

Seamlessly Connect Multiple Offices through VoIP

Let's clearly demonstrate the value of VoIP in tangible terms: Suppose you have corporate offices in Atlanta and Cleveland. The Atlanta office needs to put a call in to a client in Ohio. The call can be routed over your VoIP network to the Cleveland office, then through a local phone carrier to the client, greatly reducing long-distance charges. This type of call routing will provide significant cost savings for the daily operations of your business; depending on the number and location of your corporate offices.

Inbound calls can function the same way. With VoIP connecting your offices, every employee can have an extension as if everyone was in the same office. All inbound calls will come into a centralized location to be distributed out to every remote office. But the routing will be seamless from the caller's perspective.

Logistical benefits

A strong benefit of VoIP is in the area of data convergence. Since compressed voice data requires little bandwidth when compared to other data transactions, it makes it possible to integrate voice communications into a data network. Now you have a single network for both voice and data. This can reduce both the equipment and personnel needed for implementation, maintenance and traffic monitoring, making a VoIP network a very attractive option when looking to reduce your operational expenses.

And VoIP can improve your intra-office mobility as well. With VoIP, moving staff and offices no longer require extensive move/change orders and heavy involvement from your IT department. When an IP-phone is moved, the extension number moves along with it, eliminating the need for reprogramming at the new location. With VoIP, you can move your staff dynamically while keeping effort and expense at a minimum.

What to look for

Considering that a new phone platform can be a significant investment for your business, there are some things to consider to ensure that you are getting maximum performance out of your new system. Any vendor that you select should be willing to provide a true end-to-end Quality of Service (QoS) agreement. What this means is that every router in your network needs to prioritize voice communications over other types of data. Dropped calls, broken conversations, and call lag are all examples of what happens when voice packets are interrupted when traveling across the network.

Your service level agreement (SLA) with your carrier should stipulate that IP voice traffic should have the same quality and performance as traditional voice (circuit switch) communications. A provision should state that if performance degrades, you will get money back from the carrier. If you don't have such an agreement in place, you may find yourself spending \$30,000 or more to replace older routers that are disrupting your voice communications-when this is a problem that a quality vendor should help you to identify and correct right up front.



Other considerations

When deploying a VoIP network, one item that is often overlooked is power back-up. Older systems require a battery back-up at the main phone cabinet, but with VoIP, battery backups need to be provided to the routers in the system in order to ensure continuity of service. Typically, you will need to address battery back-ups with your own IT support team, but your phone system vendor can provide advice and support in setting up critical power protection.

When deploying VoIP, it is also important to consider how it can energize your mobile workforce. If telecommuters are part of your company, they can remain completely connected to your voice and data network, even from a remote location. An employee can be working from home, and yet still be reached at the same phone extension as if they were in the office. It is these types of advantages that make VoIP a sound business investment.