

How tech is changing the way businesses talk

 By [Rob Lith](#)

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Networked-based communications - or Voice over IP (VoIP) - is responsible for a radical overhaul of the role of the business PBX. Previously a mere utility that switched voice calls, today's IP-PBX offers unprecedented efficiencies, flexibility and functional variety.

A constantly expanding universe of communication functions, each suited to a niche requirement that another mode of communication cannot fulfil as well, shows just how diverse and nuanced modern communication is.

Mobile

The mobile phone as a key enabler of the corporate network is a long-standing vision that has become ever more manifest thanks to the acceptance of IP as the bedrock of communications technology.

Other signs include the maturation of Wi-Fi as a seamless bearer technology acting in concert with cellular GSM and 3G. The computing power of smartphone technology further demands that mobility be given its rightful place in the enterprise, and myriad applications hasten the completion of that journey. Finally, PBX technology has developed sufficiently to manage mobile phones as part of the corporate communications ecosystem.

Soon, industry alliances will coalesce between mobile and converged telcos, offering bespoke FMC benefits that do justice to this confluence of factors - for example opening up least-cost routing and zero-rated options not available before, as well as entire new functional communications vistas.

Videoconferencing

Videoconferencing is acknowledged as a supremely enabling tool, but not many businesses have even considered it, for reasons of its cost.

New platforms have however become available that make this technology available to even the most modest sole proprietor. With hosted IP-based video, any business or contractor can now rent virtual videoconferencing rooms at very affordable monthly rates, allowing them to rope in specialists at short notice rather than schedule meetings with multiple people inside and outside the organisation at much cost, delay and inconvenience.

Instant messaging

Another way in which IP communication has changed the way we do business is instant messaging. IM proves that, while email and voice conversations need never die, they aren't suited to scenarios where immediacy is vital and a degree of non-disruptive intrusion is palatable.

New applications for IM are becoming evident as customers demand a direct interface into the business. Given a choice, many people would find chat a better option than a voice conversation, especially when busy, or on weekends and public holidays, when it seems an enormous effort to pick up the phone and talk to a support engineer.

Chat does not require diverting your attention from your PC, where (let's face it) it is probably focused. And unlike a voice conversation, it is easier to terminate a chat exchange with the minimum of protocol observed.

Chat gives companies the opportunity to delay their response in lower-service level situations, whereas this would lead to a pregnant pause in a live voice chat. But in situations where a higher service level is required, the Jabber protocol (XMPP) can offer a customer service similar to voice IVR systems, which allows businesses to queue their incoming chat overflow and give an estimated waiting time. In turn, this allows the customer to go on doing other small tasks while waiting.

IP is a change-enabling architecture for businesses, opening up a world with fewer constraints, more subtle communication nuances, more speed, less complexity and lower cost.

And it's for everyone.

ABOUT ROB LITH

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