

Internet telephony enticing new users

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Making calls over the Internet -- rather than over the conventional phone network -- may become the norm for corporations in the coming years, experts told UPI's Networking.

Research shows corporations are installing network equipment to make Internet phone calls -- in geekspeak, Voice over Internet Protocol or VoIP -- at a 6.6 percent annual rate.

That pace is expected to continue for the next four years, according to research by In-State, a telecom market research firm in Scottsdale, Ariz. What is more, 91 percent of new equipment ordered for corporate telephone networks is going to be VoIP-related, and the number of Internet telephone lines in corporate America is expected to increase from 9.5 million to 28.1 million in the next few years.

The majority of U.S. companies already use Internet telephony to save money -- and sometimes even make calls for free. According to a study by IT consulting firm Forrester Research, first-generation VoIP has provided businesses an average savings of 10 percent to 15 percent.

"VoIP is in its first-generation deployments among an estimated 68 percent of U.S. corporations," said Holly Hagerman, a spokeswoman for Siemens, the German telecom equipment maker. "That is, first-generation IP -- 1gIP applications -- that run packetized voice over data networks and are only interesting from a cost-reduction standpoint. In effect, 1gIP applications are paving the venerable cow path, rather than blazing a new highway."

Hagerman said second-generation Internet telephony -- also known as 2gIP -- applications on extended, converged corporate networks will bring additional applications, including increased collaboration, network presence and synchronous communications.

"Extended converged VoIP networks help unify the variety of existing network domains, voice and data, wire line and wireless, which will then help unify a currently fragmented user experience across those domains," she said.

In addition to Siemens, other major telecom companies are plunging deep into the Internet field.

Uniden America Corp. in Fort Worth, Texas, a maker of wireless equipment, "recently announced relationships with leading broadband phone service providers, Vonage and 8x8, to deliver complete IP solutions to customers," said Amanda Shannahan, a company spokeswoman.

Meanwhile, Foundation Capital in Menlo Park, Calif., a venture-capital firm, is predicting more room for investment in the nascent industry and has been financing new VoIP companies.

One of the hottest areas is called unified messaging, the creation of a single inbox where a user can obtain all of his or her voicemail, whether wireless or landline, as well as e-mail.

"VoIP projects are creating new topologies and a greater mix of IPBXs (Internet Public Exchanges, or switchboards), establishing a new kind of base for unified messaging," said Suzanne Matick, a spokeswoman for Adomo.

The telecom technology developer in Cupertino, Calif., debuted earlier

this year at Demo 15, a major technology trade event.

"Typical large users are multi-vendor, multi-site, multi-product scenarios that would require separate exchange integrations," Matick said.

The new architecture is expected to ramp up over the next five years, experts said.

"One of the obvious advantages of embedding these features in applications will be the cycles cut from getting work done by eliminating all or at least substantially reducing the phone and e-mail tag -- symptomatic of asynchronous communications," Hagerman said. "A more sublime benefit is to tap into a company's resources more quickly -- finding an available expert immediately to resolve a customer issue upon first contact, and saving the time, cost and aggravation of scheduling a call-back."

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