

Telephone Systems

Convergence Drives Telephone Industry

'You could be rolling down the highway, listen to your e-mails.'

By George Nelson

When Deane Wurst founded Tele-Solutions Inc. in 1985, determining a company's communications needs wasn't much more complicated than asking the customer how many phones and phone lines he wanted.

"Facsimile was on the rise. No one had voice mail," he recalls. Today, however, facsimiles are becoming more e-mail related, and voice mail is "almost mandatory," he says.

"Everything is computerized now, so convergence is probably the biggest word," says Wurst, president of the Boardman-based company. "There is a convergence between voice and data. You hear about voice over [Internet Protocol or VoIP] all the time, but it's way more than VoIP."

Unified messaging, as the industry refers to it, offers a wide range of capabilities. "People want more than lines and desk sets out of their telephone systems today," he remarks.

These kinds of links started to take place about eight years ago; companies were willing to incur the expense. Since then, the cost of networking has come down "dramatically," Wurst notes.

"It's getting to the point where at a lot of the companies, the data, the network and the voice communications are all on the same platform. It all goes to the same box," Wurst says.

With unified messaging, he continues, the computer recognizes the kinds of data – fax, voice or whatever – and directs them to the appropriate location.

One example of the benefits offered by merging voice and data that Wurst offers is the ability of an individual to call in by telephone, listen to his voice mail and access his e-mails as well. "At the end, it will ask you if you want to reply," he explains.

The recipient could verbally reply; the system would record that as a WAV file and then e-mail the recorded response to the sender. "So you could be rolling down the highway, listen to your e-mails, respond, and never actually touch a computer – at least not physically," he says. "There are lots of those kind of applications."

Through Microsoft Outlook on his desktop, Wurst also can click on a person's stored data and make a phone call. "Once I put somebody in Outlook, I never have to look up their phone number again. I never have to dial it again because of the connection between my computer system," he explains.

The system also can be used to route calls to his



Today's telephone systems offer a wide range of capabilities, says Deane Wurst, founder of Tele-Solutions, Boardman.

office that meet a programmed set of parameters – from a major client, Wurst remarks, or perhaps

his wife – to "search" for him on his cell or home phone.

In addition, VoIP technology also allows a business to network many locations at far less cost, and even smaller companies with more than one site can take advantage of such applications. These systems let companies connect their customers more efficiently with specialists at other locations. As far as the customer is concerned, that individual is on site.

Investments in these systems are made with an eye toward the bottom line, whether by cutting costs or improving productivity. While these new systems often require businesses to buy new hardware, Wurst says it is "not uncommon" for them to justify the expense by the money they save. For example, a system installed for a company in Louisville, he says, is saving that company about \$50,000 a year.

"In today's economy everybody is trying to get the most bang for their buck, but it becomes our job to uncover their needs and identify applications that would be good for their business," Wurst remarks. "It's not a price-only environment anymore. Most businesses have always been dependent on their communications to their clients. But because it's e-mail, it's voicemail, it's fax – all those have to be converged into one thing and interact with one another effectively so they can compete with the people they have to compete with."

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