



## There's more to VoIP than cutting phone bills

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**Published: 3rd March, 2006**

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Voice Over Internet Protocol, much better known as VoIP, has become something of an IT fashion item over the last year or so. Indeed, during this time VoIP has moved not just into mainstream business use but has become so popular in the world at large that even those who can barely turn on a PC, i.e. analysts, rarely experience a day without using the technology. What has turned this promising technology into something that is so widely used?

The organisers of the VoIP For Business conference to be held in London later this month has published some interesting survey results on its site pointing out that whilst saving money was one driver behind the take up of VoIP, it is by no means the only significant factor (<http://www.voipinbusiness.co.uk/issues/six/voipbenefits.asp>). When it comes to factors considered to be very important in the decision to invest in VoIP, the reduction of communications costs was equalled by a desire to simplify internal communications and the desire to enhance flexible working.

These three issues were identified by 55 percent of those surveyed but were closely followed with 50 percent returns by a wish to increase productivity and by a belief that VoIP could help improve the quality of service to customers. The numbers taking part in the online survey were not large, but the results are consistent with much that is currently taking place in this space.

The survey went on to ask what services were being deployed or were planned for use on VoIP systems. As would be expected voice services topped the list for nearly two thirds of respondents. However desktop video and mobility both scored 41 percent, with telecommuting coming in next at 35 percent. Multi-channel contact centres, Web conferencing and 'on demand' conferencing completed the list.

It is interesting to note that of those who took part in the survey one in two were already making use of VoIP in their environments. Of these a large majority state that they have already achieved over 50 percent of their target cost savings and other performance improvements. A majority expect to increase their VoIP investments.

It is very clear that VoIP is rapidly becoming a standard in everyday business use. However, whilst modern VoIP platforms are relatively simple to install and operate it is essential that the systems be carefully architected and that full consideration is given to the ongoing management demands required to ensure that both VoIP services and other services deployed on the IP infrastructure operate effectively. The increasing utilisation of the IP network is, for the first time in many years, going to create a requirement to actively manage the IP infrastructure.

Quality of IP services will become an issue in the majority of organisations necessitating the acquisition of dynamic IP network management skills to ensure that service levels for all supported applications and services meet key business requirements. Not all IP services are created equal; active IP management is becoming a necessity. VoIP is here to stay. Businesses, individuals and telcos all need to work out just how they will exploit this technology as it becomes pervasive.