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TAPI: The Telephone Productivity Driver Comes of Age

TAPI (Telephony Application Programming Interface) is not a new concept. The technology has been in existence since the mid 1990s. What is new is that the technology is now refined and can offer businesses an unprecedented level of productivity in the way that their employees use their phones.

What TAPI does is take common applications such as your CRM system, Outlook®, and ACT!® and integrate them directly with your phone platform. What is the advantage of this? To answer that, we need to look no further than the example of an inbound call.

A conventional PBX phone platform and CRM system are normally two distinct units. When a call comes in, a call center representative takes the customer's name and account number, and then has to pull up the customer's record on a separate system. With a TAPI-compliant PBX platform and TAPI-enabled CRM application, the customer's profile, account information and records will pop up on the representative's screen the moment the call comes in. This will save anywhere from 15-30 seconds per call. Now multiply that by calls per day, per week and per year, and you begin to see what makes TAPI such a revolutionary productivity enhancement.

TAPI on the Move

And this is just one small example. Developed by Microsoft® and Intel®, TAPI is a well-established protocol with many TAPI-compliant applications in existence today. With TAPI products available from ADP®, Sage Software® and Microsoft®, it's quite probable you already have a TAPI-compliant application residing within your organization and don't even know it.

In addition to CRM, TAPI can deliver enhanced functionality to any program that contains customer profile information, such as a project management or billing system. Just imagine pulling up a customer record for review, clicking a button on screen, and your computer automatically dials the customer without you even reaching for the handset.

TAPI the Smart Way

TAPI is a low cost, easy to deploy application. But that does not mean there aren't potential pitfalls to be avoided. Always beware of a telephony vendor who claims their platform is "plug and play" with all TAPI products. TAPI is sophisticated technology with many nuances. There needs to be a validation process to ensure that every TAPI application you wish to use will work seamlessly with your phone system. Any TAPI-compliant phone network vendor should be willing to validate and test your TAPI applications in a lab environment to make sure everything works smoothly. And they should be willing to make adjustments to their system if needed (you may also need to

go back to the application vendor in certain cases).

The Future of TAPI

TAPI already works within common products you use every day, such as ACT!® and Maximizer® . Future development should see TAPI integrating Unified Messaging and Presence Management technologies (such as Find Me/Follow Me) with the common customer/vendor/partner information systems you already use. As TAPI grows in adoption and acceptance, you will see the line between phone and computer blurring. What will emerge will be single unit of information and communication that is much more refined and productive than either component could ever be on its own.

