

# VoIP: All at Once or at Your Pace - The Choice is Yours; The Time is Now

## Executive Summary

Your contact center system hasn't changed in a while, but now you are getting to the point where you need greater functionality or increased flexibility. Or, perhaps your company will be opening a new location in the coming months, which will require integration with your overall network as well as interoperation with contact center and back-office applications.

You've heard a lot about Voice over Internet Protocol (VoIP), but your budget is limited. Besides, you're not completely sure that the benefits of VoIP outweigh those of your existing network. On the flip side, you're questioning whether you should stick with traditional telephony for your new center or implement VoIP - perhaps at first on a small scale.

The truth is that VoIP can be an extremely valuable tool for your contact center because it can be tightly incorporated with other solutions to provide an increased level of flexibility, efficiency, and cost savings. With VoIP, for example, you can more easily employ at-home agents, giving you access to a diverse labor pool, allowing your contact center to quickly add appropriate resources during unexpected spikes in traffic, and helping your organization to reduce facilities related costs. VoIP enables your agents to handle Internet chats immediately followed by voice calls. And, for business continuity, if a primary system fails, VoIP calls can be redirected to a backup system using the same telephony device. As is the case with many technologies, your VoIP deployment will run smoothly if you conduct pre-implementation due diligence, engage the right partners, and allocate the appropriate time and resources.

Many companies and contact centers today are recognizing that VoIP is a credible and realistic option. They are planning to implement it in the near future to gain or maintain their competitive advantages - either deploying it all at once or incrementally, as dictated by their budgets and needs.

To stay competitive in your industry, don't wait to learn more about VoIP. You may be pleasantly surprised by the benefits your contact center can realize today without requiring a forklift implementation, while logically setting the stage for future applications and systems.



## The Value of VoIP

According to a recent study conducted by industry analyst firm Yankee Group, VoIP adoption rates in contact centers are expected to grow from 17 percent in 2005, to greater than 47 percent by the end of 2007. In addition, the VoIP penetration rate of agent seats is anticipated to rise from 16 percent in 2005 to more than 60 percent in the next three years<sup>1</sup>. Why? Well, when properly implemented, VoIP allows contact centers to achieve the following five benefits without compromising the quality of voice service:

### *Consistency*

When tightly integrated with other solutions, VoIP helps contact centers provide better service by facilitating a consistent customer experience across all communication channels. It enables companies to administer, manage, monitor, and drive the performance of the contact center from a single platform. This solution allows for the prioritization of voice, email, and Web chat so that all forms of communication can be equally and efficiently delivered to and handled by agents. As a result, companies are able to increase flexibility, reduce complexity, and lower costs. And, with this more consistent approach, they can also enhance productivity and help inspire customer loyalty.

### *Flexibility*

Using VoIP to employ at-home agents helps companies to increase the quality of their agents by accessing new and larger agent pools; save money by employing talent in lower-cost geographical locations; and reduce facilities costs by allowing agents to work from home. VoIP can be used in conjunction with routing capabilities to ensure that, regardless of physical location, the next available agent receives the next incoming phone call. And, the integration of VoIP with performance optimization technologies such as workforce management, quality management and performance management, gives contact center supervisors the tools they need to effectively manage their on-site staff, while equipping them with the new capabilities and techniques they require to efficiently manage their distributed workforce.

Using VoIP, contact centers can effectively plan for and respond to natural disasters or emergencies by quickly routing customer interactions - whether by voice, email, or chat - to other centers or at-home agents in non-impacted geographic areas. With this type of contingency plan, companies can confidently direct calls to at-home agents knowing that the lines won't be tied up with personal phone calls. Most importantly, operations can continue uninterrupted and customers will never know the difference. A little pre-planning ensures that the infrastructure is in place for agents to easily transition from contact center to at-home environment.

### *Improved Efficiency*

In traditional PSTN environments, companies must rely on telecommunications carriers to connect their distributed sites. However, with VoIP, once a call enters a corporate network, the company has the power to redirect that call to any location within reach of that network. When a customer telephones a VoIP-enabled contact center, they are directed to a centralized voice portal site via the IP network and then, based on the type of inquiry and specific business rules, the call is automatically redirected through the corporate network to the right agent for the inquiry. This seamless process provides the customer with a single corporate view, transfers data along with voice without requiring separate computer telephony integration (CTI) links, and eliminates associated carrier charges. It also simplifies the process associated with call transfers, enabling agents to easily move a call to another point on the corporate network as necessary.

Also, because VoIP requires only one network for voice and data communications, companies that make network improvements to support voice automatically realize benefits relating to data.

## What is VoIP?

Simply put, VoIP is the ability to transmit voice over data or Internet Protocol (IP) networks. It works in a manner similar to sending email, but instead of only transmitting packets of data, VoIP can send and receive both voice and data packets.

VoIP enables the simultaneous transmission of voice, data, and multimedia over one "pipe," without requiring special wiring associated with more traditional telephony solutions. It allows companies to share bandwidth between applications and to use network resources in an efficient manner.

## Why SIP?

VoIP is being strongly embraced today, largely because of the maturity and interoperability of Session Initiation Protocol (SIP), a standard protocol that initiates, modifies and terminates interactive communications sessions. One of the key advantages of SIP is that it allows for the exchange of information in a standard format, without requiring specialized equipment, such as telephony cards and gateways. Because it promotes interoperability between equipment and applications from various vendors, SIP gives companies more choices. The maturation of SIP is also allowing companies to easily and gradually migrate to VoIP.

<sup>1</sup> *Migration Costs, Vendor Loyalty and Need for "Agents Anywhere" Define Contact Center VoIP Adoption Plans, Yankee Group, June 2006.*

### *Extended Presence*

VoIP enables easier integration of applications via standards like SIP, which allows for voice but also chat, instant messaging (IM), audio and video. The tight integration of multiple applications and channels enables contact centers to gain more comprehensive views of their customers so that they can deliver consistent experiences across all communication channels.

As application standards continue to become more widely deployed, SIP opens up exciting new possibilities for businesses. For example, presence management allows SIP-enabled contact centers to detect a user's availability on a network, and route communications to that user at the most appropriate device. Many companies will use presence management to extend customer service and sales from the contact center throughout the organization. They will be able to set up their systems so that when employees turn on their SIP-enabled devices, they will be automatically registered as "available" to the network. Companies will then be able to couple this information with business rules that specify which calls or type of calls can be routed to any specific device, and when and how these calls should be handled if the device is busy. By factoring skills-based routing parameters into presence-based routing rules, agents will be able to immediately "find" and collaborate with subject matter experts to solve complex customer issues or, in extreme circumstances, transfer customers for additional assistance. Companies will have the ability to enable anyone within the organization with customer service or sales knowledge to become a valuable resource for handling customer interactions.

### *Reduced Costs*

The deployment of VoIP means that companies can combine two disparate voice and data networks into one network that can handle both voice and data traffic. This convergence reduces capital expenditures required to maintain and upgrade two separate networks. It also decreases operating expenses because fewer human resources are needed to maintain one network.

SIP allows companies to use VoIP to eliminate vendor lock-ins, giving contact centers the flexibility to select any provider and product that conforms to the same standards. In doing so, SIP decreases integration costs and enables the cost-effective consolidation of voice portal resources into a single location, or alternatively load balance across multiple contact centers to maximize port usage and lower total cost of ownership. The end result? Companies can choose the solutions that best meet their needs and their budgets, without worrying about compatibility.

### **Case Study: Telerx**

Telerx is a Top 50 customer-care service bureau that provides outsourced contact center services. The company implemented a hybrid contact center solution so that it could deploy TDM and IP-based agents on a single platform while maintaining its legacy investments in a PSTN infrastructure, taking advantage of VoIP capabilities while building a solid foundation for future applications and processes.

"The real advantage to Telerx clients is the ability to maximize resources. Our clients who want to globalize their operations can utilize local contact handling staff in countries where this solution enhances customer loyalty and better supports branding strategies, without the expense of decentralizing contact center technology. They can leverage their investments while extending the benefits of the technology to other regions."

*Carolyn Chamoun, Senior Vice President of Technology Solutions*

### **VoIP and Unified**

By integrating VoIP with a unified solution – one that includes the administration, management, monitoring and performance of a contact center via all communication channels from a single unified platform – companies can increase flexibility and agent productivity, reduce contact center costs, and motivate loyalty. Take, for example, a large insurance company with a SIP-enabled contact center. When a hospital calls the company to verify insurance coverage for a surgery candidate, it is possible for one agent to simultaneously speak with the hospital administrator, fax the requested information to the hospital from his computer, and send a confirmation email to the patient stating that insurance has been verified and the patient is cleared for surgery. This agent, who is working from home, is so efficient that only one phone call to the insurance company is required. The inquiry is quickly resolved. The patient is satisfied, and other agents are free to help other customers, rather than work on the same issue.

## Aspect – Helping You Stay Ahead of Your Competition

Aspect is a valuable resource for companies that are considering, planning, or implementing VoIP in their contact center. As a leader in the contact center space for more than 30 years, we have a significant amount of experience with both traditional telephony and VoIP architectures, giving us the necessary knowledge to help our customers seamlessly bridge earlier technology investments with new technology and capabilities.

We fully stand behind the use of open standards – a key component of VoIP – in the contact center for a number of reasons: they are vendor neutral and therefore provide customers with more options, they make contact centers more productive, and they give us a solid platform upon which we can develop new technologies that easily interoperate with other contact center solutions. Because we believe that SIP and other open standards are good for our customers, we are committed to continuing to invest in open standards, and we are working hard to incorporate them into the majority of our solutions.

For example, all Aspect Signature and Unified IP products have SIP capabilities. The neutrality provided by SIP makes it even easier for our customers to interoperate all of their Aspect solutions with systems and applications from any other SIP-enabled product.

And, the successful interoperability of our portfolio of contact center products with SIP Trunking solutions means that our customers can use SIP Trunking to route calls directly to their contact center products. This eliminates the need for costly load balancing products. As a result, customers are able to reduce international and interstate call costs, increase call quality, and reduce points of failure.

However, SIP is not the only standard that the company is embracing. As an enthusiastic proponent for standards-based technology, we are also incorporating other established standards, such as VoiceXML, Web Services, and Service-Oriented Architecture (SOA), into our products. And, our subject matter experts are contributing to the development of some emerging standards, such as State Chart XML (SCXML) and VoiceXML 3 (VXML3), which we believe will greatly benefit our customers.

Aspect is coupling open standards with our belief in being infrastructure-neutral so that we can focus our attention on what we do best – develop the applications that ride on the transport. Through our partnership with Digium, we are able to offer Asterisk Business Edition and provide customers with the support needed to successfully implement and maintain an open source IP PBX. Companies that take advantage of this technology are able to enjoy all of the features and functionality available in a proprietary IP PBX at one-half to one-third of the price, “test drive” an IP PBX for little or no cost, and easily integrate an IP PBX with their existing telephony infrastructure, as well as standard hardware and applications from a variety of vendors.

Finally, the Aspect Unified Command and Control™ offering helps customers tie all their traditional and VoIP-enabled Aspect products together to consolidate administration, routing, reporting and workflow rules within a single site or across the entire enterprise. Through the use of centrally created and distributed routing rules, contact centers can use this solution to ensure consistent management regardless of which contact center a customer is connected.

While some people think that VoIP is less secure than traditional telephony, the truth is, there is no inherent security difference between the two. In fact, by using certain tools such as virtual private network (VPN) and audio encryption, which cannot be utilized in conjunction with traditional telephony, VoIP can actually be made more secure than the alternative. At Aspect, we are committed to keeping our customers safe from unwanted intrusions. We can help a customer deploy SIP over a VPN so that they can take advantage of encrypted audio channels. We also work with our customers to deploy session border controllers to exert control over the signaling and the media streams involved in call handling to meet their additional encryption needs.

Our award-winning products and services combined with our three decades of industry-leading experience allow us to help our customers make a seamless transition from traditional telephony environments to VoIP. We have extensive product offerings that support the VoIP needs of most companies – whether they are in need of a hybrid solution or a pure IP option. And, we help companies make the migration at the time and pace that best works for them.

## The Last Word

Many contact centers know their proprietary traditional telephony systems inside and out, and therefore have a high level of comfort that they may not have with VoIP. However, for companies that haven't already started investigating the possibility of incorporating VoIP into their communications plan, it may be time to do so.

VoIP is an effective technology that provides contact centers with a number of new and exciting opportunities. It enables increased interoperability and flexibility that is not available with traditional telephone systems. As the industry develops new technologies and applications, many of them will be SIP-enabled and designed specifically for use in a VoIP environment. These applications will deliver new capabilities that will help contact centers provide their customers with better service. As a result, companies that become proficient with VoIP may have a competitive advantage in the future.

Companies don't have to implement VoIP all at once. Aspect helps contact centers deploy VoIP at the pace that makes the most sense for their organizations and their budgets. That means that there is no need to entirely replace existing systems in order to begin realizing the benefits of VoIP – contact centers can continue to use what they have while they incrementally add VoIP capabilities.

Deciding whether or not to migrate to VoIP is a complex decision that is unique to each organization. VoIP has the potential to open up a whole new world of possibilities, but following pre-determined procedures and selecting the right partners can make all the difference.

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### About Aspect

Aspect provides software and consulting services that turn the potential of unified communications into real business results across the enterprise and in the contact center. Applying 35 years of insight and experience, Aspect helps more than two-thirds of the FORTUNE Global 100, as well as small and medium enterprises, power their business processes with communications. For more information, [visit www.aspect.com](http://www.aspect.com).

