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Long-Distance Logic

by Dennis LaMantia

After receiving a cell phone bill that included a month of international charges for calls to a Canadian investor, Creigh A. Bogart, CCIM, a broker in Tampa, Fla., changed not only how he makes international calls but how he receives them. Bogart registered with Skype, a voice over Internet protocol provider, and now uses his Skype account as his primary contact number. “My business cards don’t have my cell phone number on them,” he says.

Bogart and other CCIM members are using VoIP programs like Skype and Web-based applications such as Google Voice to supplement their landlines and cell phones. In the process, they’re saving time and money.

Skype

With a basic Skype account, users can talk free of charge to other Skype users worldwide. Both parties must connect to the Internet and log in to their Skype accounts. Other free features include screen sharing, video calls, and instant messaging, as well as Apple and Android apps.

A Skype subscription allows Bogart to make and receive unlimited calls to and from Canadian landlines or cell phones. The plan also includes unlimited forwarding of Skype-to-Skype calls, allowing Bogart’s Canadian

client to make free Skype-to-Skype calls that ring on his cell phone.

Skype subscription plans like Bogart’s range from \$2.99 a month to \$19.99 a month, depending on the calling area. Users who make infrequent calls to cell phones or landlines can purchase Skype credit, which offers low per-minute rates. Bogart also has an online Skype number, which replaced his cell phone number on his business cards. Online numbers start at \$18 for three months.

Google Voice

Google Voice’s core feature, one number, allows users to pick a 10-digit, U.S.-based Google Voice number. Calls to that number can be forwarded to a work, home, or cell phone number, or any combination of the three. This automated switchboard can be adjusted to ring certain numbers on specific days and times. Ring scheduling is one of several Google Voice features Todd Clarke, CCIM, CEO of NM Apartment Advisors in Albuquerque, N.M., has used. “It’s provided more flexibility and privacy,” he says.

Clarke also relies on Google Voice’s voice mail management features. With either Google Voice or Google Voice Lite — a version of the program that doesn’t require a new number — users can receive voice mail transcripts via text message and e-mail. “I spend too much time in meetings wondering what is in my voice mail,” Clarke says. The transcription isn’t perfect, he adds, but it gives him a good sense of a message’s



VoIP Products at a Glance

importance. While traveling in Russia last fall, Clarke saved on international call fees by checking his voice mail online rather than through his cell phone.

Text messages and outgoing calls to U.S. and Canadian numbers are free with Google Voice. Outbound calls are initiated from the Google Voice Web site and routed through the user's home, office, or cell phone. Calls also can be placed through a computer with Google Talk, Google's instant messenger product.

Google Voice allows users to record inbound calls after the other caller is notified and download MP3 files of voice mails, which can give users potentially valuable records of business discussions.

Landline Still Required

Neither Google Voice nor Skype is intended to fully replace a land- or mobile line. For example, Skype can't be used for emergency calls. Replacing traditional home or office lines with a VoIP line requires dedicated hardware from a service like Ooma or

	Google Voice	Skype
Availability	U.S. only	Anywhere with an Internet connection
Voice calls	Free to U.S. and Canada; international rates start at 2.3 cents/minute	Unlimited calls start at \$2.99/month; international rates start at 2 cents/minute
Texting	Free, and only to U.S. and Canada	11 cents to U.S. numbers; up to 35 cents to other countries
Free mobile app	Yes	Yes
User-to-user calls	N/A	Free calls to any Skype user
Installation	None	Free software download required
Transcribe voice mail to text	Free	25 cents per message

Vonage. Both services route calls over the Internet and can connect to existing corded or cordless phones. Ooma's hardware costs \$249.99 and includes unlimited U.S. calls. Vonage plans also include unlimited U.S. calls and start at \$25.99 per month.

Several Google Voice video tutorials are

available at www.google.com/googlevoice/about.html. Learn more about Skype at www.skype.com.

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