



Voice Communications: Making the Most of Mobility, IP and Unified Communications

Gone are the days when employees could reliably expect to sit at a desk from 9 to 5, placing and answering calls on a landline phone throughout the day. Today's workforce is extremely mobile, and in their personal lives they are used to interacting with friends and family in a very fluid way—moving from voice to text to apps in one seamless thread. Now, they want those capabilities at work, too.

Frost & Sullivan research shows that 67% of IT decision makers in the United States say their employees use smart phones at the office; 57% use tablets for business purposes; one-third use IP telephony and IP phones; and more than half use soft phones at work, be they consumer or business grade. The goal for most organizations is to keep everyone connected, regardless of the device and network they're on or the location from which they're calling. Managers also want to make it easy for end users to shift seamlessly between one type of call and another, even allowing an employee to start a call on, say, a mobile phone and then transfer it to a soft phone or landline when she gets into the office.

With IP voice and unified communications, companies can make it easy for workers to transfer from a mobile device to a landline and back again with a single swipe or click; reap the cost-savings that come from treating voice as just another data packet running across the network; and deliver truly unified messaging that lets users access voicemails, emails and even texts in any way they see fit. IP telephony also supports other communications applications, including instant messaging and integrated conferencing. And it can effectively leverage LDAP and other directory services, allowing IT staff to quickly provision new employees, off-load those who are leaving, and adjust for new policies or work environments from a central location in a matter of minutes, as opposed to days or weeks. Common maintenance and support issues like “moves, adds and changes,” security and other controls are much simpler to manage. And the technology can save companies hundreds of dollars per year, per user.

Although it has been available for more than a decade, IP telephony still hasn't reached maturity—and that means there's lots of opportunity for companies that deploy it today to see a measurable competitive advantage as a result of their technology investment.

IT and telecom managers should also consider hosted, or cloud-based, IP communications. Frost & Sullivan research shows that 57% of US businesses currently use cloud computing for some or all aspects of their communications, and that is expected to increase by more than 10% by 2016. Of those, 28% host voice communications in the cloud and another 23% expect to do so in the next year.

Eighty percent of those users do so because the technology gives them access to advanced features and capabilities; supplements their in-house IT staff and allows them to focus on more strategic initiatives; eliminates the hassle of supporting multi-vendor solutions; and provides greater flexibility at times of growth or down-sizing. Almost nine out of 10 users are satisfied or very satisfied with their cloud-based communications.

Frost & Sullivan strongly recommends companies consider moving their telephony platforms to IP. They should look at cloud-based services if they have small or otherwise-occupied IT staffs, want the flexibility to easily scale up or down, and need access to advanced features and functionality at a reasonable cost.

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