



life **TOOL TIME**

Number 21

Tips, tools, and timely tidbits to make your publishing job easier

VoIP 101

VoIP is the acronym for *Voice over Internet Protocol*. With special hardware (equipment), or software, and your computer, VoIP enables you to use the Internet as the transmission method for making telephone calls. It sends voice signals in short bursts (data packets), using a specific format (Protocol) designed for Internet transmission.

The major advantage of VoIP is that telephone calls made over the Internet do not incur most of the normal long-distance costs. Just as you don't pay anything extra for sending individual e-mails over the Internet, the majority of your cost for individual calls using VoIP is covered by what you are paying for Internet access. The better the Internet connection you have, the better the quality of service and the more VoIP features you will be able to use. Ideally, one would have high-speed (Broadband) Internet service such as cable or DSL. However, please note that you can use basic phone-based service on some systems. So choose your VoIP system accordingly.

Several commercial companies use VoIP to provide service to their customers. For the sake of discussion, VoIP service can be divided into two

categories: hardware-based and software-based systems. Hardware-based systems typically charge their customers a flat monthly fee. Software-based systems typically offer a pay-as-you-go approach. High-usage clients will find it more economical to use a flat-fee system. Occasional and low-usage clients are better off with software-based systems. Both approaches use some form of equipment (hardware), but the hardware-based systems also require their clients to use specific equipment which they provide. Commercial-level services and equipment are available, but these tend to have a high setup cost and are only justified with very high usage. The examples which follow are consumer-level options within a reasonable cost range.

Examples of hardware-based systems are Vonage and Mediacom. These companies provide a "black box" that you, the client, must connect to your broadband system. Then you plug your normal phone system into that black box. Those who use these systems tell me the quality of the call is no different than their traditional phone system. Mediacom requires you to have their cable service installed in order to use their VoIP service. The advantage of Vonage is that once you have their "black box," you can take it

anywhere and connect it to any broadband system. This includes overseas connections.

Once you have their black box connected, anyone calling the U.S. number you are assigned will reach you, just as if you were in your home location. The inverse is true as well. You can make your phone calls just as if you were stateside.

Examples of software-based systems are Skype and Net2Phone. (Note: Net2Phone also offers a hardware-based service.) To use these companies, you must download their software from the Internet and install it on your computer. Generally people will utilize a headset when using these software-based systems; however, special phones (see IPFones.com) can be purchased that ring just like a regular phone when someone is calling. I have personally used both companies and found them ideal when traveling.

Here in our Life Publishers offices, we use Skype regularly to call our overseas providers, branch offices and translation teams around the world. Skype-to-Skype calls are **FREE**. (Both parties must be using Skype software.) We can talk for as long as we wish without worrying about long-distance phone bills. One of our directors regularly talks with our staff in Romania. Conference



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calls can be set up using Skype to Skype. A friend of mine in another missions organization has a conference call every week with his team in Ethiopia. His office is in Memphis.

Skype-to-Skype calls are FREE.

Skype has some additional features. One of them is “SkypeIn.” For about \$30 per year, you are assigned a local U.S. phone number which anyone can call with their regular phone. If you have your Skype system activated, you can answer and have a normal phone conversation. If you are unavailable, the caller can leave a voice-mail message. Then the next time you log on to

Skype, you can listen to your message just like you are using a cell phone. Skype also provides a video service so you can both see and hear the other party if you have the appropriate equipment, and Skype enables you to make file transfers.

“SkypeOut” is the pay-as-you-go service which allows you to call regular phone numbers anywhere in the world. Rates are very reasonable, varying according to the country you are calling.

If you choose to use a software-based system, **do not buy cheap headsets or webcams.** You will **NOT** be happy with the results. Buy major brand-name equipment. The most common problem seems to be a poor quality microphone that generates intermittent or inadequate sound.

This makes it very difficult for the parties to hear one another. One of the better models that provide good quality sound at a reasonable price is the Logitech Quickcam Pro 5000 which often comes with a nice, comfortable headset. It can be purchased for about \$50-\$60 on eBay, and is available at many major stores.

VoIP is revolutionizing communication. Companies and services are constantly changing, but one thing does not change: communication is important. It is important to your family — both at home and abroad. It is important to your supporters and your churches. It is important to your leadership and your friends. Make your ministry known, and make your communication clear.

Useful Web sites where you can learn more about VoIP:

<http://www.fcc.gov/voip/>
<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/VoIP>
<http://www.voip-info.org/wiki/>
<http://electronics.howstuffworks.com/ip-telephony.htm>

Links to companies that provide these services:

www.vonage.com
www.mediacom.com
www.Net2Phone.com
www.Skype.com

Links to companies which provide equipment:

www.logitech.com
<http://www.ipfones.com/>
http://www.plantronics.com/north_america/en_US/products/cat640035

Additional Helps

Here is a useful link on improving your newsletters which Bill Kirsch, Africa’s Hope, passed along. (Thanks, Bill.)

<http://office.microsoft.com/en-us/FX100245111033.aspx>

As you travel in the United States, you may be looking for the cheapest gas prices. Here is one of the Web sites that can help you find the best deal in your area.

<http://autos.msn.com/everyday/gasstations.aspx?zip=&src=Netx>



Bruce's Skype traveling kit

This newsletter is dedicated to providing you, our partner in God's work, with tools and information that will make your work easier. If you would like to see specific topics featured or would like to contribute an article, please contact us via e-mail at info@lifepublishers.org and mark the "subject" as "Newsletter". Mailing address: 1625 N. Robberson Ave., Springfield, MO 65803-2810