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A Look Ahead at Phone Systems in 2014

Will This Be the Year of Cloud-Based
Communications and BYOD?

Contents

Will 2014 Be the Year of Cloud-Based Communications and BYOD?	3
Why Are Cloud-Based Communication More Monetarily Viable than Other Systems?	4
HD Voice	4
Cost Effective	5
The Future of the Cloud is Software-as-a-Service	5
The Hybrid Cloud	6
New BYOD Developments	7
The Main Reason Why Companies Use BYOD Policies	8
BYOD Progressions	9
The Hybrid Cloud Revisited	9
References	10
About the Expert	10

Will 2014 Be the Year of Cloud-Based Communications and BYOD?

Cloud-based communications and bring-your-own-device (BYOD) programs are turning out to be key players in phone systems developments for 2014. Cloud-based communications and hybrid-clouds, are quickly becoming main-stay utilities for small and large businesses alike.

The “cascade effect” in data usage, or the scalability of data usage on a remote server, makes cloud-based VoIP a faster and clearer means of communication than traditional VoIP on broadband cable lines. It has been predicted by some that cloud-based VoIP will replace regular copper based PBX systems within as little as three years, however, most likely it'll be 10 years before VoIP can completely eliminate old PBX landlines, and become as reliable as the old land-line systems that are still in use today.

The future of phone systems lies somewhere between cloud-enabled PBX and BYOD programs. The main goal of a company's BYOD program is to save money. This is done by creating virtualized desktops that can be accessed by commonly used mobile devices. Allowing employees to use devices that they are familiar with increases productivity. Employees get to use their preferred platforms to conduct day-to-day operations, so they don't have to learn how to use new phone systems. It may well be that the future of phone systems lies somewhere between using cloud enabled PBX, and BYOD programs in the workplace.

There is an almost romantic feel to the term “the cloud.” Essentially it refers to renting space on a remote server and using another company's data storage to run a business.

Why Are Cloud-Based Communications More Monetarily Viable than Other Systems?

VoIP allows free phone calls to take place within a company's cloud-based network, and cloud VoIP can be used anywhere someone can access the Internet. Indeed, one of its main benefits is that it does not tie employees down to working solely in one location; it allows them to freely contact remote workers that are connected to the same network in order to get their job done quickly, and efficiently.

Overall, unified PBX communications in the cloud makes it easier for companies to support remote telecommuting employees, without requiring them to purchase a lot of expensive networking hardware. If this system proves successful, it may make it possible for some businesses to eliminate branch offices, and allow people to work from home, which again reduces overhead for the company.

More importantly, cloud-based VoIP allows small businesses to access the same communications and telephone systems that large companies use, at a fraction of the cost, which increases their ability to compete with bigger rivals in the marketplace.

Improved protocols lessen jitter and noise pollution caused by high data traffic.

HD Voice

Cloud-based VoIP utilizes High Definition (HD) Voice. With the advent of HD voice in VoIP cloud services, some of the less desirable faults of traditional VoIP such as dropped calls, faulty automated answering services, and jitter or the break-up of voice during a call, has been eliminated. New protocols on cloud-based servers have revolutionized this process, making conference

calls via systems like Skype, and normal day-to-day phone calls between offices much easier to use than they were just a few short years ago. This fact alone is going to make VoIP in the cloud more popular than any other system in 2014.

Cost Effective

Utilizing cloud-hosted PBX reduces overall capital expenses, and overhead, allowing companies to invest money where it's really needed instead of spending it solely on IT. In addition, less demand on IT and network teams, means that they can devote more time to bigger problems that a company's computers have instead of spending it on fixing the VoIP PBX servers.

The Future of the Cloud is Software-as-a-Service

Businesses are using virtual servers and renting hosted software to reduce hardware expenses in order to get enterprise-class software at more reasonable prices. These hosted services make it faster for businesses to set up unified communications with VoIP and pre-configured, or "plug-and-play" PBX phones that are simply plugged into the local network. Once plugged in they download the required network software, and are ready to go.

Some cloud providers offer free, unlimited local and long distance calls, as long as they are done on the corporate network. This also includes call forwarding to mobile devices, which means that it's never hard to get into contact with employees.

Two other features that may become more common in 2014 is larger network availability and storage capabilities. More storage means that businesses can utilize services that provide a build-your-own cloud server. For instance, IBM's Softlayer system, the CloudLayer Delivery Network, promises a build-your-own cloud server with integrated services, and dedicated resources on a single private network that include API and management systems. CloudLayer allows a business to combine physical and virtual servers, and manage them in one environment in a hybrid-cloud system.

Avaya's OpenStack software is another type of a scalable, build-your-own, cloud system. Businesses that depend on VMware for cloud services, such as PayPal, are currently planning on adding OpenStack to their services to create a layered virtualization network. If larger enterprises such as the successful online banking company are looking into OpenStack, other software-as-a-service providers will follow suit, bringing a whole slew of new apps to the market, which should lower prices considerably if they have a healthy amount of competition in the marketplace.

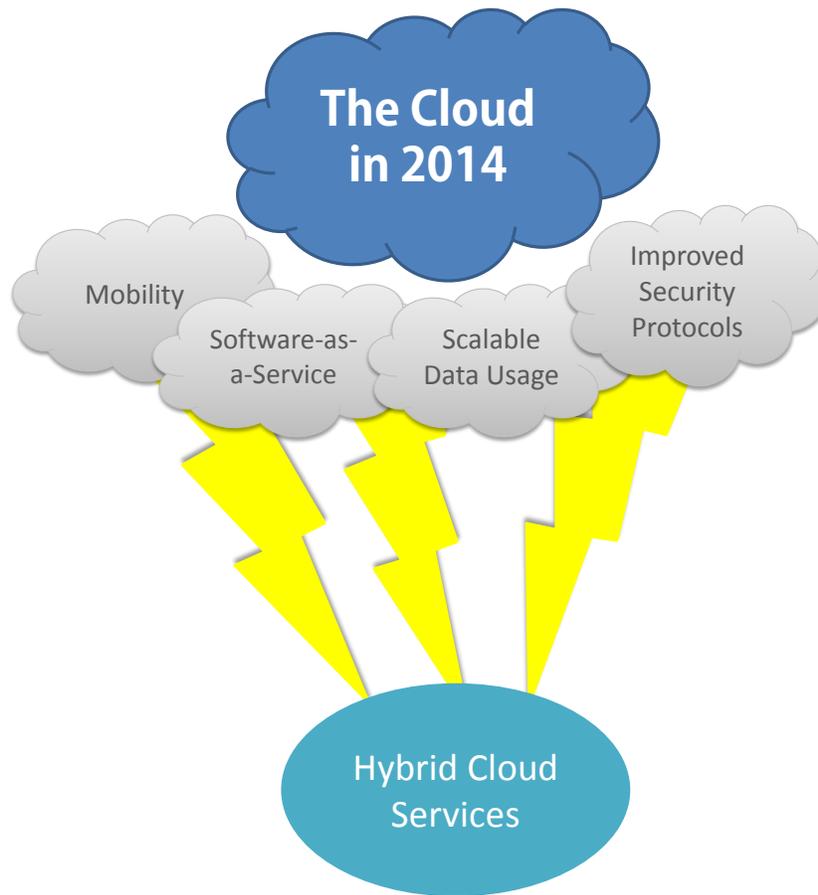
The Hybrid Cloud

Some companies now have cloud-based communications that are a part of a hybrid system that utilizes traditional PBX services, or in addition to more traditional UC, where routine apps or programs are utilized and saved in the cloud. This allows sensitive information or proprietary apps to be kept in on-site servers.

A hybrid cloud, or hybrid IT, approach uses both in-house servers and external storage services. By using the hybrid cloud, businesses maintain data security while still being able to use the scalability features of a cloud server, which helps save money. Essentially, a hybrid cloud utilizes both private and public computing sources.

Private clouds are on-site data centers keep proprietary information secure, while public clouds are off-site network servers that are owned and operated by a third party, and its services are rented out to companies. The public aspect of a hybrid cloud for instance, is used to manage email, voice-mail, and VoIP calls, whereas the private cloud stores data and operates apps owned by the company. The private aspect of the hybrid-cloud is controlled by IT, and it runs behind a firewall for extra security measures. One example of a hybrid-cloud is Microsoft's StorSimple, which provides public data storage for businesses.

Fonality is another example of a phone system provider that offers hybrid-hosted PBX services. In these hybrid systems, PBXs can utilize the cloud for VoIP calls, voice mail, and call forwarding. Some cloud providers even offer a back-up hosted PBX, or an emergency hosted PBX, that remote workers utilize during natural disasters. For instance, in a power outage, employees can go to a location that still has power, log into the hosted PBX, and continue working that day from the temporary office space with nothing more than a softphone, headset, and local Wi-Fi.



New BYOD Developments

It is now thought that 95% of companies in the United States allow employees to use their own mobile devices in the workplace, and that more will follow suit in the coming year. Currently, roughly 50% of employees are using personal devices to access business networks.

BYOD allows for decisions to be made quicker during the course of business, as employees are already familiar with the device that they are communicating with. BYOD increases productivity, and allows for a more flexible work environment, which can increase morale and thus encourage employees to work harder than they already do.

Many companies are turning towards BYOD as a solution for unified communications. Even the United States Federal Government is encouraging its agencies to implement BYOD policies because it is

cost-effective, and offers choice to customers by allowing employees to work in a flexible IT environment that allows them to work on their preferred device of choice. By allowing employees to choose what type of interface or mobile device they use, it optimizes productivity in the workplace. Plug'n'play systems in BYOD programs means that everyone can access the files and work on them, no matter what device they are using. These apps are compatible with common systems and personal devices, and allow companies to adapt to a constantly changing workforce.

The Main Reason Why Companies use BYOD Policies

Companies use BYOD because it saves them money. They don't have to put money into purchasing smart phones or tablets, because their employees have essentially bought them for them. In addition, by allowing the workforce to use devices whose interfaces they are familiar with, they are more effective at quickly getting their tasks done in a timely manner. Saving time is, after all, saving a company money.

Virtualization is a means of providing employees remote access to data and app processing, so that no proprietary data or programs are saved or used on the personal device. The "walled garden" refers to using a secure company app on a personal device that is segregated from personal data within the device's main system. Limited separation refers to using security controls on a personal device that allows personal and corporate data to co-mingle but never mix. This segregation of information is typically done with apps provided by the company.

Innovations of security protocols in corporate apps will ensure that BYOD programs become a strong part of the workforce experience in the coming year. As 2014 progresses, we may see companies emerge that solely work to segregate apps and create stronger, and smarter, security protocols in the programming. By adopting and adapting to new technologies and embracing them, companies will be able to compete with rivals that they once could not afford to take on in the marketplace.

By following a three-tier approach to BYOD services, companies will be able to maintain security, flexibility, and profitability. The tiers include virtualization, the "walled garden," and limited separation.

New policies that enable companies to manage remote workers are supported by enterprise apps and resources that are controlled by IT workers. The devices themselves do not require IT to control or manage them, only the virtualized programs that exist on an external server need service by IT techs.

New enterprises and rapidly growing businesses will be using mobile devices to transform the way that we communicate. Next-Gen mobile networks provide portability, and interoperability, and BYOD will continue to become a common practice in the business world.

BYOD Progressions

As more companies embrace BYOD, the more it will become inevitable that workforces nationwide will adapt to allow employees to bring their devices into the workplace. This may be painful for IT at first, as there are as many different flavors of devices as there are operating systems. But innovative companies will grasp onto this fact and create apps that are flexible and can be used on multiple systems without much trouble.

Eventually, large corporations will be embracing BYOD, and utilizing cloud-based communications to create a rapidly expanding network full of highly optimized workers. BYOD will create an environment that encourages BYOE, or bring-your-own-efficiency, to a workplace to provide a higher rate of collaboration between co-workers and increasing overall productivity.

The Hybrid Cloud Revisited

Like the future of VoIP, BYOD and cloud-computing go hand-in-hand. The cloud allows remote workers to access corporate information while on the go, and it allows employees to access company data and apps with their own devices with the simple use of a universal interface, such as email. VoIP services that require a unique password and user name for the employee to utilize it during the work day will maintain security in the public aspect of their cloud. Ultimately, it appears that the future of phone systems lies not only in cloud-based VoIP, but BYOD programs as well.

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