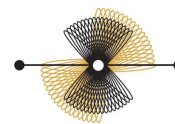


Secrets of the Pros

The IP Communications Checklist



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Are IP Communications a valid business choice for my company?

The process of voice conversations using the Internet Protocol isn't a radical new idea. In fact, the basic technology behind advanced packet services like frame relay, ATM and IP for transporting voice between corporate sites is several years old.

The trick with voice over IP (VoIP) therefore is to reconfigure a network to accommodate IP-based technology and unified voice/data communications without compromising security — while at the same time guaranteeing voice quality.

Cost-justifying the move to VoIP requires thoroughly weighing the major financial considerations for an IP communications deployment. Here are a few of those key considerations and their associated IP benefits, along with how to evaluate the right IP solution for your organization.

Does your company have more than one location?

By incorporating open standards equipment for data transport in an IP infrastructure, a multi-site company can use existing inter-office connectivity and, in many cases, existing data gear to move voice traffic alongside data. More so with a single IP communications platform at HQ to provide call processing for all sites, multi-site organizations can replace traditional PBXs and key telecom systems at each site, centrally administer their new platform, often from a single interface, enhance fault-tolerance and security, and improve business continuity dramatically.

Contributing to a lower cost of ownership — even if your company has only one location with no plans to expand — is the ability to utilize data network personnel (rather than outsourced vendors) to maintain IP-based voice/data networks. Because IP communications require only one standard network cable running to the desktop, end-users can generally manage their own moves, adds and changes (MACs) with little or no assistance from IT teams, saving an average of \$240 per IT service call.

How important is future growth and expansion?

How much growth are you looking at over the next 1-5 years, including new hires, adding offices, and leveraging existing telecom and data systems to handle such growth? Since adding users to the network already requires a computer, an Ethernet cable and a port on a data switch, IP scalability essentially comes down to simple application licensing and a desktop soft phone or handset for new users.

Also since adding new sites would already require connectivity back to the main office for sharing data, why not use the same connection for voice traffic? Using a router at each new location saves money via least-cost routing for inter-office calls, as does using the nearest entry point to the Public Switched Telephone Network (PSTN) for toll calls. Likewise by installing additional software on the router, a company can create a survivable remote site where dial tone is not impacted in the event of a WAN circuit failure.

Do you employ teleworkers?

If so, chances are they already have access to the corporate network for data access. But... can your remote workers access the corporate voice system and its robust features? Unlike traditional PBX and telecom systems, IP communications give mobile and home workers everything they need at their fingertips, from call control and presence management to unified messaging and remote message access using virtually any device. Home office workers can also be members of workgroups and, given the same voice capabilities as their in-office colleagues, are ideal resources to handle call overflows when needed.

Does the quality of customer service impact profits?

IP communications are one way to aid in speeding, improving and monitoring service delivery. Most visibly, the multimedia ACD routing for e-mails, Web chats and calls in many IP solutions gives customers the contact options they insist on. And because IP communications are primarily software-based, adding functionality to enhance service often requires only licensing a new application for features like online auto response, Web collaboration, workforce management, recording, interaction tracking, agent scoring, etc.. Moreover with its faster time-to-deployment, adaptable IP software functionality gives companies a competitive edge by way of quicker response to customer and market requirements.

Do you have a contact center?

Whether a departmental workgroup or thousands of agents, a contact center's core role is to make or receive calls and handle e-mails and Web chats. Whereas IP application suites offer complete multimedia capability for the contact center environment, they've also reached a point of affordability for even the smallest contact center operations, say 20 or 30 agents. And with the same user and features scalability that IP communications offer for growing enterprises and multi-site organizations, IP contact center suites easily scale to the service functionality and number of agents a center may require as their business expands.

The bottom line

These are only a few considerations many companies have found to be significant cost of ownership as well as Return on Investment factors. Working with a skilled and experienced IP communications vendor or consultant however, will allow you to take a closer look at your business communications requirements and how IP technologies can improve them and positively impact savings, ROI and profitability.

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What should I consider in my IP evaluation, and who should be involved?

First, keep in mind that not all departments in your organization share the same needs — and that IP communications solutions can actually vary as far as implementation and functionality. Your company should therefore consider its overall business needs as well as technical requirements... for enterprise and contact center needs, multiple offices, remote workers, customer service, business rules, future growth scalability, etc., etc.

Choosing to use IP communications is also a strategic decision. Considering that VoIP can be a major technology shift, savvy companies involve executives from IT Chiefs to CFOs in every step of the consideration, planning, acquisition and implementation process. One note of caution, however. While it's critical to invite input from IT staff with regards to networks and end-user requirements, giving them too much say could result in omitting critical business benefits better recognized by executives who understand, and who are accountable for, overall corporate strategies and solving challenges.

Companies that effectively plan their move to IP communications do indeed increase employee productivity, sales and employee effectiveness, and decrease their telecom costs in the long run. Following is a list of key considerations oriented towards executive level decision-makers as well as technology staff.

By 2009, 74% of all corporate telephony lines will be IP communications lines.

IP telephony cost of ownership over 5 years is 65% less than traditional PBX systems.

—The Radicati Group
"Corporate VoIP Market, 2005-2009"

How can I calculate the total cost of ownership and ROI for my company?

Schedule a no-obligation evaluation with Interactive Intelligence and our partner, Special Order Systems, to determine the cost benefits of a migration to IP communications for your business.



Special Order Systems is proud to be an Interactive Intelligence Partner

Considerations at the executive level

- Understand your business and your vision.
- Analyze total cost and ROI.
- Consider company size, growth plans, and vision.
- Do you have a Web or self-service initiative? Do you have a sales capability on the Web today?
- What is your average sale size?
- Do you have a customer service group? How many agents? How many incidents (phone calls) do they handle per month, and what is the cost per incident? What is the call abandon rate? Are any incidents handled via "self-service" at this time?
- How much is spent annually (or monthly) on inter-office communication?
- How much time is spent traveling (i.e. employees site-to-site, to customers, to vendors)?
- How much is spent on conference bridging annually (or monthly)?
- Would you like the ability to self-administer your communications system? Do you want the ongoing management outsourced?
- Evaluate your present technology vendor partnerships.
- Assess stability and longevity of the solution, manufacturer and integration partner.
- Select a trusted advisor for IP communications planning, and work with them to thoroughly uncover your business needs, identify your most critical organizational needs, help identify the best IP solution possible, and present solid ROI data.
- Weigh all potential solutions and consider your IT staff's input from a technology perspective.

Considerations at the IT level

- Do you need an open systems architecture for the future?
- Any proprietary protocols in place you'd like to keep?
- What is your organization's current network capacity, including for multi-site offices and remote workers?
- What are growth plans from a bandwidth and system selection perspective?
- What is your current data networking infrastructure?
- Would you like power bricks at every desk for every phone, or power driven to the phone from the closet backed up by a UPS?
- Judge ability to self-administer, which may create savings and customer-controlled response to needs. Would you like the ability to self-administer or do you want the ongoing management outsourced?
- Do you have a need for a potential integration with other systems for real-time business intelligence?
- How important is it that your investment be protected for a longer period of time than a traditional communications system (5-7 years for traditional)?

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