

Ten Reasons to switch to an IP PBX

Nick Galea, Feb 07, 2007

This article explains the top 10 benefits of an IP PBX which provide a compelling reason to throw out the old PBX and replace it with a new IP PBX. The article also provides a brief explanation of what an IP PBX is, how it works in a computer network and how it integrates with VOIP providers and PSTN Gateways.

What is an IP PBX?

An IP PBX is a complete telephony system that provides telephone calls over IP data networks. All conversations are sent as data packets over the network.

The technology includes advanced communication features but also provides a significant dose of worry-free scalability and robustness that all enterprises seek. The IP PBX is also able to connect to traditional PSTN lines via an optional gateway - so upgrading day-to-day business communication to this most advanced voice and data network is a breeze!

Enterprises don't need to disrupt their current external communication infrastructure and operations. With IP PBX deployed, an enterprise can even keep its regular telephone numbers. This way, the IP PBX switches local calls over the data network inside the enterprise and allows all users to share the same external phone lines.

How it works

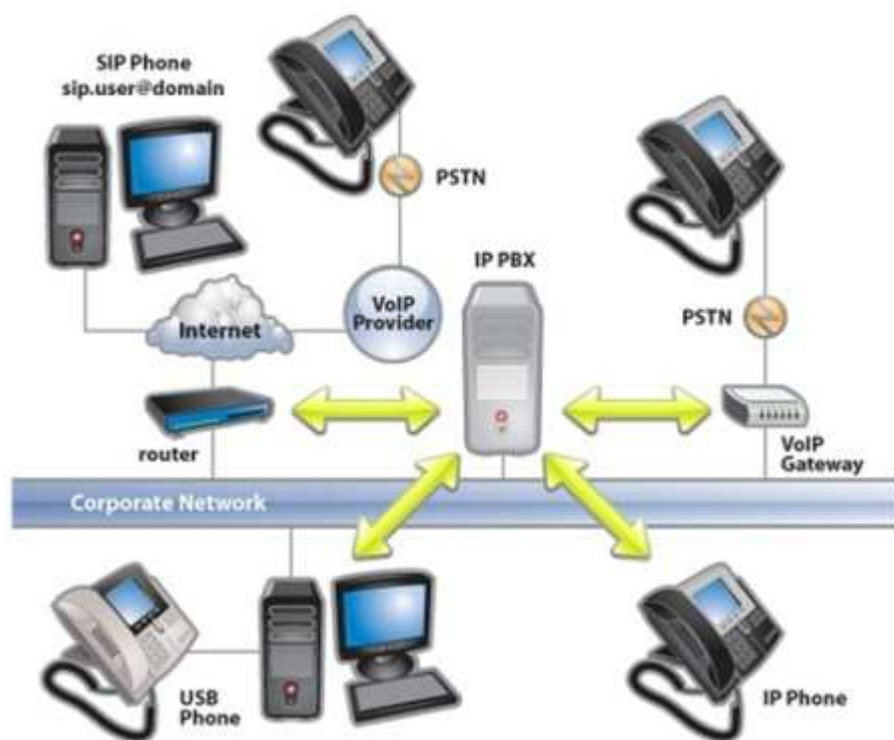


Figure 1: How an IP PBX integrates into the network

An IP PBX system consists of one or more SIP phones, an IP PBX server and optionally a VOIP Gateway to connect to existing PSTN lines. The IP PBX server functions in a similar manner to a proxy server: SIP clients, being either soft phones or hardware-based phones, register with the IP PBX server, and when they wish to make a call they ask the IP PBX to establish the connection. The IP PBX has a directory of all phones/users and their corresponding SIP address and thus is able to connect an internal call or route an external call via either a VOIP gateway or a VOIP service provider. More information and commonly asked questioned about IP PBXs can be found on IP PBX, SIP & VOIP FAQ - <http://www.3cx.com/PBX/IP-PBX-faq.html>

The top 10 Benefits

Benefit 1: Much easier to install & configure than a proprietary phone system

An IP PBX runs as software on a computer and can leverage the advanced processing power of the computer and user interface as well as Windows' features. Anyone proficient in networking and computers can install and maintain an IP PBX. By contrast a proprietary phone system often requires an installer trained on that particular proprietary system!

Benefit 2: Easier to manage because of web/GUI based configuration interface

An IP PBX can be managed via a web-based configuration interface or a GUI, allowing you to easily maintain and fine tune your phone system. Proprietary phone systems have difficult-to-use interfaces which are often designed to be used only by the phone technicians.

Benefit 3: Significant cost savings using VOIP providers

With an IP PBX you can easily use a VOIP service provider for long distance and international calls. The monthly savings are significant. If you have branch offices, you can easily connect phone systems between branches and make free phone calls.

Benefit 4 Eliminate phone wiring!

An IP PBX allows you to connect hardware phones directly to a standard computer network port (which it can share with the adjacent computer). Software phones can be installed directly onto the PC. You can now eliminate the phone wiring and make adding or moving of extensions much easier. In new offices you can completely eliminate the extra ports to be used by the phone!

Benefit 5: Eliminate vendor lock in!

IP PBXs are based on the open SIP standard. You can now mix and match any SIP hardware or software phone with any SIP-based IP PBX, PSTN Gateway or VOIP provider. In contrast, a proprietary phone system often requires proprietary phones to use advanced features, and proprietary extension modules to add features.

Benefit 6: Scalable

Proprietary systems are easy to outgrow: Adding more phone lines or extensions often requires expensive hardware modules. In some cases you need an entirely new phone system. Not so with an IP PBX: a standard computer can easily handle a large number of phone lines and extensions – just add more phones to your network to expand!

Benefit 7: Better customer service & productivity

With an IP PBX you can deliver better customer service and better productivity: Since the telephone system is now computer-based you can integrate phone functions with business applications. For example: Bring up the customer record of the caller automatically when you receive his/her call, dramatically improving customer service and cutting cost by reducing time spent on each caller. Outbound calls can be placed directly from Outlook, removing the need for the user to type in the phone number.

Benefit 8: Twice the phone system features for half the price!

Since an IP PBX is software-based, it is easier for developers to add and improve feature sets. Most VOIP phone systems come with a rich feature set, including auto attendant, voice mail, ring groups, advanced reporting and more. These options are often very expensive in proprietary systems.

Benefit 9: Allow hot desking & roaming

Hot desking – the process of being able to easily move offices/desks based on the task at hand, has become very popular. Unfortunately traditional PBXs require extensions to be re-patched to the new location. With an IP PBX the user simply takes his phone to his new desk – No patching required!

Users can roam too – if an employee has to work from home, he/she can simply fire up their SIP software phone and are able to answer calls to their extension, just as they would in the office. Calls can be diverted anywhere in the world because of the SIP protocol characteristics!

Benefit 10: Better phone usability: SIP phones are easier to use

Employees often struggle using advanced phone features: Setting up a conference, transferring a call – On an old

PBX it all requires instruction. Not so with an IP PBX – all features are easily performed from a user friendly Windows GUI. In addition, users get a better overview of the status of other extensions and of inbound lines and call queues via the IP PBX Windows client. Proprietary systems often require expensive 'system' phones to get an idea of what is going on on your phone system. Even then, status information is cryptic at best.