

“VoIP Gets Good Gas Mileage”: What Every Business Owner Should Know

New technologies can be like Christmas morning in a very large family: great, filled with unexpected goodies, valuable, but also chaotic and confusing when you're overwhelmed with too much “new stuff”. Is this true of VoIP – absolutely!

With the new technology challenge in mind, we offer concise briefings on VoIP. They are developed with the small-to-medium business (SMB) owner in mind – the business leader most responsible for the profitable growth of their enterprise.

With nearly twenty years in business, we have learned how to effectively serve the SMB business owner. We are well versed in demystifying new technologies for our clients. We're experts on the subject of VoIP for busy professionals. We know they want answers to (at least) these four key questions:

- Why should I care?
- How can it make my business better?
- What's most important to know?
- What should I do about it?

Our first briefing features a basic understanding of VoIP and highlights new business dynamics caused by this rapidly emerging technology.

VoIP: The Basics

VoIP is the acronym for Voice over Internet Protocol and it's often referred to as IP Telephony. In short, it is just another way of making a phone call but there's more to it.

VoIP lets you make voice calls using a broadband Internet connection instead of a regular (or analog) phone line. In its most basic implementation, a computer, a microphone, a speaker and an Internet connection are all that is required to make a VoIP “phone call”. VoIP transmits sound over the standard Internet connection and you can communicate without paying a penny more to your Internet provider. While some VoIP services only work over your computer or a special VoIP phone, other services allow you to use a traditional phone connected to a VoIP adapter.

- As an SMB owner, do you understand VoIP?
- Do you know why VoIP is changing business ?
- Have you considered how your business—or your competitor—can leverage VoIP to advantage?

We believe learning should be accompanied by a good natured laugh....

“VoIP Gets Good Gas Mileage”

The Wall Street Journal chronicled a survey of mid-market business leaders who were queried on what they know about VoIP. One question asked “what is VoIP” and many got it wrong. Despite its “wrong-ness” we loved this response - offered up with great confidence we're told - “VoIP is a new line of automobile that gets really good gas mileage”!

It's useful to know that some VoIP services will only allow you to call other people who use the same service. Others allow you to call anyone who has a telephone number - including local, long distance, mobile, and international numbers. New services, like Skype, are available to allow users to communicate anywhere in the world for free using VoIP technology. In the consumer market, Skype, is a big headliner in VoIP news and has become wildly popular because they pioneered the "free VoIP call". They brag of more than 150 million downloads of their offering and Skype has definitely raised awareness for VoIP.

In fact, VoIP usage has exploded. Its growth is being compared to that of the Internet in the early 1990's. To date, the primary *consumer market* driver of widespread VoIP adoption is that it's cheap. As a value proposition for business, VoIP is certainly viewed as "budget friendly, but more than that, it is seen as a way to get new features and capabilities that drive efficiency and innovation.

So, Why Should You Care?

When two juggernaut market factors align – in this case the economics and innovation enabled through technology - pay attention! Business as we know it will change.

Your competition may put VoIP to work in their business before you do. You should have some idea of what that means. Your customers may ask about your plans to use VoIP. Your partners and suppliers may take advantage of VoIP capabilities and encourage you to do the same. Any number of day-to-day influences may crop up, so having a basic grasp of VoIP and its potential role in your business just makes good sense.

VoIP merges together - or *converges* - an organization's traditional Plain-Old-Telephone-System (you'll see this called POTS) voice network into an IP data network. Now, there is one network (an IP network) for both voice and data. That is very useful and it means that cost and productivity efficiencies are created.

Joliet, IL Park District

When we brought the power of VoiP to this organization, they were delighted to be able to seamlessly and affordably connect their remote sites like the Splash Pool and the Horticulture Center. Safety, service and peace of mind were all immediately improved.

The Billions Corp

This talent management and ticketing agency is a growth-oriented innovator. They need to be "everywhere at once". When we brought VoiP to their business, they were able to do just that - provide great service from the Chicago headquarters, the Washington satellite office, or home - it is transparent to their clients.

From a "cost perspective", maintenance, management and staffing costs are reduced as only one network needs to be managed and supported. Many VoIP users say that it is easier to manage their communication systems through this new technology. Simplicity and ease-of-use are very welcome attributes of VoIP because most SMB owners are very focused on staffing and retention.

From a "capabilities perspective", VoIP enables new and better ways of communicating. For instance, employees can increase both their mobility and productivity. Using a feature called *unified messaging*, your employees can now have a single mailbox for e-mail, voicemail, pages and faxes which greatly simplifies inbound communications. One particularly impact-filled capability allows a single phone number for an employee to reach them regardless of where they are or what kind of phone they are using—home, office, cell phone,

etc. This new feature means that employees are never out of communication regardless of their physical location. This capability has profound implications for the SMB owner that has home-based workers, telecommuters and/or provides 24/7 services.

There are many VoIP capabilities to consider and we have touched on just a few of them. Some may fit your business quite well and others may not. Your organization may be VoIP ready – perhaps not. Every business has unique needs and there is no “cookie-cutter” answer to VoIP for your business. But, there are ample reasons to be informed.

Our goal is to help you become more knowledgeable about VoIP and its potential role in your organization. We encourage you to begin to think about *what's possible* and then plan for *what's best* for your business.

Tip: A Useful Resource:

The Federal Communications Commission maintains a website to help people learn about VoIP and it is a handy resource; visit: <http://www.fcc.gov/voip/>

About Medlin Communications

Founded, in 1989, Medlin is a leading provider of business communications and low-voltage electrical services. The company's extensive experience and proven approach to delivering high quality services and solutions has enabled it to enjoy consistently high satisfaction ratings. Specializing in the unique needs of cross-industry SMB companies and national retailers with company owned stores, Medlin is known for establishing long-term partnership with its clients, delivering on their voice and data integration and cabling requirements, and providing related services.

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