



VoIP: A New Dimension in Communication for SMBs

Voice over Internet Protocol or VoIP is about a decade old technology that is gaining popularity among individual subscribers and businesses. In conventional systems, phone calls are made using telephones or handsets that are connected by phone cables. These calls are routed using the Public Switched Telephone Network (PSTN,) carrying a signal from one telephone to the other. But instead of connecting telephones to the phone cables through phone jacks in the walls, VoIP uses the internet where phones can be connected to broadband devices, adapters or PCs using broadband. With this system, voice is converted into a digital signal and carried over the Internet. Let's take a look at all the options that are available to make calls using VoIP.

Make Calls from a PC: Using this platform a call can be placed from your PC. Your computer is connected to the Internet via broadband. A specially designed software app allows you to place and receive phone calls right from your PC. When deployed, this software displays a dial pad. You can dial a number using a mouse or keyboard. You will need a headphone or speaker to hear and a microphone to speak. When your PC is connected to a phone or another PC on the other end, you can talk like you would on a regular phone. The software with video capabilities will let you see each other (you and the recipient of your call) if it is a PC to PC call and both computers are equipped with cameras. In this case you don't even need a telephone handset.

Make Calls using a regular phone: You can make phone calls with a regular phone using VoIP technology, but for this you will have to have a service, such as Vonage, that provides VoIP access. You can subscribe to their service for a monthly flat fee or a per-minute rate. Your regular phone can be plugged into an adapter which is then connected to a broadband device. Some services will allow you to make calls within their service network only. But there are other services that will let you make calls anywhere. That means you can call local, long distance, international and through mobile devices.

VoIP telephones: There are VoIP service providers that provide special phones. To use these phones you don't need an adapter. Their telephones are designed to work with your broadband device. You can connect this phone directly into your broadband modem using an Ethernet cable and use the phone like any regular phone.

Companies providing VoIP services are focusing on providing unified communication platforms that will include phone, emails, faxes, videos and voice mail capabilities. Their goal is to deliver these capabilities that can be used by all means of communication including handheld devices.

The Role of MSPs: Managed Service Providers or MSPs can help businesses with the installation of hardware and software, enabling VoIP technology. This will also organize their communication networks by integrating those networks into their IT infrastructure. Now SMBs can eliminate another worry (management of their communication systems) by outsourcing their IT services.