

## **Voice still essential to business**

In a survey conducted in the UK late last year, voice still topped the communication stakes in business. The Critical Communications report indicated that 78% of UK employees and IT leaders identify voice as the most critical form of business communication and almost half (47%) of respondents felt that it was the best channel through which to solve complex business issues.

However, the report highlighted various frustrations with business voice communications systems on the part of users and technical teams alike. This, Stuart Hardy, Business Unit Manager of EOH's Networks Division, believes, is very similar to the local telecommunications landscape, where voice is no longer merely a question of traditional landlines transmitting people's conversations.

"Voice today is not what it was even 10 years ago. With the rise of various Voice over IP (VoIP) offerings over the past few years, many companies are increasingly looking at digital voice platforms like VoIP, and mobile telecoms are a standard facet of business communications these days. There are a number of alternatives for companies looking to improve on, or add to, their voice networks, and companies should weigh up the cost, flexibility and relevance of the service in deciding on which will be the best fit for their business."

Primary Rate Interface (PRI) lines enable traditional phone lines to carry voice, data and video traffic, and therefore provide constant availability and improved stability. In a business environment where convergence is the norm, with employees using landlines and wireless phones, email and instant messaging to do their jobs, PRI lines are a good addition to a company network, Hardy says.

"PRI lines are designed for high call volumes, and are a good solution for companies looking to add to their existing analogue lines in order to meet increased volumes. However, the cost of PRI lines is higher than solutions such as VoIP, so companies must evaluate whether the PRI line will offer the right efficiencies."

He explains that VoIP got a bad reputation for poor quality of service in the past, with reduced clarity compared to that offered by technologies such as PRI lines. This has changed, though, as the technology has advanced and a variety of VoIP services have entered the market. Hardy points out that VoIP solutions obtained from a reseller cannot necessarily be compared to those offered by providers who have their own networks, and that VoIP can actually be a misnomer.

"We don't like to use the term VoIP because there is a difference between dedicated voice services over IP and shared voice services over IP. Smaller businesses rely on their ADSL for this purpose and the shared services result in poorer VoIP quality. Voice must be prioritised in order to drive down cost and provide good quality of service, and dedicated bandwidth allocation must be made for voice. This is why we run dedicated infrastructure capacity, so that voice quality is ultimately never compromised."

The Critical Communications report indicated that eight in ten employees are frustrated by the performance of their organisation's voice communication system. The research also showed that 60% of businesses were intending to invest in their voice/telephone network in the near future.

Voice has been an essential business tool since telephones were first introduced, and Hardy points out that with the technology available today, the kinds of frustrations indicated in the survey are unnecessary. "Voice can be transmitted in a number of ways. Whether using a PRI line or VoIP, companies should ensure their infrastructure is able to meet their needs and exceed their quality expectations."