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VOIP: A Basic, Basic Intro

By Bear Cahill

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What is it?

Most people are familiar w/ NetMeeting and other software that let you talk to others over the internet. VOIP is similar. However, it also uses your phone – the interface we're all familiar with.

Instead of connecting your phone to the wall, you connect it to a box either the VOIP company provides or you buy on your own. This is the modem. You need highspeed/broadband internet for this. Your modem plugs into your cable/dsl modem and now it can 'talk' btwn your phone and the internet.

Your phone lines already do pretty much what VOIP does, just w/ different/older technology (well, some of it's new w/ optics and such, but...).

How hard is it to setup?

It's actually very easy. Assuming you have the company send you a modem or you buy a kit at the store, you simply plug the modem btwn your current cable/dsl modem and your computer (e.g., the out from your cable modem now goes to the new box and the out from that to your computer). It also has a phone jack for your regular phone.

Once it is on, it will boot up and configure itself.

What are the benefits?

There are many benefits depending on the company you go w/, but here are a few I have (all of these are free w/ the monthly fee– \$14.99 for my setup):

1. Features like caller id, call waiting, call waiting caller id, call forwarding, etc.
2. Voicemail

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3. Email alerts for new voicemail.
4. Web access to voicemail – you can play your messages on your computer.
5. Auto-forward – if the phone is ever down or isn't answered, it's auto-routed to another number
6. Online management of all features, settings, account, etc.
7. Computer dialing – highlight any number on your computer, hit F6 and it sets up the call from your phone to theirs – very convenient!
8. Keep your regular phone (you don't need a voip phone)

There are some other cool features available for extra \$ like the softphone which lets you use your computer as a phone w/o the modem – this means you can take your laptop w/ you wherever and you have your phone w/ the same phone number everywhere too (you can do this w/o the softphone, but you have to take your VOIP modem around w/ you – not bad if you're going somewhere for a longer trip).

Another really cool thing is the virtual phone numbers. You can get extra numbers that ring the same phone, but they are local numbers to any area code you want. So if I live in Dallas and have family in New York, I can get a local phone number here and there. That way my family in New York can call a local number (free) and talk to me! Vonage charges \$4.99/month for that. I'm not sure about the others.

And the biggest benefit – IT'S CHEAP! I pay \$14.99 plus some tax and such, but not the ump-teen taxes, charges, fees, etc. like the phone company charges.

Also, if you do a little research/reading, you can set it up to where every phone jack in your house is wired for VOIP. It's little more than plugging the output of your VOIP modem into the wall jack you already have. Very little more.

Bottom Line

You get lots of good, free features and options for doing/managing a lot more including a lot over the web and it's SO much cheaper (at least it is for me!). Being the 'average guy' I am, I don't really use all the features. Fortunately, it's pretty much a 'set it up and forget about it' type thing except that I save \$40+/month w/ it!

I use Vonage b/c that's what I was told about first and it was one of the first. There are others and I'm sure they have their strengths, but Vonage has the cheapest base option at the time I did my research.

Bear Cahill runs: The Armchair Geek (www.thearmchairgeek.com), Webpage Hosting Info (www.webpagehostinginfo.com), Go To College Online (www.gotocollegeonline.com) and The Video Exchange Community (www.videoexchange.org)

What Is VoIP Technology?

By Sandra Stammberger

You may have heard the term Voip used a lot in the media, but are not sure what everyone is so excited about. Here you will find the answers to your most sought after Voip technology questions.

What is Voip technology?

Technically, VOIP is Voice Over Internet Protocol, or voices traveling over internet lines and wires like other information would. So, what does this mean to you? A lot. Even if you don't have a clue what Voip technology is, you may still be utilizing it everyday if you have a digital phone line or if you use a microphone hooked into your computer to speak to others while you are connected to the internet.

What is Voip technology going to do for me?

Digital phone and services like it keep costs down for the company, which is passed on to the consumer. It is usually much cheaper than a traditional land phone line, especially if you want extras such as caller ID and call forwarding.

What is Voip technology going to lack?

As great as Voip technology may be, there are some drawbacks that one using it for your phone service should realize. First, most digital phone companies do not provide access to emergency assistance numbers, such as 911 for those in the US. This may leave your household vulnerable if you use digital phone. Some consumers overcome this by keeping a basic plan with their traditional phone company provider or have a cell phone available in case of an emergency.

Another drawback to Voip technology in the form of digital phone is that if your power goes out, so does your phone. When you have a service through a traditional phone company, you can still access your line even during power outages as long as you do not need a second power source to run it (ex: cordless phones need a second power source to run, so when the power goes out so does your phone). This is not so with digital phone. However, once again having a basic plan with your traditional phone company or having a cell phone on hand may remedy this problem.

What is Voip technology overall?

Voip technology can be an asset to anyone. It keeps the cost of having a land phone line cheap while still allowing us to communicate verbally without having to rely solely on cell phones. The next time you are taking a look at your high-price phone bill from your phone company, take another look at digital phone and Voip technology in general. You may rack up savings that you never even knew existed.

For more information about VOIP visit

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