

VoIP comes calling

Touting lower rates and a suite of services, a new phone company takes aim at businesses of all sizes



THE DIAL TONE—the lifeblood of many businesses. Used to be there was but one way to get a trusty dial tone. You'd pony up whatever Ma Bell asked, wait around for someone in a blue truck to come and install the equipment and then pay ever-higher rates for monthly service.

Next came the cell phone, but spotty coverage areas and the concentration of providers meant it wasn't much of an option to replace the landline. Indeed, it became another communications expense, paid either to Bell or one of its equally large and monolithic competitors.

The newest trick to drive down the cost of business phone service is VoIP

FROM LEFT Tim Farmilo and Dan Martens of Western I.T. Group

(voice over internet protocol). It's not new at all, but it's only recently that internet connections have achieved the speed and levels of reliability that make it possible to walk away completely from traditional landlines.

Of course, there is a catch. Virtually all businesses get their internet service from one of the communications juggernauts that control the landline and cell phone markets. However, if you're paying for internet anyway, VoIP is a great way to slash phone costs.

Just ask the partners at London Business Phone.

"Our customers cut their phone costs by 30% to 80%" says Dan Martens, who created Western I.T. Group eight years ago with partner Tim Farmilo. Western I.T. looks after all manner of business I.T. needs and grew out of a side business Martens began while studying computer science at Western.

Recently, the partners created the London Business Phone subsidiary to provide VoIP services for business.

"As Internet connections continue to improve, more and more businesses are going to choose VoIP because of the savings," Farmilo says. "The bigger the business, the more potential savings there are because multiple locations can run for the same initial investment."

The initial investment is for the PBX system that routes calls over the internet and the phones needed to work on the system.

London Business Phone does not charge for initial set up and does not require contracts that bind a business to its service for a prescribed time. The only additional cost is \$35 to port an existing phone number onto the new system.

"There is a lot of potential for growth in this area," says Terry Dash, hired to drum up business for the new phone venture. "The old Nortel phone systems are in 80% of businesses. In the next few years they will have to be replaced, and VoIP is the obvious answer for many of those businesses."

The only hiccup is that internet service is not delivered consistently across the city. It tends to be fastest in the core, and "spotty" according to Martens on the fringes of the city. VoIP requires fast, reliable internet. The company tests to determine whether an address is viable, and will work with a potential client to attempt to bump up its internet service when possible. **Q**

LONDON BUSINESS PHONE

Internet telephony service provider,
a division of Western I.T. Group
Established 2004 (Western I.T.)
7 employees
London market

www.londonbusinessphone.com