

# Panasonic: Blurring Boundaries and Shattering Silos in Business Telephony

December 15, 2010

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audience: IT professionals, Telephony professionals, SMB decision makers, Enterprise decision makers

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## Introduction

It may be true that as Gertrude Stein famously said, “A rose is a rose is a rose.” But where businesses and their communications needs are concerned, it’s definitely no longer true (if it ever was) that a phone is a phone is a phone. For many if not most business users, “the phone” has evolved and continues to evolve as its role in effective business communications expands. Panasonic brings a unique combination of strengths to this dynamic marketplace, offering solutions that blend legacy and modern technologies to offer basic and enhanced functionality.

## Analysis

Telephony is changing, from “plain ol’ telephone service” (or “POTS”) to voice and unified communications (UC) often running atop Internet Protocol (IP) network infrastructures. But many businesses still have significant capital and experience invested in legacy telephone systems, and are still deriving business benefits from those investments.

Meanwhile, the views of those buying and using business telephony systems are also in flux. That audience now includes growing numbers of younger, “IP-aware” people who have never worked in organizations with separate voice and data networks or management. But the ultimate audience for telephony services still includes those whose needs or desires for advanced or enhanced services is minimal or non-existent, at least for now.

Further, delivering basic dial tone has given way to a more systematic, strategic approach to telephony, focused on connecting workers to each other, to customers and to needed resources wherever they may be. But delivering basic dial tone is still business-critical and especially challenging in some geographies or where mobility support is also needed.

What’s needed is a solution set that embraces both legacy and modern technologies and approaches. Such a solution set would enable business telephony decision makers to keep using what’s in place and working, and combine it with the most useful strengths of the old and the new.

Panasonic has positioned its business telephony business and solutions in direct response to this need, precisely between “pure-IP” and “pure-legacy” providers. Panasonic takes what it calls a “converged IP” approach that embraces both legacy and modern handsets, PBXs and network connections.

The Panasonic approach results in solutions that can be tailored to specific user needs without forcing those users to adopt new technologies before such changes make maximum business sense, according to company executives. Examples include the following.

**Hospitality:** Panasonic telephony solutions for the hospitality industry combine advanced call routing and management features for guests and employees with support for in-place, still-functioning non-IP handsets. This allows hospitality providers to deliver more efficient communications and better guest care without requiring expensive wholesale replacement of legacy equipment.

**Wireless Integration:** Panasonic also offers integration of wireless telephones compliant with the Digital Enhanced Cordless Telecommunications (DECT) with PBXs via traditional or IP-connections. DECT handsets communicate with those PBXs through Panasonic access points. Advanced calling and management features can thus be extended seamlessly to users of DECT-compliant wireless telephones.

**Logistics and Security:** “Door phones” commonly found in warehouses and similar environments can be integrated with cameras and other telephones, including those equipped with displays. Users can then not only monitor cameras from any authorized telephone or PC, but can also lock and unlock individual doors for enhanced security.

Panasonic is also evolving as a business in response to changing technologies and user needs. The company recognizes that many businesses rely upon resellers to choose and implement telephony solutions. However, sophistication of resellers and integrators varies widely, especially in the face of the advent of IP telephony. Panasonic is actively recruiting channel partners with more understanding of IP, data and networks and is offering extensive training to those channel partner training, executives told Focus.com.

Panasonic also offers numerous financing options to business telephony buyers. Smaller businesses have been disproportionately affected by the credit crunch, which makes those financing programs more important and attractive to such businesses, the Panasonic executives said. Financing makes available to resource-constrained companies advanced telephony solutions that can improve their competitiveness.

Panasonic’s telephony operations are also well positioned for a future in which the “consumerization” of business technologies is likely to continue and accelerate. For example, larger, multi-building private residences and commercial environments can benefit equally from solutions that can integrate support and management of wired telephony with DECT-compliant wireless phones, door phones, cameras and other security features. Panasonic can draw upon years of experience and success in consumer electronics markets to respond to the continuing blurring of distinctions between business and consumer needs and solutions.

## Recommendations

Numerous trends underscore the continuing growth of IP telephony. These include the increasing use of Session Initiation Protocol (SIP)-compliant trunks and telephones (some based on open source technologies) and the retirement of expensive, high-capacity T-1 lines in favor of IP-based links.

However, not every business is ready for a wholesale move to IP telephony. Many could not financially justify such a move, even if there were business incentives to make it. If yours is just such a business, you should look closely at Panasonic, its offerings and its ecosystem of development and channel partners. Panasonic competes effectively with vendors such as Alcatel and Cisco, and offers combinations of functionality, affordability and support unmatched by most if not all competitors.

## Disclosures and References

This Brief was originally published on Focus.com.

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