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Voice Over IP Basics

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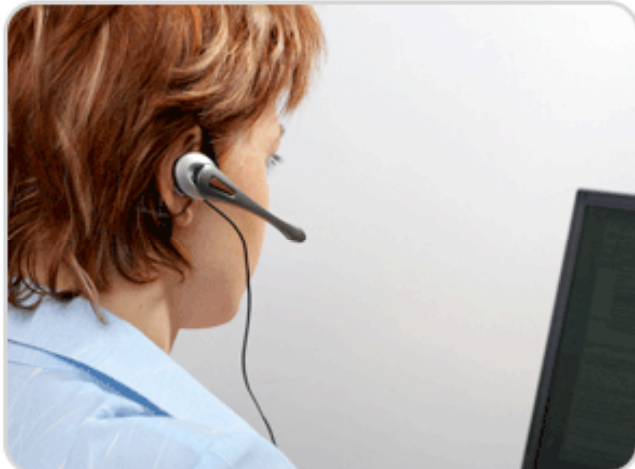
What is VOIP?



VOIP (Voice over Internet Protocol) is a method of allowing you to talk to someone over a network such as the Internet or a corporate network on a device similar to a normal telephone. There are services available that allow you to make VOIP calls for free such as [Skype](#). Services like Skype require both the person placing the call and the person receiving the call to be on the service, while other fee-based VOIP services like [Vonage](#) allow you to call any phone number just as you would with standard telephone service. For more information on VOIP, you can check out the FCC site [FAQ on VOIP](#).

9-1-1 Services on VOIP

Currently, one of the biggest drawbacks to VOIP service as the sole phone service for a home or business is 911 service. On a normal phone line, 911 operators have access to caller ID information that allows them to route emergency services to the address you are calling from. However, VOIP calls often do not provide accurate location information due to their portable nature. Adding to this problem is the fact that many VOIP providers allow you to choose the area code for your phone number from any available across the country. That means you could live in Texas and have a California area code with many VOIP providers. For more points to consider regarding VOIP and 911 services, check out [this page](#) from the FCC web site.



Web Connection and VOIP Calls



We often take our phone service for granted because in most areas the service is rarely interrupted. We can't always say the same thing about our Internet service. VOIP calls won't work if your Internet connection is down, and a broadband connection is

required for VOIP to function with most providers. Dial-up access does not provide enough bandwidth and popular VOIP services like Vonage require a connection that provides 90Kbps upstream speed. The more things that use your web connection bandwidth, the less call quality you will get when making a VOIP call. If, for instance, you are downloading music when you are making a VOIP call, you may experience poor connection similar to using a cell phone in an area with bad reception. A web connection with higher bandwidth and speed will reduce the chance of your calls dropping and the chances of poor quality calls.

Why Choose VOIP?

Many users are making the change to VOIP due to the cheaper costs associated with this type of calling over standard phone services. VOIP is much more portable than standard phone lines and can be taken with you wherever you go so long as a fast web connection is available. Perhaps the biggest reason for choosing VOIP is the cost savings typically associated with VOIP providers as compared to standard telephone service providers. Portability is another big selling point. VOIP users that travel frequently can take their phone and phone number with them wherever they go allowing them to have the same number no matter what part of the country or world they are in at the time.



What's needed to make VOIP calls?



There are a few things you need to be able to make VOIP calls. Many services like Skype or MSN require a computer to operate. All services will need some hardware and software that will vary depending on the provider you choose. A web connection is a given with a decent upload speed for quality calls.

Some services require a hardware device to turn the VOIP protocols into information your standard phone can use. There are also a number of VOIP phones available that are portable and have great features, such as the [AU-100 VOIP phone](#), that are designed especially to function with VOIP services.

Is VOIP Worth It?

Ultimately, whether or not VOIP is a viable option for you comes down to your preferences and the quality of your web connection. If your web connection frequently goes down or is particularly slow, you may want to think twice about VOIP. If members of your family have medical needs that might make you more prone to need to call 911, you may also want to seriously weigh the pros and cons of the 911 functionality with VOIP services.

The equipment needed to make VOIP calls is not very costly and the prices are coming down all the time. Perhaps users who should most consider VOIP are those that make lots of long distance calls. Personally, I used VOIP for awhile and, on my connection, I had some issues with call quality that make me not want to use VOIP alone for my phone service. However, if you are in an area with quality high-speed web connections, you may well be very happy with your VOIP service. The cost savings typically seen when VOIP is used is undeniable. My suggestion is to try VOIP before you totally drop your standard phone service. Use the VOIP as your everyday calling plan while you use your web connection as you normally would. The only really way to tell if VOIP is for you is to try it out. You can always go back to your plain phone service. Just don't sign a commitment contract with a VOIP carrier until you are sure VOIP works for you!