

VOID

ANALYSIS



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1. Abstract

The purpose of this paper is to compare and organize information about the leading VoIP providers. VoIP (Voice over Internet Protocol) is a telephony service that uses the internet in lieu of traditional telephone lines to transmit voice. As a result, additional features such as video chat are often available. All VoIP services require you to have an active internet connection.

2. What Is VoIP And Why Should You Use It?

VoIP stands for Voice over Internet Protocol, and is essentially a telephone on your computer. Rather than sending voice signals over traditional telephone lines, the internet is used to transmit the data.

VoIP technology started to gain popularity in 2004 when mass-market VoIP services were introduced. Corporations noted their efficiency and low costs, and began migrating to internet-based telephony as opposed to traditional copper wire. It wasn't long before consumers caught on to the convenience of the technology, and a new industry was born.

VoIP services allow voice chat through a microphone and speakers, a headset, or – depending on the carrier – their own brand of wireless (Wi-Fi) phone. Some providers even offer devices that connect to the phones in your house, allowing you to send the signal over the internet.

Voice over internet protocol technology can be either software or hardware-based. Software-based VoIP consists of programs like Skype, which you install on your computer. Hardware-based VoIP interfaces directly with your existing devices, as mentioned above.

A highlight of VoIP is that it allows voice as well as data to be transferred. This has allowed a feature dubbed “unified communications” to exist. Unified communications includes:

- Phone calls
- Faxes
- Voicemail
- E-mail
- Web conferences
- Video capabilities

Unified communications are typically only included in high-level corporate packages.

So why should you use VoIP? Both individuals as well as corporations can expect lower costs than traditional telephone systems. Lower cost plus additional features makes it clear why VoIP technology has been on the rise.

3. How to Choose a VoIP Provider

Whether you are an individual or part of a corporation, there are several things to keep in mind when choosing a VoIP provider:

- Will you just use a computer or is it important to have a wireless phone?
- What features are important to you? Do you need voicemail? Video capabilities? Web conferencing?
- Is the software compatible with your operating system? Is the software still being updated?
- Do you need international calling?
- Would you prefer a service that is a flat monthly fee or pay-as-you-go?

Be sure to keep these thoughts in mind as you consider different services. Businesses should take the time to create a formal list of required features and then match them against our chart.

3.1. Should I choose a Monthly Plan or a Pay-As-You-Go service?

Choosing the right plan depends entirely on how you want to use the service. If you think you'll just use it a little, a pay-as-you-go plan is almost always the right choice because it will be less expensive. If you are planning on using the service a lot or want to make international calls, then a monthly plan may be the best choice.

4. Features and Terminology

4.1. Definitions

Video Calling – Some software based VoIP providers have video chat capabilities. If you have a webcam, these programs will let the person you are talking to see your face. Applications like Apple's Facetime and Skype have made webcams extremely popular, and the latest in VoIP software-based technology takes advantage of this. Obviously, you must be using a computer program for video calling to work – your handset phone has no ability to record video.

Call Mobile Phones and Landlines – Some VoIP providers are unable to call landlines and cell phones. For the most part, this happens with programs that are software-based, though it's rare that VoIP technology can't interface directly with landlines these days.

Free Calls on Service Network – Certain providers allow free calls on their own network. Skype, for instance, allows you to chat with other Skype users at no charge. Vonage is another provider that offers this complimentary service.

Conference Calls – A conference call gives a group of people the ability to communicate with each other simultaneously. They are most frequently used in business settings, but groups of individuals, such as gamers tend to use conference calls often.

Mobile Application – Many providers now offer mobile applications for iPhone or Android. These applications typically allow you to piggyback the VoIP service on your cellular data connection, resulting in a greatly increased number of minutes available without incurring additional charges.

SMS – Standard text messaging service. Some VoIP providers allow you to send texts directly to cell phones.

Caller ID – The ability to see who is calling you. When you receive an incoming call, a message is displayed telling you the person's name, if they are in your contacts. Otherwise, only their number is displayed.

Send Files – Many computer-based VoIPs allow you to send files to the person you're having a discussion with.

Voice Mail – The ability for people who call you to leave a voice message.

Call Transfer – The ability to send a call to another person or another line.

Free Plan Available – Some providers offer free basic plans at no cost to the consumer, especially if it is for non-commercial use.

Pay-As-You-Go Price – The amount you will pay per minute of usage. Most international rates are calculated in this way.

Monthly Plan – The amount you will spend on your VoIP service each month.

Unlimited Plan (World) – Some providers offer unlimited global plans.

Emergency Calls – Historically VoIP technology was unable to place calls to 911. Now, most providers are able to connect the call.

Use of Phone – Many VoIP providers ship a piece of hardware that allows you to use your own phone with the service. By using an adapter, there is no reason to buy a special and often more expensive phone.

International Plan Available – Does the provider offer international plans?

Module – What type of connection does the provider offer?

Software: Computer-based.

Home Adapter: A piece of hardware that connects your current phone to the internet.

Phone: Some providers carry their own branded phone that you can buy.

4.2. Standard Features of VoIP Providers

Through our research, we have found that VoIP services typically have a few standard features:

- The ability to call mobile phones and landlines
- Allow at least 3-way calling if not conference calls
- Caller ID
- Have a mobile application
- Priced extraordinarily reasonably; the cheapest plan starts at \$3/month (Skype)
- The service will generally work over your computer or by the use of an adapter, most often mailed to you at no cost.

5. Provider Reviews

5.1. SKYPE

Pros

Easy to use, works well, frequently updated, very cheap prices, good security.

Cons

Frequent interface changes in the last couple of years.

Conclusion

Skype is a massive company. Initially a small start-up, it was first purchased by EBay and then acquired by Microsoft for \$8.5 billion. Now that Microsoft has purchased Skype, they plan to integrate the technology into Windows, Xbox, and a host of other software applications.

Having created their own proprietary method of sending voice over IP, the fact is Skype works extremely well. The voice chat is crystal clear and the software is easy to use. An additional feature, if you are using speakers, is that Skype actively cancels out the voice of the other person so they don't hear themselves as an echo.

Skype is a solid service with extraordinarily cheap plans. If you are looking for a great software-based provider, the service comes highly recommended.

5.2. VONAGE

Pros

Reduced cost over traditional telephony services, interfaces directly with your home equipment so you don't have to buy additional telephones.

Cons

Requires additional hardware to integrate your phone with the internet (currently free on new accounts), not the cheapest of VoIPs.

Conclusion

Vonage was one of the first VoIP companies to reach massive popularity, though a few years ago it fell off a bit due to increased competition. By focusing on good service and marketing, they are starting to gain ground.

Their service is good with clear phone calls and easy setup. Enjoy free calls Vonage to Vonage and make use of the mobile application for your phone. Overall, Vonage is highly recommended if you're planning on integrating VoIP into your existing telephones.

5.3. VENTRILO

Pros

Easy to use, small in size, uses virtually no system or internet resources.

Cons

Requires mild computer literacy knowledge to set up, UI is lacking in aesthetic appeal.

Conclusion

Ventrilo, commonly referred to as "Vent," is used primarily for groups of people. This tiny program utilizes virtually no bandwidth and is highly efficient. As a result, people who do a fair amount of conferencing favor it.

The UI is slightly lacking and it does take a bit of technological knowledge to set up, though once set up is complete, Ventrilo does work extraordinarily well.

5.4. TEAM SPEAK

Pros

Flagship software for gamers, clear calls, small program.

Cons

Requires mild computer literacy to set up, UI is an improvement over Ventrilo but still isn't amazing

Conclusion

If you're a gamer, Team Speak is the most established player in the VoIP gaming field. Best for hosting large conferences, Team Speak is customized for the gaming community. They also have a well-established SDK so your corporation can integrate the software into your own product offerings if you desire.

Highly recommend if you are a gamer or in need of an SDK, otherwise there are simpler programs available that will better match your needs.

5.5. GOOGLE TALK

Pros

A tiny program which also runs in Gmail, easy to use, unlimited free calling in US and Canada – even to landlines and cell phones

Cons

Service is very simple and lacks many telephony advanced features. No monthly plans.

Conclusion

If you live in the US or Canada and you want to make unlimited free calls to landlines and cell phones, this is the best program on the market. Voice comes across crisp and clear as does the video. There are no monthly plans available but the pay as you go rates are so cheap you won't even think of complaining.

5.6. VoIP.COM

Pros

Every plan comes with 60 free international calling minutes monthly, a plethora of standard telephony features, a free second line, and easy setup

Cons

Limited to being only for voice calls, few additional features available.

Conclusion

This provider is not the cheapest, but it has a great reputation for working flawlessly. The nicest thing about VoIP.com is the plethora of features you get. While it can only do telephony, it does an excellent job of that – and who wouldn't like a second line, unlimited incoming calls (which is standard across VoIP services), and no activation fee.

VoIP.com is a solid replacement for standard telephone lines – and that's what it should be seen as. Any users wanting more advanced features such as video should pick another provider.

5.7. LINGO

Pros

Low monthly rates compared to other VoIP providers

Cons

Some users report inconsistent call quality, few features.

Conclusion

The most attractive part about Lingo is its pricing; compared to other VoIP providers it is downright cheap. Unfortunately, that low cost also means call quality isn't the best. There is a 30-day money-back guarantee and a free first month, so you can see if the service is up to par without any risk.

There is nothing too complicated about this: cheaper price for cheaper quality. Perfect for buyers wanting to spend as little as possible, but if the quality is what you seek than Vonage would be a better option.

5.8. 8X8

Pros

Comprehensive package, excellent for businesses.

Cons

More expensive, not as friendly for home use, will pay \$39.99 activation fee.

Conclusion

Initially 8X8 was called Packet 8, a firm more residentially focused. Now they've rebranded and the difference shows: 8X8 is a dream package for businesses needing a rock solid VoIP solution.

The business focus from 8X8 is obvious. It is pricier but it does come with the full gambit of features. We wouldn't recommend 8X8 for individuals, but if you run a medium or large company they might just be the first place you should look.

5.9. PHONEPOWER

Pros

Highly reviewed, free second line, free equipment, 60 free international minutes/month

Cons

When your contract ends, they automatically begin billing you higher.

Conclusion

PhonePower is packed with features at a very good price. Their long-term subscriptions really knock the price down – as low as \$8.33/month, one of the cheapest plans available. The service is reliable and like most of the VoIP providers, offers 911 access.

PhonePower has better voice clarity than some of the other services making it an excellent choice if you can get over the fact that they will automatically start billing you at higher rates once your contract ends.

5.10. VIA TALK

Pros

Affordable plans with a plethora of features, comes with an attractive and easy to use web control panel.

Cons

Low call volume, long delay after dialing a number, 911 service costs extra.

Conclusion

Via Talk has come a long way since its initial release. A company once known for terrible service has turned things around to become a well-respected VoIP company. Its cheap plan prices and perfect mix of features makes this provider an excellent choice.

The web control panel is something they really put effort into developing – and it shows. Say goodbye to those annoying menus when you try to set up your phone. Here you simply log into your account online, change your settings to what you desire, hit save, and you're done.

Overall, Via Talk is an excellent choice. Fair pricing, good features, and amazing control panel make it worth the money.

6. VoIP Providers Pricing Matrix

8x8	
Monthly	\$49.99
Monthly Metered	\$49.99/month + 2.9 cents per min after 250 mins
Monthly (Unlimited World)	\$104.99
Google Talk Pricing	
Pay-As-You-Go	From 1 cent/minute
Lingo	
Monthly (US & Canada 250)	\$9.95
Monthly (US & Canada 500)	\$16.95
Monthly (America Unlimited)	\$21.95
Monthly (Unlimited World)	\$23.95
PhonePower	
Monthly (pay upfront)	\$8.33/month (average)
\$14.95	
\$16.95	
\$19.95	
Skype Pricing	
Pay-As-You-Go	From 2.3 cents/minute
Subscriptions	From 1.2 cents/minute
Unlimited US & Canada	\$2.99/month
Premium Plan	\$4.49/month
Unlimited World	\$13.99/month
Team Speak Pricing	
Corporate Version	From \$25/month
Ventrilo Pricing	
Licensed Version	Unlisted Price

Via Talk	
Monthly (Unlimited US & Canada)	\$15.75/month
Monthly (Lite Plan)	\$10.95/month
Monthly (Business 1500)	\$34.95/month
Monthly (Business Unlimited US & Canada)	\$42.95/month
VoIP.com	
Monthly Plan (2-year term)	\$14.95/month
Monthly Plan (no term)	\$19.95/month
World Plan	\$179.95/year
Vonage Pricing	
Pay-As-You-Go	Not Available
Monthly (US & Canada Unlimited)	\$9.99/month
Monthly (US & Canada 300)	\$11.99/month
Monthly (US & Canada 750)	\$19.99/month
Monthly (US & Canada Unlimited)	\$34.99/month
Monthly (Unlimited World)	\$54.99/month
Monthly (Small Business 1500)	\$39.99/month
Monthly (Small Business Unlimited)	\$49.99/month