

Hybrid IP-PBX's – What's Next?

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The Dell'Oro Group report excerpt released January 29th states that Hybrid IP-PBX/TDM system revenues are predicted to decline starting in 2010.



In three years what will become of the Hybrid IP-PBX?

In the past couple of years we've had numerous discussions with manufacturers about this and as have, I'm fairly certain many other dealers and VARs. In addressing what will happen with the Hybrid IP-PBX it's expedient to discuss other questions first.

What makes the IP-PBX better than the Hybrid IP-PBX?

The first early successes of the IP-PBX were pretty simple. Would you pay someone to come to your office to change the font used for letters sent from your company? Today, that's the same scenario as hiring someone to change speed dial, extension names, and make simple moves-adds-changes (MACs) to your telephone system. Laugh now but just a few years ago most were found not laughing and instead paying the bill for MAC expenses.

Where the IP-PBX has excelled are in the areas of advanced applications and packing voice calls over the private networks to avoid long distance costs.

The IP-PBX's emulate telephony systems and deliver advanced telephony applications and often fail to provide features long embedded in most TDM systems. The ringing current isn't true 90 VAC for 2500 ports even if you can afford the ATA (analog terminal adaptor), an ADA (analog-digital-analog) conversion process remains, and call completion through the IP-PBX is often less than 100% and not the rule of being non-blocking as are many Hybrid/TDM systems. There's also packet overhead associated with voice calls and the overhead associated with getting the data network capable of running and consistently maintaining voice and quality. It may sound like fightin' words to some but emulation is what IP-PBX's do and most do it very well but the recent adage of "pure" is more marketing than substance.

Is it possible for Hybrid IP-PBXs to emulate IP-PBXs?

The Hybrids offer IP phones that also connect across the LAN infrastructure and use PoE. The IP phones connect via the IP-Extension card or gateway that uses a slot in the Hybrid system. IP-PBX's and Hybrids both have slots just not for the same things. Hybrids allow users or any company staff to administer their systems and perform MACs. Hybrids also have gateways to interconnect other company offices via the IP network. The challenge for Hybrid IP-PBX manufacturers is going to be meeting advanced applications in more IP-centric methods. One example is providing CTI seamlessly between the Hybrid and the IT wares or "as seamless" as IP-PBX's do. Next, I think there will be some bundling of these advanced applications to run on a blade taking up a slot in the Hybrid system. The dynamics of the SMB/E telephony space just isn't the same as L-enterprise.

Hybrids may or may not exit the scene as predicted by the Dell'Oro Group. Customers ultimately decide upon who stays and who gets cut when it comes to meeting their telephony needs. The Hybrids do have key advantages over IP-PBX's: reliability, survivability, low cost, traditional telephony features including bells and whistles, and the ability to preserve investment. In the SMB/E market I think Hybrids have the chance to shine and outlast the Dell'Oro Group's predictions, but it won't be without an investment of sweat equity, bundling, and emulating what the IP-PBX does better today than the Hybrid or TDM systems.

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