

Don't even go there (without a driver)

Using IP telephony to meet business goals **By William Beldham**

If you try to implement anything with such complex impact to your IT environment as IP telephony, you may find that, as Gertrude Stein said, "When you get there, there is no There there."

First, find business drivers, then implement the strategy to attain your business goals. The drivers will get you to your goals.

Where's the driver?

Every business depends on telephones. Incoming calls let customer support staff take orders and answer questions. Outgoing calls are typically for follow-up or new contact with customers.

Since the telephone was invented more than 125 years ago, the interface to customer or supplier data has been the human on the phone. If everyone using the phones in your business already knows everything there is to know about your customers and suppliers, the old system works fine — don't change.

But realize that your competition is linking customer and supplier data to its voice network. Everyone in its business knows everything about its customers and suppliers — order status, volume, history, preferences and anything else that would lead to a better customer experience.

And they are coming for your customers, too, offering increased service levels. Your competitor is even operating on a better margin because it can deliver strategic cost and pricing information when and where it can make a difference. Your way of using the phone has just become obsolete.

You have to answer several questions before you can begin implementing an IP phone system.

■ Where is my customer and/or supplier data, and can it be linked to my phone system?

■ How can access to this data improve my business flow, volume and profitability?

■ Can mobility improve my business?

■ What applications can deliver the information I have to the people who need it at



the point of contact?

There are other factors that become keys to adopting IP telephony, such as interoperability, legacy technology, migration plans, budget and training. Budget may be the greatest factor in the predetermination of your phone system's destiny. But don't consider budget without the business drivers.

One way to address business goals while preserving the budget is to find an IP telephony solution that leverages existing digital phones while delivering IP functionality. A truly integrated IP phone system with multivendor interoperability can deliver IP functionality directly to the PC on the desk beside the legacy digital phone. New handsets alone can account for 30 percent or more of the cost of a new phone system.

Lengthening the useful lifespan of existing telephone handsets, network switches and routers while adding full IP functionality creates a synergy that can help you attain your business goals faster. Using this synergy to speed your ROI makes sense (and dollars) three ways.

■ Reducing up-front expenses keeps dollars available for immediate cash flow.

■ Gaining full IP functionality immediately can put you ahead of your competition, making more money for your company now.

■ The more quickly the new phone system is paid for, the more quickly those dollars are added to your bottom line.

Not only can your new IP telephone system deliver data to phone users in your company, it can provide information to callers directly from a database via interactive voice response. This can save money by freeing employees to focus on tasks that require their presence.

These phone systems can save toll charges by using least-cost routing functions. IP phone systems can allow increased mobility by giving full desktop functionality to remote office, home and traveling employees.

Drive profitability by improving communications, customer service, vendor relations and mobility through the integration of data applications, IP networking and an IP phone system that can deliver the powerful functionality to desk phone, PC and cell phone, but make sure your business goals are doing the driving.

WILLIAM BELDHAM is a solutions consultant with TriLogic Corp., a solutions integration company focusing on IT Infrastructure. Reach him at (724) 745-0200 or wbeldham@tri-logic.com.

Insights Technology is brought to you by TriLogic Corp.