

## Internet Brings Simplicity Of “String And Cups” To Small-Business Telecom



(NAPSA)—The myriad of telecommunications options could tempt any small business to revert to the simplicity of a string pulled taut between two paper cups, the standby of children (and the occasional adult) for generations.

If you're looking for a more practical alternative that offers such simplicity and long-term affordability, consider a phone solution with Voice over Internet Protocol (VoIP) technology. Broadly available since 2004, VoIP is an Internet-based technology that digitizes a person's voice and then sends it in data packets over a company's voice network.

“The benefits of VoIP are many, but one of the largest is the ability to reduce a business' costs, in particular long-distance costs,” said Sanjeev Aggarwal, vice president of Access Markets International (AMI) Partners, Inc., a small-business research firm. “A small business with 10 to 19 employees can save an average of \$8,000 in the first year by using a VoIP phone system.”

VoIP also caters to a small business' desire for a flexible do-it-yourself solution. Neil Chasan, founder of Sports Reaction Center, a small business based in Bellevue, Wash., knew he'd found the right fit for his physical therapy clinic when he was able to install Microsoft Corp.'s small-business VoIP solution, Microsoft Response Point, himself.

“I have to say it is 1,000 times easier than the PBX system we had before,” Chasan said. “I can make changes to the system simply and quickly. Before, I had to call in an outside tech, wait several days, and it often cost us money to do simple things like add a phone for a new staff member.”

Small businesses looking to increase their responsiveness to customers and upgrade their pro-

fessional image can also take advantage of standard VoIP features such as voice mail, caller ID, call conferencing and call forwarding. VoIP also integrates with many of the e-mail, business productivity and customer relationship management software applications that are commonly used by small businesses.

Mark McCracken, president and founder of Seattle-based Comenity, a designer of high-end home entertainment systems, says that VoIP has given his company a new level of credibility.

“Our employees spend the majority of their time out of the office at client job sites, but the call-forwarding capabilities make it much easier for customers to reach us without trying multiple numbers,” McCracken said. “This helps set us apart from many of our competitors and also gives our customers the impression that Comenity will be around indefinitely to service their needs.”

Coupled with the potential cost savings, such benefits are motivating many small businesses to consider moving to VoIP. AMI Partners found that despite the recent economic downturn, 36 percent of small businesses with 100 or fewer employees will adopt VoIP over the next few years. By taking advantage of vendor financing, small businesses can more easily upgrade their technology for long-term business gains. A technology upgrade such as VoIP can position a small business for significant growth once the economy picks up again.

If your company is considering a move to VoIP, there is no better time to take advantage of the simplicity, advanced features and vendor financing options to cut the strings keeping you from a simple, flexible and cost-effective solution.