

By Symone Salisbury

BEYOND THE OUTER LIMITS

Today's Office Technology Rivals Past Fiction

Has science fiction become reality in the world of office technology?

In "Aliens," a 1980s movie set in the future, the main character used a video phone to speak with her superiors. In addition, Captain Kirk of the popular "Star Trek" television series often communicated with members of his crew via live video.

One could argue that the above examples foresaw today's workforce technology – advanced phone options and videoconferencing, respectively. Along with copying/printing and Voice over Internet Protocol (VoIP), they comprise four of technology's most rapidly evolving segments. Common themes among them are convenience and multi-functionality.

Experts from the Indiana companies AT&T, The Cellular Connection, Cannon IV and Interactive Intelligence, Inc. provide an update on the latest in their industries.

Videoconferencing

What you see is what you get

AT&T provides global communications services and networking equipment to residential, private sector and public sector customers. Videoconferencing is one of its offerings.

"Video is actually a collaboration of voice technology and video technology," explains Bob Gandolfo, AT&T video technology specialist. "The technology has to be able to take the video component and the audio component and sync both of those together so that as you're participating in the videoconference, what I'm saying is consistent with how my lips are moving."

Full motion video has remedied the lack of balance between audio and video that was commonly experienced during the late 1990s.

"When you look at networking today, everything is done over Internet Protocol (IP)," he relates. "What has evolved also is that videoconferencing is done using IP. It's all done on your local area network. What that's done is brought the cost down significantly."

Gandolfo refers to larger businesses as the early and main implementers, but points out that an increasing number of small businesses are now taking advantage of it.

Modest equipment fees also play a role. Whereas employing the technology previously ranged from \$80,000 to \$100,000, the average cost now is \$10,000.

"It's very cost justifiable to (purchase) videoconferencing equipment today, even for a small organization," he contends. "If they're able to cut down even just one business trip a month, it pays for itself."

Government, education and medical sectors lead the way in videoconferencing use. It facilitates governmental meetings, allows students to complete college-level courses from their high school classrooms and promotes remote consultation among doctors regarding patient diagnoses.

"I think what you're going to see in the very near future, and I say that with confidence because



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it's happening already, is videoconferencing at your PC," he predicts. "There's no reason you can't have a little inexpensive camera attached to your PC monitor. You already have speakers attached to your monitor. That will turn your PC into a full-fledged conferencing device."

Desktop videoconferencing requires companies to add bandwidth to their networks, which can be expensive. Consequently, small businesses may be better equipped to experiment with the new technology as they have fewer employees to accommodate.

Residents pay approximately \$500 for the feature, along with the cost of DSL Internet service. Purchases include a small PC camera, microphone headset and software.

"The bottom line is we're looking for a way to get people together and communicate on a higher level," Gandolfo states. "The videoconferencing is not an attempt to replace that person-to-person contact. However, it is primarily used today to reduce the cost associated with meetings."

Cell Phones

What's next is your call

The prevalence of cell phones has risen dramatically over the last 10 years. Their mass appeal has made them indispensable to many.

Moorehead Communications, based in Marion, conducts business primarily as The Cellular Connection, which provides cellular and DISH satellite television services.

Are cellular devices that are used to only make phone calls still popular?

"They are available, but they are definitely phasing out," says Scott Moorehead, owner and administrative vice president of Moorehead Communications. "It all depends on the user. We still have a contingency of our customer base that would like to do nothing but push the 'end' and the 'send' keys. But the best quality phone will probably come with some features you're not going to use."

One factor influencing preferences is the nature of individuals' jobs.

"For any sort of sales person or account manager who's on the road a lot, we're finding a lot more that they really want to have their e-mail at their fingertips all the time," he remarks. "The wireless carriers are bringing in a much bigger portion of the customer base by making it easier to get your e-mail to you. Two years ago it was complicated and clunky and slow. It's gotten so much faster and easier."

The cell phones rely on Bluetooth technology, which he describes as "a language that two pieces of equipment use to talk to each other – technology that allows any sort of accessory to connect to your phone wirelessly."



Portable calling options continue to expand.

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Moorehead comments that providers are focusing on two entertainment areas: music and television.

“They’re trying to include MP-3 capabilities right on the phone,” he reveals.

“One thing that I see down the line that carriers are trying to go after is to get live television right on your cell phone,” he continues. “It’s really going to be popular, I believe, once they get it rolled out.”

Just as a large number of residential customers have replaced landline phones with wireless devices, some companies have done the same. Most have been small organizations and those in the service industry. Advantages are consolidation of service and cost savings, depending upon the provider.

Failing to routinely evaluate cell phone plans can result in financial losses for businesses.

“If a company goes for more than a year without really taking a hard look at their cell phone bill and letting somebody in the industry assess their current needs, they’re going to be losing quite a bit of money,” he cautions. “The plans and the needs change so often that it really pays to look at that probably on a quarterly basis.”

VoIP

Best of both worlds

Interactive Intelligence is a global developer of IP-based business communications software. Its subsidiary, Vonexus, delivers IP communications solutions for small to medium-size businesses.

A July/August 2003 *BizVoice*® story featured one of the company’s offerings, VoIP. What’s distinctive about the technology is that it consolidates fax, e-mail and voice capabilities into one IP network.

Tim Passios, director of product marketing, considers VoIP’s advancements over the last three years.

“Cost was a pretty big factor because the major players were just coming out with their IP phones. Other players came to the marketplace and drove those prices straight down. Today, you can get an IP phone for the same price as a high-end analog phone or digital phone, and in (many) cases, they’re less expensive than a digital proprietary phone.”

He praises Session Initiation Protocol (SIP), an industry standard, for streamlining VoIP.

“Because this standard supports other things than just voice – it also supports video, instant messaging and others – it can be utilized by different vendors for different things,” he says.

Also, reliance on IP phones rather than a network to transmit data has improved quality of service (QOS) by removing distortion from conversations.

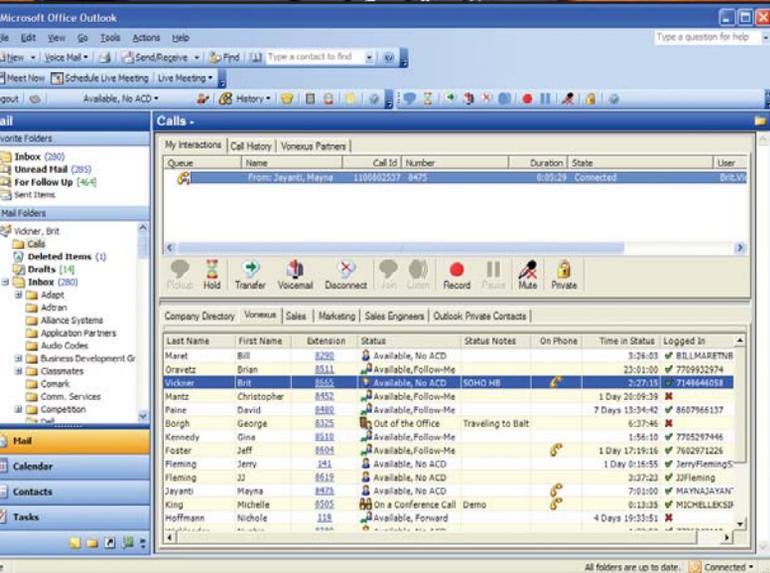
Another recent development is Enhanced 911 (E911), which provides 911 dispatchers with information such as user name, telephone number and location (even as detailed as identifying the floor of a building from which a phone call originates) based on VoIP telephones.

“It’s (E911) actually becoming a huge one for us as a company to provide to our customers,” Passios shares. “Almost every request we get for our software, many of the enterprises are asking for that specific service.”

Internet telephony is geared toward small businesses through affordability (administration of one network), convergence of applications, ease of deployment and location independence (VoIP’s portability).

“The newer adopters are contact centers,” Passios states. “The reason they were lagging behind was because of the QOS issue and the concern with customers calling in and not getting top-notch quality.”

Integration is one of the keys to Voice over Internet Protocol technology.



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National figures indicate that 36% of large enterprises, 23% of medium and 14% of all small North American organizations use IP. Those statistics are projected to double by 2010.

"About seven to 10 years ago, people were spending a lot of money to prepare their telecommunication and data infrastructure around Y2K," he recalls. "Those applications need (to be) replaced. Now they're spending it on VoIP because all the vendors are moving that way."

According to Passios, 80% of Interactive Intelligence's quoted and shipped deals are based on VoIP.

"We're leveraging the future of Interactive Intelligence on the SIP standard or VoIP," he declares. "VoIP is going to become as commonplace as using the Internet. We're seeing the trend this year more than we ever have before, and next year is going to be the big year (for) massive adoption."

Printing/copying

Audits a must

Jerry Jones is president and CEO of Cannon IV, an Indianapolis provider of printers, copiers and software. It helps businesses strengthen efficiency and save money by conducting printing audits.

"Technology is changing so fast, it's just unbelievable," he marvels. "Today, the device that was a simple printer or copier two or three years ago now has the ability to scan the document, e-mail the document, take it and scan it and put it in a folder. It's so comprehensive."

Those capabilities and others require companies to constantly review their actions. The first step of Cannon IV's audit process is to determine a client's needs. Then, it calculates current expenditures.

"We would do an audit to say, 'do you realize that at the end of the day you're paying x amount of dollars per page,' and then the objective is to reduce that cost," Jones explains. "One of the ways you reduce the cost is to make sure that the proper print volume is going to the right printers."

"For instance, what businesses are really demanding today is color," he elaborates. "The challenge is how do you help customers drive down the cost because color is generally five or six times the cost of black or white."

"What's happening is the technology is speeding up so fast that the printer world can now do everything that the copier world used to be able to do, and it is becoming incredibly cost efficient," Jones adds. "You're seeing that the multi-function printers are kind of obsoleting the old fax machines."

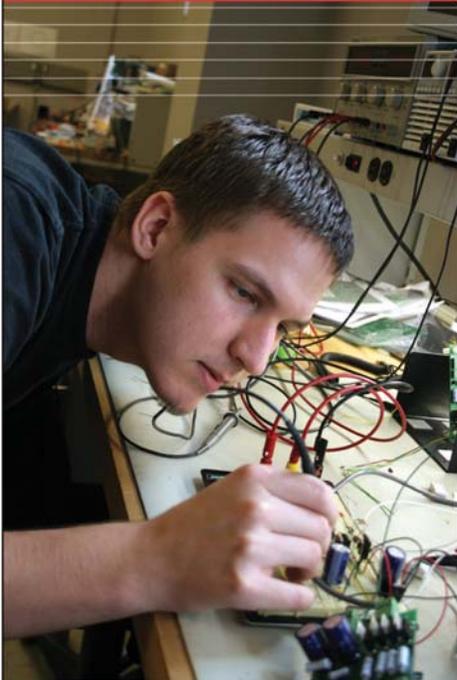
Printers that previously cost between \$7,000 to 8,000 are going to be available for one-third of the cost: \$2,500 to \$3,000.

"Hewlett Packard and other companies have said that your printing (costs) can be as high as 5% of your total revenue," Jones reveals. "And when you're talking about multi-million dollar companies,

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you're seeing what printing and copying can cost.

"The whole idea is not to replace everybody's printers," he adds. "It's figuring out what are good printers and what should stay."

Jones notes, "The old model for all businesses was 'pay in advance for everything.' Our (Cannon IV) formula, because we're so sensitive to the customer, is get people to understand what they want and then charge as they go. We think once you've gone through a comprehensive audit and can present the customer with a logical and beneficial way to manage the business, it's more than just printing and copying. It's how do we help you manage a business."

INFORMATION LINK

Resources: Bob Gandolfo, AT&T, at (800) 232-1234 or www.att.com/videoconferencing

Scott Moorehead, The Cellular Connection, at (888) 442-2079 or www.ecellularconnection.com

Tim Passios, Interactive Intelligence, at (317) 872-3000 or www.inin.com

Jerry Jones, Cannon IV, at jerry.jones@cannon4.com or www.cannon4.com

BizVoice® Receives National Honors

BizVoice® magazine, the flagship publication of the Indiana Chamber of Commerce, was recently recognized in national and international competitions for outstanding work in communications. BizVoice® received top honors (Awards of Excellence) from The Communicator Awards and Communications Concepts' Awards for Publication Excellence (APEX).

The Communicator Awards is an international competition that recognizes outstanding work in the communications field. There were 5,214 entries from the United States and several foreign countries in this year's print competition. BizVoice® earned this prestigious award (given to approximately the top 14% of all entries) in the association magazine category for its May-June 2005 issue.

BizVoice® received the APEX Award of Excellence in the interviews and personal profiles category for Editor Tom Schuman's profile on David Frick, the Indiana Chamber's 2005 Business Leader of the Year. Fewer than 30% of the nearly 5,000 APEX entries earned top honors.

Additional 2006 BizVoice® honors include the ACE (Award for Communications Excellence) Award of Merit for overall publication and The Communicators' Award of Distinction for the September-October 2005 issue. BizVoice® has earned 38 national and state awards since 1999.