

Why Your Company Should Make The Switch To VoIP



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

We made the switch to a Voice over IP (VoIP) phone system a few weeks ago. I opted for an in-house telephone server, but could have easily chosen a

hosted systems usually require little to no hardware investment. You might need to upgrade your firewall or Ethernet switches to accommodate the increased traffic.

An in-house system requires an investment in a mid-grade voice server, the phone system software, new phones, and possible network upgrades. The equipment cost is around half of what a traditional phone system would cost.

We've seen our monthly phone bill drop from over \$300 per month to less than \$60 using VoIP carriers instead of a traditional phone company.

Hosted fees run from \$20 to \$30 per extension, which includes all of your local and long distance calling, and the rental of the cloud based phone system.

VoIP is particularly cost-effective, if you have employees working from satellite offices or telecommuters.

A telecommuter can take a VoIP phone home and make calls by plugging it into his home Internet connection to make and receive calls on the company lines at no additional cost.

Other benefits

Certain VoIP service providers have introduced mobile apps that allow

workers to make and receive phone calls on their mobile devices using the company phone numbers. Their privacy is therefore protected since they do not give their personal phone number.

In addition, the company owns the line so if an employee leaves, calls are routed to the company rather than the employee's cell phone.

Things to consider

While the mobility and scalability of VoIP systems are attractive, there are a few things to keep in mind. Since VoIP services depend on an Internet connection, if the connection fails, the phones would be dysfunctional.

In a business such as ours, where phones are integral to daily operations and client service, we would strongly recommend a backup Internet connection.

Almost all VoIP systems also have a fail over function, where the system will automatically route incoming calls to another number, such as a cell phone, if the Internet goes down.

The future

The increase in VoIP adoption is undeniable, and analysts predict that it will become the predominant business phone service over the next decade. Our system works great, and I'm glad we made the switch!

hosted option that didn't require any hardware in the office except for phones.

A growing number of small businesses are making the same switch. While it can be a lot of work to overhaul the entire telecommunications system of your small business, it is definitely worth considering in light of the ever-increasing costs of traditional services.

What is VoIP?

VoIP is a method of making phone calls using the Internet as opposed to using typical landlines. VoIP services integrate Internet connected IP phones, which look pretty much like traditional office phones, except they plug into an Internet connection with an Ethernet cable.

Cost effectiveness

The biggest VoIP attraction is low cost. Since they're Internet-based,

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Does Your Organization Have A Security Program?

*by Michael Menor,
Vice President, Service Operations*

No matter how large or small your company is, you need to have a plan to ensure the security of your information assets. Such a plan is called a security program by information security professionals.

Whether yours is five or 200 pages long, the process of creating a security program will make you think holistically about your organization's security.

A security program provides the framework for keeping your company at a desired security level by assessing the risks you face, deciding how you will mitigate them, and planning for how you keep the program and your security practices up to date.

Think you don't have anything of value to protect? Think again. The key asset that a security program helps to protect is your data - and the value of your business is in its data.

You already know this if your company is one of many whose data management is dictated by governmental and other regulations — for example, how you manage customer credit card data (PCI Compliance) or even how you handle sensitive patient information (HIPAA). If your data management practices are not already covered by regulations, consider the value of the following:

Product information, including designs, plans, patent applications, source code, and drawings.

Financial information, including market assessments and your company's own financial records.

Customer information, including confidential information you hold on behalf of customers or clients.

Protecting your data means protecting its confidentiality, integrity, and availability. Also known as the C-I-A triangle. The consequences of a failure to protect all three of these aspects include business losses,



a life cycle for managing the security of information and technology within your organization.

Hopefully the program is complete enough, and your implementation of the program is faithful enough, that you don't have to experience a business loss resulting from a security incident. If you have a security program and you do experience a loss that has legal consequences, your written program can be used as evidence that you were diligent in protecting your data and following industry best practices.

Getting started in the right direction

It doesn't matter whether your security program is five pages or 200 pages long. The important thing is that you have a security program and that you use it to address your company's security in an organized, comprehensive, and holistic way. You can adapt the above elements to create a security program for your organization, or, if you need help, give us a call at (734) 457-5000.

Everyone needs to have a security program because it helps you maintain your focus on IT security. It helps you identify and stay in compliance with the regulations that affect how you manage your data. It keeps you on the right footing with your clients and your customers so that you meet both your legal and contractual obligations. Its life cycle process ensures that security is continuously adapting to your organization and the ever-changing IT environment we live in. And, of course, it's the right thing to do because protecting your data's security is the same as protecting your most important asset.

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The Top 5 Upgrades To Speed Up Your Systems Now

Things happen a lot faster in a small business than they do in the corporate world. This is why it is critical for small business owners to ensure their technology is up to date.

Here are five upgrades you should consider including in your IT budget to help you get things done faster.

Get a faster Internet connection

Surprisingly, many businesses which completely rely on Internet connectivity still settle for slow Internet speeds.

It may not seem obvious at first; however, speeding up your Internet connection will speed your business activities, such as file downloads and webpage loading.

You might even consider signing up for a second internet line with another provider just so you can balance your Internet access between the two.

This will speed things up and provide a safety net in case one provider's network fails. Most of the

firewalls we recommend automatically have two Internet connections for redundancy.

Upgrade to Gigabit networking

Upgrading your network speed to Gigabit Ethernet will give you a 10-fold increase in network throughput.

GbE used to be expensive; however, today there are affordable gigabit network switches. In addition GbE works over CAT 5E cabling that is widely deployed, and it is typically built into most desktops and laptops.

Upgrade hard drives to Solid State Drives

If you are not yet ready for a company-wide system upgrade, you can still stretch the lifespan of your desktops/laptops by upgrading the hard disk drive (HDD) to a solid state drive (SSD).

An SSD can read and write data at a higher speed, which allows users to boot up their systems and launch applications faster. SSDs are affordable; even a lower-end model will deliver a significant system boost.

We've seen incredible performance increases when installing solid state drives. Windows will boot in 5 to 10 seconds, Word loads instantly, and even QuickBooks speeds up.

Switch to 802.11n wireless

If your office runs on an 802.11b or 802.11g Wi-Fi network, this would be a good time to deploy the 802.11n wireless.

This comes with a faster wireless speed that makes for a better experience and can support more wireless devices. Note that GbE is necessary to support these faster 300 Mbps 802.11n Wi-Fi access points.

Upgrade computer RAM

More RAM never hurts, and this is bolstered by the sheer affordability of RAM.

While modern computers with 4GB or more of RAM generally have adequate memory for nearly all user demands, increasing your RAM allows you to reduce virtual memory or even turn it off. This makes for a much faster computing experience.

Most Commonly Used IT Acronyms And Their Meanings

CPU (Central Processing Unit)

The CPU is the computer 'brain' and its most important element. It interprets and executes most of the commands from the computer's hardware and software.

RAM (Random Access Memory)

RAM may be compared to a person's short-term memory. It is the place where the operating system, application programs and data in current use are kept so they can quickly be reached by the processor.

GHZ (Gigahertz)

GHZ describes the frequency cycles and is used when discussing computer performance, usually the clock speed of the CPU. A CPU with a higher clock speed can process data faster. One GHz means 1 billion cycles per second.

Gigabyte

A gigabyte (GB) is equal to approximately a billion bytes and is a measure of computer storage capacity that could be used to describe disk space, data storage space, or system memory.

Megabyte

A megabyte (MB) is a measure of computer storage capacity and is equal to approximately a million bytes. Most PCs have storage in gigabytes, not megabytes.

32/64 BITS

32-bit and 64-bit refer to the architecture that a central processing unit or operating system utilizes. Generally, more bits mean that data can be processed in larger chunks and more accurately.



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The Hidden Cost Of Internet Misuse At Work

Using the Internet for personal purposes in the workplace is causing a dip in employee productivity and costing money for the business owner.

Internet abuse constitutes an issue due to the fact that the browsed content raises ethical questions and often the sites visited are not allowed through office policies.

This is in addition to the fact that the time and frequency of accessing the Internet compromises productivity.

What constitutes Internet abuse?

Workplace Internet abuse is a significant risk factor for employer liability, costing employers' valuable hours of work.

Internet abuse ranges from viewing pornography in private offices to spending hours on social sites,

playing online games, shopping online and paying bills through the company Internet.

Other consequences of improper Internet use include litigation, such as sexual harassment, hostile work environments and discrimination.

Revoking privileges

One way to deal with this problem is to entirely remove Internet access. Unfortunately, such a decision has the negative effect of punishing those who don't abuse the privilege.

In addition, it's impossible to completely banish personal Internet usage when the business relies heavily on Internet for communication, research and up-to-date information.

Monitoring usage

One way to reduce employer liability is to monitor and filter employee Internet use.

Although there are disagreements about the principle behind Internet monitoring, many employers agree that it is a necessary 'evil.'

This solution requires some investment and changes in the networking infrastructure but can provide an almost immediate Return on Investment (ROI).

A phased implementation approach works best. Let your employees know you're making a change, implement, and then give them a few days to adjust.

It is also necessary to draft an Acceptable Use Policy (AUP), implementing rules of personal Internet use before implementing such a change.

If you want to discuss internet monitoring solutions for your business, please give us a call for a free assessment.

The Right Strategy To Get More Visitors To Your Website

Every website can be improved, however good it is. In fact, you never want to settle for 'good enough,' particularly if your website is part of a business.

It's unlikely that 100 percent of the visitors to your site take the precise action you want, so there is always room for improvement.

Determine your sales path

When thinking about how to attract more visitors to your site, it is first important to figure out the primary goal of your website, and then work backwards.

For instance, if you are selling a product online, the path for your

visitors is likely to visit your homepage, navigate to the product sales page, click the order button and then complete the order form before they finally arrive at your thank you page. This path is your conversion funnel; the trick is to optimize and improve every piece of it.

Evaluate each website page

In order to determine how much attention you should give to each of your website pages, you must evaluate them separately.

Find out how many visitors land on each page, and what percentage of them proceed to the next stage of the sales path (its conversion rate).

Aiming to increase the conversion rate of each page will be much more effective than looking at your entire website as a whole. For instance, increasing the conversion rate of each page by 10 percent would mean a 33 percent increase in your overall conversion rate.

Constant tracking

It is critical to track the conversion rate of each page both daily and monthly. While daily rates may fluctuate quite a bit, watch out for dramatic conversion drops which might be caused when a page, image or video does not load. On a monthly basis, check the performance of your pages and spot those that are decreasing in effectiveness and need improvement.