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Does VOIP Phone Service Make Sense For Your Business?

Thomas Fox is president of Tech Experts, southeast Michigan's leading small business computer support company.

When we moved our office last month, part of the process included reviewing things like our telephone and Internet services.

Voice-over-Internet Protocol (VoIP) telephone service is basically technology that allows you to make and receive calls over data networks. Instead of traditional phone services which channel analog signals such as the sound of your voice over copper wires, VoIP converts these sounds to digital form first—so that they can be sliced, diced, packaged, and routed over a digital network.

Because VoIP technology uses the same ideas behind data networking, and allows the use of the same networks used by computers, voice traffic can also be routed through the Internet as well.

Suddenly you can now dramatically reduce the cost of voice communications, as well as achieve creative combinations of both services to create new applications for use.

VOIP (voice over IP) services have really evolved over the past few years. In the past, I've been hesitant to use it because the service could be flaky - and since 90%+ of our business comes in by telephone, I wasn't comfortable with something that wasn't reliable.

Fortunately for small business owners, that's changed. The service is now as reliable as service from the phone company. And with the ubiquity of high speed Internet service, call quality has improved to the point of being indistinguishable from the old telephone network.

Our switch to VOIP provided two significant improvements over the service we used before.

First, we increased our telephone line capacity and coverage. We've added telephone numbers for our client's in Toledo, Dundee, and the downriver area to be able to call us locally.

Second - and perhaps more importantly - we've cut our telephone costs in half.

Cost and coverage were my primary concerns when looking at a move to VoIP services. Here are a few reasons you may want to consider switching to VoIP for your office:

You can make and receive calls from multiple devices - for instance, on a dedicated phone, your PC via a software-based phone, or even a mobile phone with VoIP capabilities.

It's easier to add extensions to your phone. You can provide a local number or extension for all your staff without additional costs or cabling.

VoIP allows your employees to be more productive and efficient by giving them the ability to receive and make calls anywhere with a data connection.

You can use VoIP as a tool for real-time collaboration along with video conferencing, screen sharing, and digital white boarding.

You can potentially unify your communication channels, streamlining communications and information management—for instance, marrying email with fax and voice in one inbox.

You can employ presence technologies that come standard with VoIP phones and VoIP communication systems. This technology can tell colleagues about your presence or give you info on the status and whereabouts of your staff.

happy holidays

Need help? Call the Tech Experts 24 hour computer emergency hotline at (734) 240-0200.

Saying Goodbye To An Old Friend... Would A New Workstation Boost Your Productivity?

Many people find it hard to let go of that old workstation that seems to be "working just fine." But, ask yourself: Is it really?

Most people recognize that, as their machine ages, it seems to get slower and slower.

A fresh install of Windows generally makes the computer speed back up to it's "like new" speed.

But as we rely more and more on our computers, laptops, phones, and tablets to be productive in our work, does working at that original speed still make sense?

If it isn't broken, don't fix it?

Why is it a bad idea to have the "if it isn't broken, don't fix it" mentality when it comes to your computer?

For starters, you're wasting your money doing so.

If a computer is past its normal lifecycle then it really doesn't make any sense spending the money to continuously bring it back to a like new state as far as the software goes because the hardware is still very outdated.

In general a desktop computer's useful life span is roughly three to five years providing you purchased a mid-range computer and not the bottom of the line model.

For laptops you get slightly less useful life span out of them due to the fact that a mid-range laptop is generally not as good of hardware as a mid-range desktop.

The other reason a laptop doesn't tend to last as long is the fact that it is constantly being moved around.

This constant movement, shaking, vibrating, dropping, etc. causes a lot more stress on the hardware in comparison to a desktop.

Due to the different factors involved in a laptop's life cycle, a laptop's useful life is roughly two to three years - perhaps slightly longer if it is well cared for.

Software updates may require PC upgrades

Another reason to think about workstation replacement has to do with the software you run on your machine.

Many different software companies offer updates to their software.

Some updates offer fixes to problems or security issues, but many updates also offer new features or updates to old features.

These updates sometimes include a better graphical interface that makes a program easier to use. Generally, these types of updates have higher computing and speed requirements.

Many industry specific software companies put out these types of updates, and they're great! Who wouldn't want a more attractive user interface that functions better and offers more options?

The problem: Updating/upgrading software requires more system resources almost one hundred percent of the time.

If you're the kind of person that likes to hold on to your workstation forever and never update it, but wants those nice software updates, you might see performance problems.

While your software is updating it needs more RAM, more CPU power, and in some cases, more graphical capacity to run to the new software properly.

A lot of times, users don't realize that with new features come new requirements.

In short, if your computer is over five years old, consider replacing it, particularly if it's a laptop. A faster workstation will help you with updated software, and keep up with your busy workload.

Feature article written by:
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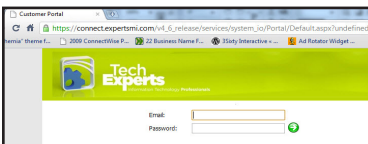
Create new service requests, check ticket status and review invoices in our client portal:
www.TechSupportRequest.com

How To Keep Your E-mail Off The "Naughty" List

Someone's making a list and checking it twice, but it isn't Santa. Due to rising e-mail abuse and spam, hundreds of servers at various companies now monitor e-mail accounts to make sure those accounts are not sending out mass e-mails.

If that e-mail account is assumed to be sending spam it is put on the "blacklist."

Once on the blacklist, your e-mail account is virtually SHUT DOWN because your e-mail is blocked by hundreds or thousands of servers and your message can't be delivered.

Big companies who give out e-mail addresses like AOL, Google, and Comcast, for example, will cut off e-mail service to anyone who sends an e-mail to a large number of people at once.

Because of this, even if you or your employees innocently send a message to 100 of your clients, you could be without e-mail for days or weeks.

So, how do you prevent this costly and frustrating downtime from happening to you? Read these tips to find out:

Protect Your Server

Spammers LOVE to find e-mail servers that don't have a proper firewall, anti-virus, and intrusion protection.

They get a high from hacking into these servers and then using them to send out thousands of e-mails. Plus, with no protection in place,

tracking and catching these spammers is nearly impossible.

The right protection will also prevent malware from being installed on your server, which can automatically send spam without human interaction.

Don't Allow Employees To Forward Messages

Unless it is for work –only related purposes, make a policy that no one is to forward messages like jokes, photos, or videos outside the company.

If just four of your employees send out this kind of an e-mail to 30 of their contacts, that's well over 100 people receiving junk mail on the same day from the same e-mail server. This puts you at high risk of being blacklisted.

Have Your Clients And Prospects "Opt-In"

Sometimes companies end up on the blacklist because someone on your list complained and reported

your message as spam. If you have your clients and prospects agree via an opt-in form that they want to receive communication from you and confirm their permission, then you'll have better protection against that.

Also make sure you keep good records of these opt-ins. That way, even if you do get blacklisted, you should be back up and running fairly quickly.

Make Sure Your E-mail Is Set-up Properly

In addition to protecting yourself from hackers and invasions with software and firewalls, you also need to be sure that your e-mail is configured correctly and set-up to block outside relays.

If you've got the wrong setting in your e-mail account, you could wind up blacklisted, without any e-mail for days or weeks.

Keep Your E-mail List Up-To-Date

If someone asks to be removed from your list and you continue to send messages to him, the chances of him reporting your company as a spammer is pretty high.

Avoid this by using in-house lists (instead of purchasing one) and contracting your list to verify the information.

We use and recommend iContact. They're excellent commericial email service. To sign up for a free trial, or for more information, go to: http://icontact.extole.com/a/clk/37L8x

Beware: Online Banking Phishing Schemes Are On the Rise

Banking online is a convenient and time saving way of managing and keeping track of your company's finances.

Weak security practices, though, can make it more possible for cyber-thieves and hackers to steal your hard-earned money. It is important to make sure that all possible steps are taken to safeguard your company's finances.

Online banking is a tool that many businesses utilize because of the ease, efficiency, and convenience it offers. It's a great way to manage finances in your day-to-day operations.

Unforunately, as more businesses turn to online banking, cyber-thieves and hackers who target small companies are becoming more adept at stealing from companies online.

Security experts are urging companies to beef up their security systems to keep them safe from cyber and identity theft.

The more companies rely on the Internet, especially when it comes to managing finances through online banking, the more prudent it is to take steps to prevent that hard-

earned money from being stolen or diverted to someone else's account. One tip experts give is to establish proper protocols for transacting with the bank, such as requiring two people to verify a transaction before it is approved.

This helps create a checks-and-

balance system that hackers can't bypass.

Having a dedicated workstation used for only online financial transactions is also recommended, as this lessens the likelihood of it being infiltrated by Trojans, viruses, spyware, and other malware that may come from the machine being used for other purposes.

Having the right anti-virus and anti-malware software - and keeping it updated - also goes a long way in keeping your online banking transactions safe from unfriendly eyes.

Your finances are the lifeblood of your business. If you're interested in how you can make your online banking experience more safe and secure, we'd be happy to sit down with you to discuss security solutions that are tailor-fit to your specific requirements and needs.

Give us a call at the office, (734) 457-5001.

Top 5 Reasons To Be Thankful For Technology

When you're looking back over the last year at what helped make for a good year, technology will definitely make the list!

Giving credit where credit is due, here are the top 5 reasons why we should be thankful for all the new technology we used this past year:

1. It allows us all to be more "earth-friendly."
Thanks to e-mail and the Internet, as well as document imaging, we can all communicate with each other without having to waste paper and ink, not to mention stamps!

2. We can instantly access information on practically any topic we want, whenever we want. If you need to find a Mexican restaurant

within a mile of your location, you can not only find one, but also check out the menu and order online so your food is waiting for you when you get there!

3. It keeps us in touch.
Although it can easily be argued we've gone too far in this department, cell phones, Blackberries, and even online forums (blogs, Facebook, MySpace) have enabled us to find and stay in touch with more people more frequently.

4. It saves us time and money.
Nothing has done more for the consumer than the Internet. In minutes, you can search and compare various products and services without having to make a phone call or get in your car. Plus, you can order just

about anything online and have it shipped to your door.

5. It's a great scapegoat for any number of mistakes you've made.
Missed an appointment? Blame your system being down. Don't want to talk to someone? Use the old, "I have no bars in this area," excuse. Overlooked an important client's request? Just tell them you never got the email!

What are WE most grateful for?

Those of you that trust us to make all the computers and gadgets work the way they are supposed to!

Thank you for a fantastic 2011 - here's wishing you and your family the very best for 2012!