



Alternate Access Quarterly Newsletter

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Alternate Access will be closed during the winter holidays as follows:

Wednesday, November 24
Thursday, November 25
Friday, November 26
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Friday, December 31

The VoIP Communication Triumvirate: Planning Ahead for a Positive VoIP Experience

Reliable, consistent, high quality VoIP business communication is the result of teaming three key elements in your business: your system network, your phone service and your phone system. Each of these three components takes part to ensure you have maximum uptime for your telephone communication, all calls to your business get through, and the quality of voice to and from your location is pristine.

We begin a series of articles that will highlight each of these components to give you a better understanding of the importance each plays as a member of the VoIP communication triumvirate. Maybe you have already considered or implemented these suggestions, or maybe you are just starting to think about changing or upgrading to VoIP. Whatever the case, our series will provide pertinent information to consider regularly as you continue to improve your existing business communications.

Our first article will review what business owners can do to ensure an ideal network for VoIP. As the backbone of your phone system, and most likely your entire business operations, there are steps you can take to ensure that your network is healthy and operating at maximum capacity.

(Continued on page two...)

End 2010 on a Positive Note with a Tax Break!

In September The Small Business Jobs and Credit Act of 2010 was signed into law, extending and increasing previous limits. Install a new phone system by Dec. 31, 2010, and you may be eligible to immediately write-off 50 percent of the cost of your new system, rather than depreciating it over several years.

Of course, you will need to consult with your tax advisor about the deductibility of any equipment prior to purchase.

In addition, the Act increases the Section 179 expense deduction to \$500,000 (up from \$250,000 in 2009) and increases the total amount of qualifying equipment purchased to \$2 million (up from \$800,000 in 2009). The new Section 179 expense deduction is in effect for tax years beginning in 2010 and 2011. The bonus depreciation extension that had expired at the end of 2009 is now extended through Dec., 31 2010 and made retroactive to Jan. 1, 2010 by the act.

So why wait? Consult with your tax advisor today to determine if you are eligible to take advantage of The Small Business Jobs and Credit Act of 2010. If it is high time you get your communication house in order, contact Alternate Access to find out what our Voice over IP phone solutions can do for you. Get a triple benefit of increased functionality, lower ongoing communication costs and a tax break from Uncle Sam.* Make your holidays extra special this year!

*** Consult with your tax advisor about the deductibility of any equipment prior to purchase.**

(...*Communication Triumvirate continued*)

1. Enlist the help of a networking expert. That's right – an actual expert. Don't hire your Uncle Bill who may have dabbled in cabling or your 18-year-old niece who is a whiz with computers. Talk with your colleagues and business contacts, and do a little research to locate a reputable, dependable networking professional. Larger companies may hire such a professional to their staff or keep them on retainer, where smaller businesses may consider hiring them on a project basis. Develop a positive working relationship with this expert, and have them help you assess your network on an ongoing basis to identify areas of improvement.

2. Create a model server room. Your server "room" may be a renovated closet or a larger space up-fitted to your specifications. Whatever space you allot, take the time to make it ideal. Make sure the space is temperature-regulated. Servers run best in a constant cool temperature with no moisture. Place servers on a table or shelving unit, or in a server cabinet or equipment rack, adequate to support the weight of the servers and networking equipment and to provide access to both from the front and back. Do NOT set your server on the floor and set other appliances, books or items atop it. Dust and sweep the space regularly. Excess dust can clog server fans, causing them to overheat. Finally, make sure each server is connected to a commercial strength UPS battery back-up.

3. Make cabling "home run" to the server/equipment room. Evaluate your network cabling. Within the server room, your cabling should be neatly organized and easily accessible. Make sure that all equipment and cabling is properly labeled. Doing so now will make it easier to troubleshoot future support issues, whereas a messy and chaotic cabling job will lengthen the resolution of support issues. From the various locations in your office, cabling should be "home run" to the location of your network equipment. Make sure cabling is neatly run to all switches, your phone server and any routers. Cabling should be tested and patch cords should be factory made to ensure an optimum cabling configuration.

4. Understand your network traffic. Both volume and quality of bandwidth directly affect VoIP. Ask your networking expert to explain which traffic is local to the LAN and which must travel over your Internet connection. Also, log what applications are on your network, such as Microsoft Office or your accounting software, as well as any critical virus or spam protection software. With this knowledge, examine your business functions and needs, as well as those of individual users, throughout the day.

For example, are you primarily sending standard business e-mail? Do you copy very large documents and image files around the network? Do you need to transfer large documents outside your network that must go across your Internet connection?

Use this information to work with your networking resource to better understand your network traffic, select adequate bandwidth and reduce the possibility for latency, packet loss and jitter.

5. Use high-end PoE switches. With a VoIP phone system, phones should not be powered by a power strip under your desk. Instead, they should be powered centrally from the server room. As such, high-end Power over Ethernet (PoE) switches, backed up by a UPS battery, are required. These switches should also be designed for Quality of Service (QoS), which, as it pertains to voice, is a measure of the reliability, consistency and overall perceived audio quality of a call. Attempting to daisy-chain smaller, economy-priced switches from the server room will result in poor call quality.

By following these VoIP rules of thumb, you have a better chance of setting up your VoIP network right the first time – once and done. You will also build a stronger foundation from which you, with the assistance of the networking professional you choose, can maintain a stable and secure VoIP network in the future. Having an expert to help you plan, implement and maintain your VoIP network will provide peace of mind and ease of daily operations.