

ShoreTel Adds More VOIP Options for SMBs

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IP PBX provider ShoreTel on April 23 will launch a mixed bag of IP Telephony enhancements designed to make end users more productive and organizations more efficient, and to reduce the total cost of ownership of ShoreTel IPT products.

ShoreTel, whose sweet spot in the VOIP (voice over IP) market is SMBs (small and midsize businesses), has released a new version of its software, added new, smaller-footprint IP PBX hardware and built its first SIP (Session Initiation Protocol)-based IP phone.

A key new feature in the ShoreTel 7 release is escalation notification, which allows administrators to create a mandatory response process for incoming calls. The escalation feature, built into ShoreTel's voice mail system, allows administrators to "define business rules and routing so that a mailbox can call out to a phone, pager or e-mail," said Steve Timmerman, vice president of marketing at ShoreTel, in Sunnyvale, Calif.

"You can escalate up to 10 different devices and specify the waiting period between notifications. It's helpful for any organization committed to providing a certain service-level agreement," he said.

New user productivity functions in the Personal Call Manager desktop client provide a dial-out, wizard-based approach to transferring calls. At the same time, administrators can define tool bars with programmable buttons for specific employee roles such as call center agent, salesperson

or secretary. The buttons allow users to perform standard telephony functions with a single mouse click, and to launch other applications or a Web browser from a programmed button.

The Personal Call Manager, which is also integrated with ShoreTel's contact center client, allows up to nine different tool bars that can each have 24 buttons programmed, according to Timmerman. It allows "rich functionality with even a simple phone," he said.

ShoreTel 7 also adds a mobility feature that allows the system to automatically find an individual without having to select an option, and the ability to define custom ring tones for each user.

On the hardware side, ShoreTel added two new switches that provide more granular options for the number of handsets supported by the ShoreTel switch family. The ShoreGear 50 and ShoreGear 90 support 50 and 90 users in half the footprint.

The "half u" form factor in the new switches lowers power consumption and heat dissipation, the company said. The switches also support both IP phones and digital trunks in the same box. ShoreTel now provides switches that support 40, 50, 60, 90 or 120 users.

"Where we see ShoreTel playing strongly is in small and medium businesses that have under 500 seats. The more granular platforms help them strengthen their hand in that market, because customers can pick and choose boxes for specific locations," said Irwin Lazar, principal research analyst at Nemertes Research. "The half-rack boxes are good for companies that are tight on rack space," he said.

ShoreTel has also come out with a new IP conference phone, the company's first SIP phone. The ShoreTel IP 8000 Conference Phone embeds 16 microphones, eliminating the need for remote microphones.

"It picks up all conversations in large conference rooms - even up to 40 feet away. That's an advantage and brings forward new technology that can transmit an entire conversation to the far side," Timmerman said. The alternative is to turn on and off microphones based on where the sound is coming from.

ShoreTel used titanium for the conference phone's speaker. That material doesn't distort with time or humidity, Timmerman said.

The new ShoreTel 7 software and new ShoreGear switches are available now. The ShoreGear 50 is priced at \$2,695 and the ShoreGear 90 is \$4,195. The ShoreTel IP 8000 Conference Phone, due in June, is priced at \$1299.

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