: "Have you ever taken lots of cocaine and listened to There She Goes by The La's?" He then gave a drunken rendition.

I am called often by people's babies, wrestling with their parents' mobiles and leaving me messages more erudite than The La's fan.


Telecom Italia this month announced that from next year it will be selling kit that can turn your phone into a remote control. It will operate household appliances, TV set-top boxes and "a host of home electronics devices".

A lack of courtesy is going to become expensive. Next time you roll over on the sofa,

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the mobile in your pocket will accidentally order up a pornographic movie, dispense your dog's worming pills, recharge your car battery and fill your fridge with milk. And you'll wake Achilles again.

The writer is the FT's Milan correspondent

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