

COVER STORY

tems Inc., headquartered in San Jose, Calif., "You've got to sit down with that customer and understand their business needs. What do they want to accomplish, and how can the technology address that?"

It's a matter of establishing where the customer wants to be in the next 12, 24, and 36 months, Stanton says. "You need to make sure that not only does that initial implementation go well, but that the integration partner has presented the right platform, so that, as the business's needs change and grow, the [communications solution] can grow and evolve with them."

"Establish the scope," says Pierce. "Are we talking about just a single location, or a number of locations? Are all of those locations, just a few, or just one [getting the VoIP installation]?"

2. Establish the Goals

Why is the business considering a move to VoIP? Jim Cavanagh, knowledge transfer agent at Atlanta-based The Consultant Registry, says it's one of the first things he asks. "And they often give me that deer-in-the-headlights look that says: 'Are you stupid? This is the future.'" They

may have heard the buzz about tremendous cost savings," Cavanagh says. However, he adds, "A lot of them find out that VoIP may cost a certain percentage more than doing it the old way." Also, he says, "The really compelling reason to make the shift to VoIP is manufacturer discontinuation of their equipment."

Therefore, advises Cavanagh: "Make absolutely certain that the customer is doing this for the right reason. The customer will respect you and you'll have a better relationship, long-term, if you're taking their side."

Ted Wallingford, founder and executive consultant for Elyria, Ohio-based IT consulting firm Best Technology Strategy, says that relying too heavily upon carrier savings as a means of justifying the cost of the project is a prime pitfall. "If your target savings delta isn't met, then you end up blowing your project budget or you don't get the ROI you were expecting by engaging in the project," he says. "I've seen it happen over and over."

Wong of Network Architects calls selling VoIP solely on the basis of saving money on long-distance costs "a five-year-old model." The message

his company tries to convey to customers is: "The reason for doing VoIP is the productivity benefits you get when you integrate the telephone and a computer together, and what that can do."

3. Educate the Customer

Educating the customer and properly setting expectations are closely intertwined. Joe Scotto, global director for small business solutions marketing at Avaya, headquartered in Basking Ridge, N.J., observes: "There are going to be fewer pitfalls with larger businesses," as the larger firms usually have in-house IT staff who can speak the technical lingo. But for smaller businesses, "there's less that they understand, so the onus is on the VAR to educate and really make sure that what they are saying is setting the right expectations—and making sure that the customer really understands what it means."

Scotto says that a situation in which education is needed "could be something like softphone usage. [A softphone is software used for making calls over the Internet using a computer.] Someone who's familiar with softphones has an expectation of the quality, because they know that the

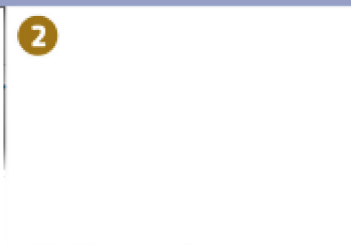
IP TELEPHONY SOLUTIONS FOR SMBs

A number of vendors offer portions of an IP telephony solution, while others provide the complete solution. Here, we highlight some product solution sets from among those that offer a complete solution—IP PBX and IP phones.



Allworx Corp.

Allworx phone systems (image 1) are designed for up to 100 users per site. Products include the Allworx 6x, 10x, and 24x systems (analog and VoIP), and Allworx 9200 series and 9100 series phones with traditional key or PBX system functionality. Software options provide call assistant, call queuing, conference bridging, and VPN. Allworx systems can also function as email and Web servers, SPI firewalls, and routers.



Avaya Inc.

Avaya's flagship IP telephone system for SMBs is Avaya IP Office, a scalable IP PBX platform that serves businesses with up to 270 seats (depending on exact configuration). It can be paired with a number of IP phones, such as the Avaya 5610 (image 2). For smaller offices, Avaya offers its Quick Edition solution, which handles up to 20 IP phones. Quick Edition features a distributed architecture in which the IP PBX server function is incorporated into each phone.