

Vol. 7 Number 6  
June 2007

## Shifting Trends in Phone Usage: Small-to-Medium Businesses Build Competitive Advantage Through New Technologies

Electricity and phones. Both used to be seen as simple utilities that every business must have. But small-to-medium businesses (SMBs) are realizing that their phone system can be much, much more. The latest telecommunications technologies have shifted the ubiquitous telephone from a simple facilitator of communication to a true business enabler—one that is becoming a key component of every SMB's competitive strategy.

Many companies are aware that deploying a phone platform through a call center is a great tool for customer acquisition. But what most do not realize is that even the smallest business can use new technologies to build customer loyalty and retention without a call center, using the existing talent and resources they already have in-house.

With Automated Call Distribution (ACD), an SMB can turn their workers into centers of opportunity. Callers can be directed straight to the knowledge resource that can help them as efficiently as possible, giving workers the ability to assist customers, answer their needs and engage in selling new business just as effectively as if they were a full-time customer support representative.

Add to that equation wireless and unified communication technologies, and an employee can be anywhere in the building or on the road, and an inbound caller can reach them directly through one number. The call will ring through to the employee's wireless handset or cell phone, with no noticeable connection lag.

### Measuring Success

But the real competitive advantage of the latest phone systems is not all customer-facing. To gain success, you must first be able to measure success. And new applications are available to enable you to measure everything from the performance of your phone system, to the performance of your employees, all right from any web-enabled device.

- How many calls are processed per hour, per day?
- Who's making inbound/outbound calls and for how long?
- How many times does the phone ring before it's answered, and how often is a customer put on hold?

These are just a few on the questions you can answer with the right monitoring application. You can pull up key performance data right at your desk—or anywhere—and adjust your phone system, retrain employees, or tweak internal processes as needed. It's the key to boosting customer service, enhancing productivity and minimizing cost in the most efficient manner possible.



## Eye on the Future

The newest applications on the horizon are known as Computer-Telephony Integration (CTI). This technology raises business productivity to a new level by integrating common software such as a CRM application and integrating it with a phone platform. Now, a customer service representative can pull up a customer record and dial their home phone number right from their computer. Or, when an inbound call comes in, the system can recognize the number and have all of the customer's files ready to be accessed by the representative.

Imagine this scenario: An automotive repair shop has a service manager who spends an hour a day calling customers to let them know their car is ready. With CTI, the system could recognize when a job has its status updated to "ready for pickup". Then, an automated call could go out to the customer to inform them that their car is ready. And with a monitoring application, the business could track how much they are saving by freeing up the service manager to focus on more important tasks.

## The Right Foundation

These technologies can reinvent how you do business. But you must have a phone platform in place that is capable of supporting these new applications. Without the right foundation in place, you could create an integration nightmare as new software tries to run on a system without the bandwidth or sophistication to support it. Be sure to discuss with your IT staff or phone system vendor what it will take to get your network up-to-speed and ready to handle all the latest customer service, productivity and cost saving enhancements - enhancements that will build your competitive presence in the marketplace.