Your Call is Important . . .

In this White Paper we look across the enterprise communications landscape and ask the questions that any CIO should ask when considering voice services.

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1. Telephony has changed

The CIO (or the Board) should not imagine that something as long established as telephony is a topic that is well past its debate-by date. Any illusion of commoditisation would grossly underrate the massive design progress of very recent years.

So what has changed?

First, business has changed. What we expect, what customers expect and what employees expect has been transformed. Secondly, the technology underlying many services – especially telephony – has changed almost beyond recognition.

And these changes are needed:

• How often have you spoken to a call centre operator who feels the need to apologize for a delay in finding your data?

• How often have the button-pressing choices routed you to some corner of a call-center least able to answer your query?

• How often has a conference discussion stalled whilst participants hunt around for extra information?

The opportunity to make great changes in business operations arise from disruptions to 'business as normal'. The acquisition or merger, new leadership, new competition or simply a collapse in demand - all these provide the context for sweeping changes. But, a far more likely driver might be an influx of fresh employees with minds more open to 'changing the way we do things around here' – or 'corporate culture' as it was labeled.

Whatever the trigger, the CIO must find the capacity to match new expectations. That search demands insights into new systems and network capabilities. It raises a whole series of questions – not all of which may immediately be obvious. The answers will help underpin investment in future facilities.
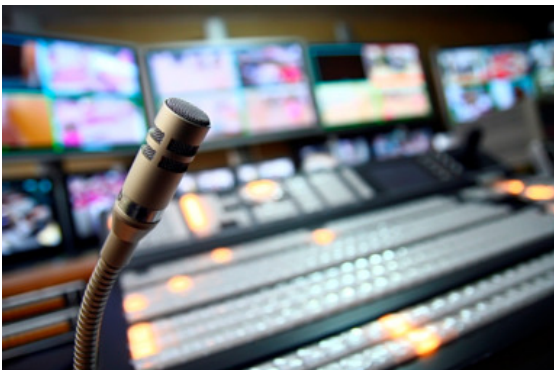
2. Embracing a shift to 'Voice over IP'

One question that refuses to go away – not least because many telephony providers have been addicted to their legacy networks – concerns the shift towards Packetized Voice.   Diehards may maintain that digitized Voice over IP (VoIP) can never reach the quality of their old analogue networks with Time Division Multiplexing. These mythical 'problems' turn out to be relatively straightforward design issues – the need for your networks to be 'fit-for-purpose' with adequate capacity and careful planning of the migration process.

Among the many benefits of VoIP are easier integrations with mobile or online Apps. Customers expect a multi-channel environment and are unlikely to be impressed with technological silos.   A further VoIP benefit is found in vastly reduced maintenance costs as switches in many different locations across your enterprise are eliminated. Nor should organizations overlook the simplification of training costs when just one system is used across a multinational VPN.

Cross Border Communications
Maybe, as a multinational enterprise, the CIO needs to think through how to realistic to adopt a single pan-European Service Provider – and how otherwise to cope with 'end-to-end' quality, regulation, local languages and pricing propositions.

Even within the core European States, telephony services have evolved with different numbering systems and system designs that might struggle to conform to the standards of modern networks. Your networking resources should not be compromised to serve the exceptions but solutions for those should not be beyond Service providers who have both the experience to recognize the conflicts and the expertise to overcome them. The European Single Market in Telecoms may have a way to go but being aware of these contexts could lead to some very different and innovative Service Level Agreements.

Multinational CIOs may also need to probe a supplier's capacity for international networks. Why are some suppliers capable of constructing a 10-site network in one country but fall apart when there's an international dimension?   Will you be the one to break the news to the CEO that the latest business acquisition cannot be integrated tomorrow on account of your old one-country design?

Network management, avoidance of congestion and conformance with different regulatory requirements, may be specialisms best in the hands of expert designers for whom these environments are an everyday reality but all are very valid questions that CIOs should explore.

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3. Cost and Collaboration

Why continue paying for international calls when many packages offer great flexibility and alternative pricing models – including more-easily-budgeted 'price per seat' schemes that are not subject to unpredictable call patterns?

Unlimited Calling options are, for many businesses, an everyday reality. But maybe your business has seasonal peaks and troughs? To determine the optimal pricing model the tools offered by Service Providers to allow analysis of call patterns could enable evidence-led decision-making.   And in such deals are charges made for both internal as well as external calls?

In pursuit of greater collaboration?

One of the great benefits of modern voice network systems is the scope for a more-intensive and more-flexible networking of your business talents. The ability to call in participants from around your world, on the fly, with supplementary discrete or broadcast text chat, can transform the extent of collaborative working.

This is a topic that is not only claiming great attention but is set to become an important differentiator. By the end of this year there'll be a new BSI/ISO Standard for Collaborative Working that will inevitably become a crucial qualification when bidding for public sector and other major contracts. However, the workstyle of your enterprise may not always be enhanced by incessant interruptions that diminish valuable thinking time. Harvard Business Review has recently published a study that shows how dependence on a few 'very helpful' people in an enterprise can both cause decision bottlenecks and also detract from their real work.

P**laying by the rules**

CIOs may also want to explore issues of sound quality but, at the same time, inform their buying decisions with an understanding of the wider contexts of Regulation and the often hidden costs of unavailability. How many enterprises are aware of calls that have failed long before they reach their end destination?

When customers do get through, verbal communication can be brilliantly nuanced or a disaster of misheard misunderstandings. Sometimes the sound of the message can be more important than the words themselves. Regulatory conformance may sometimes seem a burden on business but in reality good responses to customers can and will promote trust in your services.

4. Right call, right place, right time

Intelligent call handling systems can recognize priority callers and direct them to handlers best positioned (and briefed) to respond. Being responsive to sensitive situations or hyper-critical account holders offers an altogether better approach than those default disasters when their pleas are answered by generalized five- step menu systems that often seem designed to get in the way of action. Can your network invoke the equivalent of a 'hot line' to cover critical events?

CIOs could look closely at how incoming calls are managed and whether that demands a sharper view of Agent Flexibility. Is the call handling system designed to enable your people to do their job or does it merely encourage them to pass the buck?

Customer Care?

'Calls may be monitored' but how often are they really used for training purposes? And, the CIO could ask, how do the facilities integrate with Mobile and Web Apps?

Call handling facilities can provide the best possible showcase for your business – but should also allow the enterprise to manage the costs and leverage a full range of talent and expertise. There's always a balance between tight script control and empowerment of agents to resolve issues – and that balance can be regulated by personal authorization profiles, provided, of course, that the systems allow such flexibilities.

Who needs all that equipment?

Consider also whether your organization really needs to tie up assets in kit and systems that could so very easily be outsourced. Cloud-based telephony can be vastly more accessible from different locations and devices – and, moreover, can be a huge enabler of work-style options and convenience for employees and partners.   By drilling down into these outsourcing options we leave behind the old challenges of dealing with calls and focus instead on creating effective environments for 21st century enterprise.

And finally... is it safe?

VoIP delivered over a QoS technology such as MPLS is as secure as TDM voice. But increasingly, as the internet is used more and more for VoIP, other forms of security such as encryption have to be implemented.

VoIP benefits go beyond link security. Compared to TDM, VoIP has a better ability to keep telephone systems operating in the event of a service impairment or a catastrophic event. Conditions such as power failures, access facility failures, network failures and devastating weather patterns can be survived due to the disaster recovery, redundancy and resiliency options available on VoIP.

These questions - these 'lines of enquiry' - can all play a part in the pursuit of smarter business. Along the way there are many avenues to explore – <u>further clues and much more detail can be found by browsing our ebook here.</u>

About Colt

Colt provides network, voice, and data centre services to thousands of businesses around the world, allowing them to focus on delivering their business goals instead of the underlying infrastructure. Customers include 18 of the top 25 bank and diversified financial groups and 19 out of the top 25 companies in both global media and telecoms industries (Forbes 2000 list, 2014). In addition, Colt works with over 50 exchange venues and 13 European central banks.

Colt operates across Europe, Asia and North America with connections into over 200 cities globally. It recently completed the acquisition of KVH – which now operates under the Colt brand - an integrated data centre and communications services business, with headquarters in Tokyo and operations in Hong Kong, Seoul and Singapore.

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