

IP-Quick Takes, EA\$Y MONEY



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It's been argued that L-Enterprise reaps very little benefits or advantage in implementing IP-telephony solutions to their branch and satellite offices.



I maintain that if you don't have the "experience and the skill-sets" then you are headed for trouble. Experience counts big time. You can't buy your way out of IP-troubles once you've made that commitment to implement and then are in the cutover stage. You also can't buy your way out of trouble by saying to your boss, "well I bought Company X." I don't think this is going to work as it did in the old days of "well boss, I bought AT&T", because those days, I believe, are over.

Overlooking the satellite and branch offices is in fact where the money is - it all adds up and there's a pile of savings in these locations.

Granted, the decision makers all want to score big hits and that's why they target HQ, call centers, and large offices- big numbers mean bigger opportunity for savings and of course it makes them look good and we all want our bosses to look good.

There are still plenty of organizations that remain conservative in their technology deployments of any kind. For you - this is a great opportunity and especially for you since these sites pose less risk when weighed against the overall wheels grinding in the organization and I don't mean to imply that they are unimportant. These sites are opportunities and the rewards are many.

By implementing these offices first, your team gains valuable experience and beefs up their skill-sets where needed. L-Enterprise enjoys structured cabling plants that are managed and maintained which don't have the issues found in the field in smaller offices. These issues are many in number and challenging and range in depth from wiring, inferior installation practices (I see these daily), inferior equipment, poor installation practices, lack of grounding, power protection and battery backup.

Besides the experience, the branch and satellite offices have a tendency in most companies to suffer from neglect. Although it's often perceived there are arguably instances where this rings true. It's bound to happen and does. Giving the remote offices attention and spending time to discuss their past unmet telephony and IT related needs will open doors if the time is invested upfront. Wherever we go on vacation, I ask several times about the telephone system and what issues the staff has with it. Engaging the users takes little effort and mixed with time, the payoff is good. But this does little for the money saving ROI drills and exercises on the surface. Ask any IT person for a job and the first thing out of their mouths is "How can you promote the technology?" as if to say, our users hate the computers, phones, and other technologies and we need someone to help assure the users that they should love it. Well, here's your chance in the remote offices.

Financially speaking, many are not practicing any sense of traffic engineering (TE) - that is to say how many lines and agents do we need to answer the phones? TE is a science that pays off big for satellite offices. The numbers are usually neglected, lines just added here and there and over the course of several years no one knows what's billed or why and the costs build up. The smaller offices are ripe since DSL, cable, the RBOCs, and even CLECs offer converged bundles to discount the overall package and bandwidth. The trick is going to be negotiating a decent SLA with acceptable terms- but, once done- the payoff is there. Routing interoffice calls via IP for L-Enterprise is a key hit to the bottom line. Route these calls across bandwidth- as needed and those cheap long distance calls disappear and anytime one or more services are converged there is a TE savings of time, bandwidth and money. Read that last sentence over and over until you understand. This is another key hit to the bottom line. This is what we've been doing for nearly seven years- implementing IP-PBXs with paybacks of 12-24 months that get funded by substantial knock downs on the operating expenditures (OPEX). This is when the money flows, of my favorite kind. Build a case and they are easy to do with remote offices.

The aggregate effect of implementing field offices first will be felt and is measurable on the converged backbone sites such as HQ, call centers, and large facilities with high numbers of telephones. The traffic impact does change the overall picture of the backbone network that is being converged. Often, worried about bandwidth or numbers of telephone lines, customers have made two mistakes that I've seen repeated over the years. First, they over buy. This is tragic but it happens all the time. Take away the fear with statistics and TE studies. The homework and planning pays. For those not equipped to do TE, get help, training, or seek external resources. The DOT COM bustees didn't do their homework and they didn't give TE a first or second thought. Second, customers under buy and this is painful later on and ends up costing

an organization more. Right buying isn't magic neither is it elusive.

Next, maintenance costs for the field offices will drop if not disappear save the first three months of panic calls of "How do I program this button or move my IP phone?" Lastly, let a little more time pass (burning in stage) and you will gain further knowledge and experience because the real fun begins after cutover. Users will plug network printers into IP phones, no it's not a good idea, and users will plug in other things too. Power events will stress test your work and if you did it right, not many issues will surface, otherwise, your savings will vaporize.

The headline promised EA\$Y MONEY so I don't want to disappoint you. I've heard and read too often about "what you can't do regarding cabling." A key hit is cabling- if your remote offices are using Cat 3 or even 25-pair cabling with adapters you can still have IP phones but your limit will be 10 MBPS period. It works and it works well- and it even works better with the newer IP phones that are switched- unlike the old built in hubs which I could never figure why? You will have buildings, structures and limitations of what can be wired and if your stuck and the building only has 25-pair with amphenol wiring or Category 3 then you can still re-terminate those cables as imitation 568A or 568B connections for a LAN but your limit is the 10 MBPS and you want to limit your distance to 200 feet. The switched phones work out best in long runs and you can still run PoE across this wire. You may run into low power- but it's something you can judge while on site if distances of cables are a concern. Then, there are lots of phone and data tricks you can do with the cabling and other gear. Of course the big downside is getting beyond 10 MBPS, and maybe Thin Clients are a good thing too.

Keep an open mind, try different things when they make sense- sometimes, it's all you'll have to offer, but at least you've got something. Branches and satellite offices don't operate in ideal environments, so solutions will be custom, unique and will give you an edge. Most of all, on a personal note - have fun, because the remote sites offer plenty of that.

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