

## **What's in the price of a call?**

*The launch of a new advertising-funded VoIP service adds to the ever growing list of providers offering free calling services, but what will this mean to the business user? Dan Cole, head of product management at THUS plc discusses*

The proliferation of VoIP has generated significant media attention over the past few years and the recent interest surrounding the forthcoming launch of a new, advertising-funded VoIP service Voixio, puts a new focus on the debate.

Consumer facing services that allow users to make free calls can be excellent examples of the benefits of VoIP and ultimately raise awareness on a wider industry level. Yet, when it comes to the business domain, where the need to make mission-critical calls is vital, the service requirements are quite different. As such, businesses should be mindful of the potential pitfalls VoIP services delivered over the public network may present. This is, to a great extent, why carrier-grade services, delivered over converged networks are better suited to business needs.

VoIP calls running over the public internet can be affected Internet usage as they are not necessarily prioritised over data traffic. Conversely, on a private converged network, all IP traffic is directed over a virtual private network (VPN) and comes with quality of service (QoS) agreements which ensure the high level of performance and security essential to business. Ultimately, the cost benefits of convergence also means that businesses can make better use of applications such as video conferencing, as well as enjoy greater mobility for employees who can work just as easily at home or offsite by plugging in and picking up calls using one number delivered over VoIP.

The fact that the price of a call will continue to decrease should not impact business purchasing decisions. Business telephone systems today require enhanced services such as voicemail and call recording for staff training in addition to carrier class head and handsets integrated into the existing network system. In this market, the price paid is often a reflection of the competitive advantage firms can expect from deploying telecoms systems specifically tailored to business needs.

These are interesting times in the voice market and recent spate of new service launches, including Voixio, is a compelling example of why the cost of a call continues to fall. Yet it is also an example of the differences in services required by business and consumer users. Against this backdrop, it is the industry's duty to educate businesses that VoIP performance will ultimately be defined by the network on which it operates.

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