Hosted VoIP Provides Critical Capabilities for Distributed Enterprises

Introduction

Today's digital economy is moving at the speed of light. For distributed enterprises to keep up—and get ahead—they need to effectively connect and communicate across disparate locations, systems, employees, partners and customers.

In addition to introducing new ways of thinking about data connectivity for digital transformation, the distributed enterprise is driving new demands on the voice systems that are critical to modern operations. While companies can be reluctant to shake up reliable voice systems that work well as they are, new functions and capabilities are key in efforts to make communications more effective across any location—and today's mobile workforce. Given these evolving requirements, enterprises are embracing hosted voice over IP (VoIP) services.

Benefits of the cloud model are impossible to ignore, and use of these services has increased dramatically in just the past few years. Now organizations want the advantages of next-generation VoIP features without the overhead of managing and administering infrastructure. Hosted VoIP works across all of an enterprise's offices, warehouses, branch locations and stores, and supports home and mobile workers.

The migration to hosted VoIP services is a continuation of the trend toward consistent service delivery of voice services at lower prices. Previously, the move to Session Initiation Protocol (SIP) trunking saved money through consolidation. However, organizations soon realized that these savings were capped; they still needed dedicated staff and had to assume the cost of maintenance contracts for equipment and other expenses. In contrast, hosted VoIP services offer far greater savings by delivering "cloud economics."

An excellent fit for the distributed enterprise

Hosted VoIP provides a modern and fundamentally improved set of capabilities that are closely aligned with the needs of today's distributed enterprise. The benefits of this approach have a positive impact on virtually every aspect of the usage model.

For starters, cloud economics offer numerous financial benefits and a dramatic improvement in return on investment. The economic concept of efficiency of scale is put to real-world use by cloud service providers (CSP). One of the most important differences between hosted VoIP and on-premises hardware is that the hosted solution does not require the organization to make a capital expenditure on hardware to support voice services. There are also substantial staff cost savings, since the CSP handles many of the management and administrative tasks of the platform. And because hosted services are delivered on a contracted basis, there are no budget surprises. The CSP also simplifies cost allocations and chargebacks if required.

Another major cost savings is the elimination of redundant infrastructure for resiliency and preventing service interruptions in the event of a natural disaster, major power outage or other event. The cost of redundant systems can be as much as 75% of the initial systems investment.

From an operating perspective, a key benefit of hosted VoIP services is the ability to deliver consistent capabilities and functionality to all locations, both commercial and residential. This allows employees of the distributed enterprise to work from anywhere, an essential capability for the modern organization. Home- or small-office-based employees get headquarters-level services and capabilities, enhancing the professional appearance of the entire organization. It is also important to note that using consistent functionality in all locations simplifies user training and increases productivity for employees who work in multiple locations, even if it's just their home or local office. Consistency also reduces the number of technical support calls, as confusion around using different VoIP systems is mitigated.

A corollary benefit to this consistency is the ability to globally roll out new features so that all employees have access to them at the same time. A global rollout ensures that collaboration activities remain in sync and that users can work efficiently. Older infrastructure that requires phased rollouts not only raises costs, but also introduces a substantial level of complexity, lowering user satisfaction.

Finally, hosted VoIP allows for faster delivery of new features and capabilities, removing from the upgrade cycle time the long process of testing new software

and ensuring its reliability. That's why working with the right hosted service provider is essential. Best-in-class providers have substantial "test and deploy" resources, meaning they can ensure rapid delivery of new features with a high level of quality.

Compelling new features coming from best-in-class hosted VoIP service providers

In addition to global rollouts, it is just as important that your hosted VoIP provider can offer real innovation. Best-in-class providers deliver advanced functionality to streamline and boost the effectiveness of business and operating processes. These services not only empower employees, but in most cases deliver an improved customer experience that increases customer loyalty and company revenues. Some of the most compelling features include:

- **Simultaneous ring:** This feature provides automated call forwarding from desk phones to cell phones. The ability to "follow" employees from desk phones to mobile phones shortens the time to connect for both employees and customers. It also lowers frustration for all parties and delivers improved customer service.

- **Integration of messaging and voice:** With the ability to link text messaging and voice, it becomes simple to turn a group chat or message string into a conference call to make decisions or handle issues more effectively. This technology also allows information to move seamlessly from text to voice-based delivery for more efficient communication.

- **Hunt groups:** This functionality allows for an unanswered call to be distributed to other members of a team based on documented rules for distribution. This improves customer service

and interaction by dramatically increasing the likelihood of connection on the first try. This feature also simplifies group collaboration and interaction, with the ability to forward calls to any location or individual with a hosted VoIP service.

- **Simplified hoteling:** "Hoteling" is the concept of allowing workers to dynamically choose the specific physical workspace they want to use. Many enterprises today are looking to reduce the cost of office space and create more workforce flexibility, so it is essential that their VoIP systems support free movement of staff. Hosted VoIP services provide an excellent solution, since hoteling is supported at any location an employee chooses.

- **Soft phones for laptops and PCs:** The ability to use a soft phone that runs on a traditional PC platform provides greater flexibility for employees, enabling them to effectively place calls anywhere they have an Internet connection. In cases when a smartphone is lost, has a dead battery or may not be available, employees can use VoIP services for business continuity. Hosted VoIP solutions can provide this functionality seamlessly from any location.

- **Busy lamp field:** This feature makes it easy for another employee to see if someone is available or on a call. This saves time because fewer calls go to voicemail, and it simplifies voice calling because it is now possible to make calls only when the other person is available.

Hosted VoIP services enable administrative control and employee mobility

One of the most challenging aspects of mobility is that many organizations have limited insight into the usage of employees' smartphones. For many employees, their

personal smartphone is their primary business tool through which they access vast amounts of corporate data and proprietary information. This creates numerous management, security, compliance and legal issues. IT organizations have responded quickly by implementing new tools for protecting enterprise data on mobile devices in general, including mobile device management solutions and data security products. However, there are some smartphone security issues that demand particular attention. For example, a user's contacts may contain proprietary business information or personal data that bad actors may want to gain access to.

Offering organizations a new level of visibility and administrative control over voice functionality, a hosted VoIP service provider can assign the employee a business number that the organization owns and controls. The business number is used for contacting the personal cell phone of the employee for all business-related activity, allowing the organization to not only track and manage usage in a way that has not been possible before, but also control the disposition of the contact number. Employees still receive personal calls through their own number, but all business calls are made using the corporate-owned number.

Further, organizations previously had to conduct a "fire drill" to regain control over the voice usage of an employee's device when that person's employment status changed. But with this new level of control, when employees leave the organization, their authorized access to hosted VoIP services can be immediately revoked, and all business calls can be redirected to their replacement. This ensures that customers are going to get a fast response when there is a change in personnel. Also, this automated solution

mitigates the need to communicate new contact information to customers and external parties, enabling them to quickly note the change and update their own contacts database. In addition, using a hosted VoIP service allows managers to quickly eliminate access for any user that leaves the organization.

This capability is even more important when an employee goes to work for a competitor. Without this feature, an ex-employee could still receive business calls related to the previous employer's business, potentially providing valuable information to the new company.

In addition, very real compliance issues can arise without this functionality. For example, if a financial adviser changes firms but the customer isn't aware and leaves instructions to buy, sell or change investments or products, that creates a potential compliance issue, as confidential information has been passed to the wrong organization. Similar privacy scenarios could arise in healthcare as well.

Combining a world-class network with the cloud

Organizations should choose a hosted VoIP provider that can also build, manage and design a network solution to meet the needs of a distributed enterprise. Given today's compliance and legal requirements, it is now time to quickly deploy a solution that can meet these demands. Hosted VoIP services are generally the best way to do this quickly, with a comprehensive set of features for both the organization and employees. These services allow organizations to deploy new and engaging applications for customers and employees with consistent functionality and features.

Key takeaways

As distributed enterprises find increasing value in hosted or cloud services, hosted VoIP services offer a number of important benefits, both financial and feature focused. Use of these hosted or cloud services is growing rapidly because they are well aligned to the needs of distributed enterprises. Hosted VoIP services deliver cloud economics that reduce Capex and Opex, and dramatically reduce IT resource requirements for already overstretched staff. From a feature perspective, hosted VoIP services can introduce a wide range of new capabilities, and deliver them more quickly and effectively to employees in every location, enabling greater productivity across a distributed enterprise.
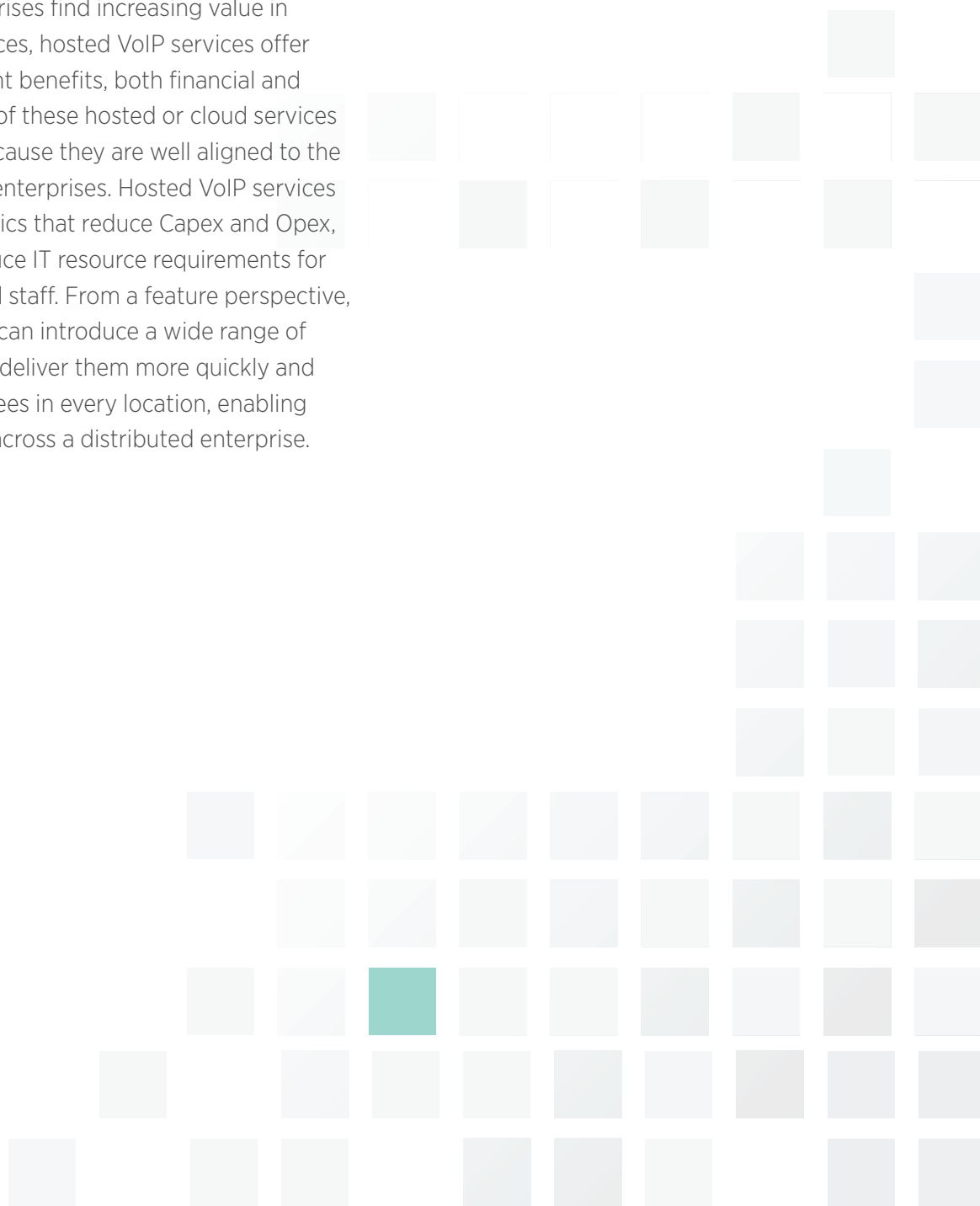
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