

Technologies to Watch for Enterprise IP Telephony

P2P, hosted systems and call management

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The time has never been better for enterprises to take advantage of IP technology. While companies like Skype and Vonage have become household names for VoIP, the same cannot be said in the enterprise world. A number of things are falling into place now that will help change that, and this article looks at three technology trends that are driving IP adoption.

Peer-to-Peer

There really are two flavours here, and both are primarily focused on telephony. Peer-to-peer is attractive because it is inexpensive and quick to deploy, it is easy to use, and offers cost savings. On paper, P2P makes sense, either as an adjunct to existing telephony systems, or even as an outright PBX replacement.

The first variation is the one most of us know, with Skype as the leading exponent. For the most part, this form of P2P is PC-based, where voice calls operate much like text messaging does in the world of Instant Messaging. Skype-to-Skype calls are free, and the call quality is generally very good. Skype is gaining rapid adoption among business users, but the proprietary nature of the Skype protocol creates some firewall traversal problems. As such, it is not yet a viable replacement technology.



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The second form of P2P is typically known as “plug and peer”, and is a true replacement technology. This variant embeds software in IP-enabled phones. Focused primarily on the SMB market, this is an affordable, feature-rich platform with PBX-like features, but based on a serverless, decentralized architecture. The intelligence resides in the endpoints, making it very easy to use as well as to deploy. Avaya Inc.’s one-X Quick Edition is the most advanced offering here, but others exist, such as Popular Telephony Inc.’s (Peerio’s) One + One solution.

Hosted Telephony Solutions

Network-based telephony is not new, as any Centrex user knows. With the advent of IP, several versions have developed. Some are managed, and some are hosted. Some are voice-centric, while others are converged, voice-data services.

Regardless of which type, the important trend is that adoption of hosted IP services is growing for all types of businesses. There are many scenarios that warrant a hosted service, but two themes are central for all – cost savings and simplified network management. TDM Centrex users would adopt hosted IP because they lack the IT infrastructure for a premises-based solution, and they need to keep costs down.

Businesses with premises-based systems would shift to hosted because it delivers better value. They can eliminate a capital expense, and may wish to scale back their IT. Other businesses, especially larger ones, would look to hosted as a convergence solution. In these cases, the company has decided that voice-data convergence is strategically important, and hosted is the best way to get there.

The Canadian hosted market started to take shape when Telus Corp. introduced IP One in 2004. The system offers PBX

functionality along with a browser-based interface and unified messaging capabilities, and can scale to any size of business. Since then, other offerings have come to market, most notably Natural Convergence Inc., Shift Networks Inc. and OneConnect Inc., all of which cater primarily to SMBs. It should also be noted that with the flexibility of IP, hosted platforms can be built around a specific application instead of being a full-scale telephony platform. A good example of this is CallCentreAnywhere, which Telus offers to SMBs. This product appeals to businesses that cannot afford their own call centre infrastructure.

Advanced Call Management

While IP brings many benefits to business users, ironically, it complicates the process. A simple phone call can be routed to any number of destinations – voice mail, cell phone, home phone, BlackBerry, email, *et cetera*. We now have so many ways of communicating; these choices end up making it harder to reach people, not easier. In fact, people often use these tools as filters to prevent others from getting in touch with them. Phone tag and email tag have become facts of life. Presence makes IM a useful tool, but also an invasive one that can be an interruption.

The early promise of unified messaging looked to solve this problem with a single inbox. To some extent this worked, but these are vendor-driven solutions. Given how our communications options have mushroomed, especially with presence, more sophisticated solutions are needed. On one level, there is a need for more intelligent call management and call routing capabilities. There is also a need for network and vendor agnostic solutions. Iotum Corp. is focused on this problem. As this issue becomes better understood, we can expect to see other solutions emerge in the near future, which can only be good news for business users. ■

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