

Making IP Telephony Affordable with Managed Services

Working with a service provider to deploy a hosted IP Communications solution can boost productivity without busting the budget.

Recent research from IDC shows that interest in IP telephony is strong. According to a recent study (in which 63 per cent of survey respondents had fewer than 2,500 employees and 66 per cent had annual revenues of less than \$1 million), small and medium-sized businesses (SMBs) plan to spend even more on telephone systems than they do on basic networking equipment, with a net spending increase of 5.6 per cent on their phone systems anticipated over the next year.

The question is whether you should manage your own IP telephony system or use a hosted solution from a service provider. For some, there's no question.

"In this environment, where telecom is going to be so very competitive for the foreseeable future, I don't know why one would want to keep it all in-house," says Bob Rosenberg, president of telecommunications research firm Insight Research. "Looking at hosted solutions is much more reasonable."

The managed-services model can appeal to SMBs, for a number of reasons:

- Without the expense of building an infrastructure, you could get:
 - A high-speed Internet connection.
 - A telephone system with automatic call distribution, call forwarding and voice conferencing.
 - Integrated voice, fax and e-mail messaging.
- The service provider is responsible for building in system redundancies for disaster recovery.
- With merger-and-acquisition activity increasing, a managed system is easier to upgrade or downsize.
- Because IP telephony is state-of-the-art (and still subject to change and growth) the managed-services model offers the ability to keep up with improvements in the underlying technology.

There are certain situations in which it might make more sense to manage the system internally. For example:

- Banks may want to let customers dial in and request account information using the touchpad on their phone, which would mean having access to customer databases and other secure information.
- Defence contractors may require high levels of encryption on their networks.
- Hotels and convention centres might want to offer IP telephony services to guests and exhibitors and finance the system through surcharges.

So there are situations in which you should consider adopting IP telephony and managing the system yourself. But experts agree that those scenarios are highly specialised. Most SMBs are better off focusing on their core businesses and taking advantage of the services of companies that specialise in managing these systems 24 hours a day.

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