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The IP Communications Authority Since 1998™

Hosted VoIP in the Enterprise

By Richard “Zippy” Grigonis

Hosted solutions are attracting scads of new business customers. You don't have to buy new equipment or pay IT staff to install, configure and maintain it. And new, flexible technologies allow services to interoperate with any legacy premise equipment you may have. Furthermore, many services can be offered with high “granularity” – you can buy them on a per-line basis, and your maintenance contract is generally based on per-seat licenses.

M5 provides IP Telephony and PBX telephone key systems using VoIP in the greater New York and New Jersey area. Dan Hoffman, CEO of M5, says, “The good news for the field is that everyone is acknowledging that this is a good idea, and our prediction, along with some other analysts, is that in 5 or 10 years the mid-size enterprise will stop buying its own systems entirely. All signs of the economics of customer satisfaction point in that direction, and there has been a growth in the resiliency of the network to make hosting possible. Within that broad landscape, we see the end customer splitting the industry into two directions. First, there's a group that wants to see that costs continue to be driven down, and get basic dial tone over the network. Second, there's a group that views the technology as a way to drive costs down *and* drive service levels up.”

“So there's this group of businesses that are very voice-connected to their customers,” says Hoffman, “and they consider this voice delivery model as a way to finally get some major impact from all of the R&D and all of the rich features that are going into the telephony world, and they want it hosted because feel these things are simply too complicated to deploy by themselves. Just about everybody likes the service model, and customers are gobbling it up as soon as they can find providers who can deliver the services well and reliably. But there are people who are increasingly using it as a way to deploy the advanced features, and that's where we're getting some really exciting stories.”

“The key is that, in order to get anything out of those features, you need to present them as an easy-to-use service. For as long as there have been phone systems, we've had some devices laden with thousands of features, but no one uses them all. When we talk to end-user businesses, all of this stuff makes their eyes glaze over, unless there is someone who can set it up, support it, and make it easy for them. They just don't have that capability in-house. The richness of unified communications is making it necessary to deliver such enormous functionality as a service.”



Larger carriers are also in the hosted VoIP arena. For example, Qwest OneFlex Hosted VoIP is a VoIP service that replaces your need for a premise-based phone system, and it provides popular applications such as voicemail, conferencing and unified messaging. It also offers Microsoft Outlook integration.

Also in the game is XO Communications, a nationwide provider of advanced communications services and solutions for businesses, enterprises, government, carriers and service providers. Its customers include more than half of the Fortune 500, in addition to leading cable companies, carriers, content providers and mobile network operators. Its infrastructure comprises an interesting amalgam of high-capacity nationwide and metro networks and broadband wireless, which helps XO offer customers a wide range of scalable, managed voice, data and IP services in over 75 U.S. metropolitan markets.

XO's Director of Voice and Converged Services, Nic Jackson, says, “Our XO One Managed iPBX services business provide a managed solution that includes a PBX as well as network services, installation, maintenance and management of the end-to-end voice solution, which is great for enterprise customers.”

XO's Eric Hyman, Director of Managed Services, says, "In fact, we have two product lines that support managed services in some type of hosted environment. The first one is the XO One iPBX. Our primary manufacturer of choice is Avaya, although we do work with Nortel on occasion, and we're in the midst of working on a trial with Cisco. In that environment XO carries the capital for the hardware and the maintenance. It's a very different model and value proposition that you would probably encounter with anybody else. It has the ability to reduce IT capital expense — meaning staff headcount — and it enables the customer company to focus on its core business, while XO focuses on the hardware and network solution. By the way, XO One is a complete bundled solution, which means it includes not only the hardware, maintenance, and management of that hardware, but it also includes XO's network. So it's a single bundle from a single provider, allowing for a single point of contact to our customers for any and all telecommunications issues."

"This product has had a steady upward trajectory," says Hyman. "It's a fairly successful product for XO Communications. I would say that Avaya would probably rank us as either Number 5 or 6 in terms of domestic resellers in the SMB space. So we have a very strong symbiotic working relationship with Avaya."

"Second, we're finding even greater success in multi-location deals," says Hyman, "where customers are not only taking this hardware, but they're adopting XO's MPLS VPN product too. They also like to send voice over the MPLS VPN if it's our IP Flex with the VPN." (XO IP Flex is one simple bundle containing a complete package of communications solutions for a business, including the XO Anywhere feature for unified communications, local and long distance voice, Internet access and webhosting — all at a flat monthly rate consolidated on one invoice. XO IP Flex is available with Business Lines, Digital Trunks or ISDN-PRI connectivity.)

Hosted or Managed?

The rising tide of VoIP hosting has spurred carriers to bring their infrastructures in line with what's expected of a next-gen network, whether by "home grown" efforts or by scrambling to find companies that offer the proper technology, particularly when it comes to offering truly "managed" services involving customer premise equipment not actually managed by the customer. Turin Networks, for example, recently announced new feature enhancements that position the company's popular Adit product line as a major carrier-grade Converged Services Access Gateway (CSAG) platform optimized specifically for the migration to VoIP and the delivery of new managed IP-services to SMBs. There are more than 130,000 Adit units out there, deployed by customers that include 6 of the 10 largest LECs in the U.S. — they are the premier component of Turin's iConnect for Converged Services solution. Turin's Adit 600 now has a MultiService Router (MSR) module with SIP-based VoIP, making the Turin Adit 600 a super-flexible multiservice CPE platform enabling service providers to deliver a complete range of traditional TDM voice, VoIP, Internet access, and IP-based VPN/Security services from a single, modular device.

Ironically, Mitel, a company long known for its CPE business phone systems, is also experiencing growing interest in its managed services offering, the recently expanded Mitel TotalSolution managed services program, used by more than 17,000 large and small companies. The Mitel TotalSolution program now includes the extensive Mitel unified

communications portfolio of platforms and applications, IP/data communications network planning, provisioning, and carrier services, along with complete service, training, and support, as well as other financial benefits. Thus, unlike competing "simple lease" programs, Mitel provides a more comprehensive offering that ranges from up-front consulting and maintenance to upgrades and carrier services. Mitel has the ability to interoperate across various network vendors' equipment, and Mitel consultants can work with a customer's IT infrastructure and help them leverage existing investments.

Helping Hands

Increasingly cut-throat competition has forced network operators and service providers to focus on value-added services that are easy and inexpensive to deploy. But many service providers or telcos wanting to get into the hosted services business have difficulty building and incorporating new customized applications. Fortunately, Sylanro Systems of Campbell, California, has developed software enabling service providers to deliver innovative customized, hosted VoIP applications and services for business, consumer, and wireless subscribers. Many business and residential voice communication services across fixed, mobile, and converged IMS networks have their origins in Sylanro technology.

Sylanro recently won a 2008 TMC Labs Innovation Award for its Synergy Web Attendant Console. Based on a cost-effective SaaS (Software as a Service) model — in particular Sylanro's Snapps Web Services — the multi-user, browser-based Web Attendant Console allows end-users to grow their own solution and integrate other web services such as location and CRM into the same app, thus enabling carriers to sell additional services to end-users without additional hardware such as sidecar consoles. Using this multi-user, Flash-built solution, office receptionists can control and dispatch incoming calls to corporate and departmental numbers from any browser running on a desktop, independent of physical location. Indeed, there is no physical installation of any desktop software or hardware.

Also, in February 2008, Sylanro unveiled Release 4.2 of its Synergy Multiplay Application Feature Server, which now includes a software suite focused on mobile users, enabling sophisticated, hosted IP communication services across fixed, mobile and cable networks. With Sylanro's technology, enterprise customers can use their mobile phones as an extension of their hosted PBX services with the ability to interact with business PBX applications such as Automatic Call Distribution (ACD) and phone presence over the mobile handset. Moreover, the system supports real-time call handover between multiple devices, such as a desk phone and a mobile phone.

And in the Contact Center...

Many people don't realize that call/contact center capabilities can also be delivered as a service. Take for example, Version 5.2 of CosmoCom's flagship product CosmoCall Universe.

Interestingly, CosmoCom is as adept at supporting internal corporate communications as well as those entering an organization from the outside world. That's because the need for communication between contact center agents and their supervisors has been underserved in the past, fostering a cottage industry of third-party add-on products. Now, however, CosmoCall Universe includes tools that agents can use to request supervisor assistance, and supervisors can use to broadcast

critical information to all agents or to any defined group of agents. Agent-initiated help requests are automatically routed to a qualified supervisor who responds by opening up a keyboard chat session with the agent, which can become a voice call with one click. One click can also put the supervisor in silent monitor, whisper, or barge-in mode for the requesting agent's current call. The assisting chat session is independent of the agent's conversation with the customer, regardless of the channel. Supervisors can also request chat sessions with agents or with other supervisors. In addition to the need for one-to-one sessions with agents, supervisors often need to broadcast announcements to agents – with CosmoCall Universe, these announcements pop up on the agents' screens just like a chat window. CosmoCom even offers a GUI service creation tool, CosmoDesigner.

Richard Grigonis is Executive Editor of TMC's IP Communications Group.

The following companies were mentioned in this article:

CosmoCom
www.cosmocom.com

M5
www.m5net.com

Mitel
www.mitel.com

Qwest
www.qwest.com

Sylantro Systems
www.sylantro.com

Turin Networks
www.turinnetworks.com

XO Communications
www.xo.com

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XO Communications is a leading nationwide provider of advanced communications services and solutions for businesses, enterprises, government, carriers and service providers. Its customers include more than half of the Fortune 500, in addition to leading cable companies, carriers, content providers and mobile network operators. Utilizing its unique combination of high-capacity nationwide and metro networks and broadband wireless capabilities, XO offers customers a broad range of managed voice, data and IP services with proven performance, scalability and value in more than 75 metropolitan markets across the United States.

XO® One Managed iPBX is an end-to-end managed communications solution that includes an IP-PBX, phones, installation, maintenance and support, and a service package that includes local, long distance, and Internet access on a single monthly bill.

XO® IP Flex with VPN is a fully managed, secure, wide area networking solution that allows businesses to extend the life of their legacy phone systems while delivering the production benefits of VoIP and unified communications. The service combines voice, data and Internet access over a single connection with dynamic bandwidth allocation for maximizing applications performance. It includes a choice of calling plans, Class of Service capabilities, optional unified communications package, and optional Applications Performance Management.

www.xo.com