

Hosted VoIP

All providers are NOT the same!

At Hipcom we share the Comms Business vision that VoIP will 'emerge from the hype and deliver on it's promise' in 2006. Our take on this is particularly in relation to the new opportunity which hosted solutions are bringing, but we understand that for many resellers this ever-increasing part of the VoIP story is probably raising more questions than it is delivering answers. As pioneers in this very new space, our aim is to help resellers understand VoIP technology, to learn how to implement the right solutions for customers and to ultimately grow their businesses as a result.

When talking to partners about hosted VoIP we have discovered that many do not realise the extent of the learning curve that is required. Essentially, voice becomes an application which runs on your customer's data network and as such, it is not an independent system which you can fully control in the same way you would with a traditional phone system. When implementing a VoIP solution, you need to make sure that it will work in your customer's unique environment. Hosted IP Telephony relies on the network infrastructure which is already in place - and elements such as the customer's LAN, firewall, security settings, connectivity and even the cabling suddenly become involved, making everything far more complex.

At Hipcom, our key strength is our experience in the VoIP marketplace, both from a technical and commercial point of view. Our leadership team has worked in the channel for many years, initially with traditional vendors deploying the early IP PBXs and Cisco Call Manager platforms – and now today with Hipcom, where we believe we are leading the way in breaking new ground with the Hosted Telephony market. Whether you are from a voice or a data background there are bound to be gaps in your knowledge and you must choose a provider who can help you identify your strengths and then work with you to bridge the gaps in between.

The title of this supplement is 'The Reseller Guide to VoIP' - so if you are a company that is starting to think about adding a hosted offering to its portfolio, what questions do you need to ask of potential providers? We think that these 10 are key:

1. How much money am I going to make out of selling these solutions – and at what stage in the sales cycle?
2. With no cap-ex for the customer, how long will it be before my cost of sale is covered and I start to make a profit?
3. Can I talk to one of your partners to gain an understanding of the benefits of the relationship?
4. Can you show me a real live customer situation and explain how it is working for them?
5. What is the pedigree of your chosen vendor partners for elements like base platform, provisioning, media gateways, IP handsets and so on?
6. Does your solution enable me to offer not only a completely hosted solution, but also a migratory approach using business trunking that will enable my customers to keep their existing PBXs?
7. What support will you offer me if I want to take a white label solution and re-brand this as my own?
8. Will your provisioning software enable me to offer the service without my partners even being aware that it's not entirely my own?
9. If everything goes really well, can you actually sell me an entire platform – and let me migrate my existing customer licenses with it?
10. How detailed a level of technical expertise do I need to have before I can start implementing these solutions – and do you have the right background and skill-set to help me to fill the gaps in my knowledge base?

We cannot answer all of these in detail right here of course, but if this is the type of information that you are seeking, we invite you to ask us – and then ask every other hosted VoIP vendor out there in the marketplace today. We believe that the differentiation will soon start to become apparent.