

IP communications

Do you know the basics of a technology changing the face of business? **By Gary Grabowski**

In keeping with last month's theme of creating customer value through improved business processes, it's only appropriate to discuss new ways to communicate, both internally and externally, through the implementation of an IP communications solution.

So what are IP communications? Simply put, IP (Internet Protocol) communication solutions let you deliver converged data, voice and video applications to your entire work force, regardless of location, over a single IP network.

Efficient communication is key to increasing customer satisfaction. By combining voice, video and data communications into one powerful environment, you can bring together your employees, customers and other associates for improved collaboration. An IP communications solution can allow faster and easier access to voicemail, e-mail and faxes through a single inbox, while enabling you to reduce telephone costs and lower your network administration and maintenance costs.

It helps organizations realize business gains by improving operational efficiencies, increasing organizational productivity and enhancing customer satisfaction.

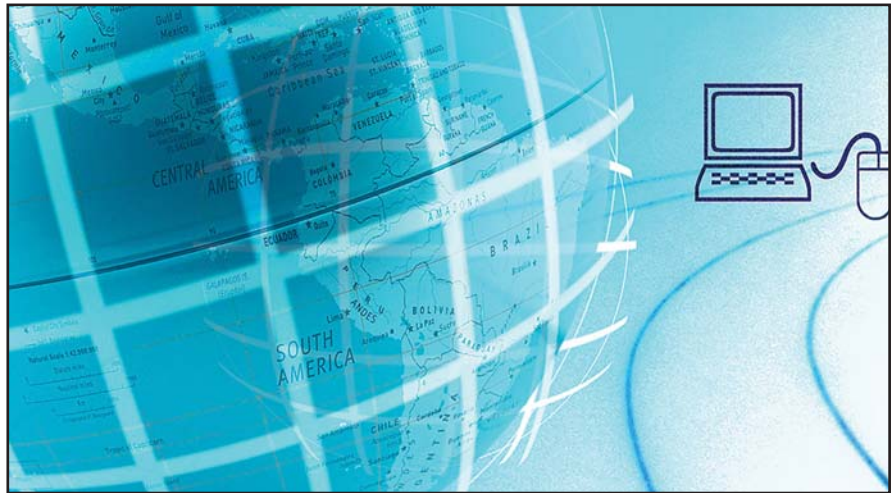
The basics

There are a wide range of both hardware and software components that can make up an IP communications solution. While the list is extensive, here are some of the core system features and functionality.

These may vary by system manufacturer, and many options and software applications may only be available through third-party companies. A typical IP communications solution may include the following.

■ **IP telephony.** IP telephony is the technology for transmitting voice communications over a network using open-standards-based IP. IP phones combine the functions of a traditional telephone with an Ethernet connection and optional customizations to deliver a complete suite of business telephony features such as call waiting, caller ID, transfer and conference calling.

These features can be deployed across any number of sites that are connected by a company's data network.



■ **Unified messaging.** Unified messaging applications enable the user to easily and seamlessly access e-mail, voicemail, faxes and schedules via PC. Phone calls can be automatically dialed with the click of the mouse and conference calls set up by dragging and dropping.

This type of application allows the user to access e-mail over the phone and voicemail through their computer from any location, and send and receive faxes electronically while increasing organizational productivity and improving customer service and responsiveness. This type of functionality can provide increased productivity for mobile sales and service people and eliminates the cost and hassle of managing separate voicemail, e-mail and fax systems.

And it enables employees to be able to respond faster to customer requests from any location.

■ **Video integration.** Users can access video conferencing and training right from their desktops. Dial plans can be integrated so users are able to just dial an extension in order to join a video conference or access a video based training application.

■ **Call center applications.** Available third-party call center applications tie phone and e-mail systems to back office applications where customer account information is stored. When a customer calls into the center, the call center agent

has instant access to the caller's account history and can deliver a more personalized and timely service. And, customers visiting a company's Web site can use new Internet tools to request assistance from a live agent.

IP telephony enables the agent to deliver voice assistance over the phone while assisting the customer online in real time.

The bottom line

By combining voice and data traffic on the same line, IP communications allow you to reduce the number of incoming phone lines, and for those companies with multiple office locations, it provides direct communications to remote sites just as if they were local, resulting in reduced long-distance charges. Moves, additions and changes are greatly simplified.

In some systems, when users change locations within the company, they simply unplug the telephone and take it with them, and the system will know who and where they are.

Finally, IP communications provide increased employee productivity and efficiency and, ultimately, a greater value to your customer.

GARY GRABOWSKI is the operations manager at TriLogic Corp., a solutions integration company focusing on IT Infrastructure. Reach him at info@tri-logic.com or (724) 745-0200.

Experts **Technology** is brought to you by TriLogic Corp.