

EXPERTS' FORUM | Technology

The 4 Communication Tools That Save Businesses Money

A disaster can bring a community and its communications to a standstill. With the downed cell towers and unstable infrastructure that follow disasters like Hurricane Katrina, Ceres Environmental needed a communication system that allowed its team to create a remote office and begin the recovery process.

The government contracting firm found it in a new IP phone system. We just have to bring the phone, plug it in and it works, said Mike Hansen, Ceres asset manager. It has amazed some people at FEMA and the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers. The opportunities of an IP-based phone system extend well beyond the "plug and play" feature that businesses like Ceres have come to appreciate in today's mobile business world.

Taking advantage of those additional features and creating a unified communications system boosts the productivity of teleworkers and has proven to be equally valuable for companies with multiple locations or customers spread throughout the nation or the world.

Here are four features that can improve communication and efficiency at your business:

1. **Clone Your Phone:** Besides answering calls anywhere just as if you were at their desk, you can transfer calls between your desk phones and mobile phone. It's called twinning and is similar to transferring a call to another line in the office.
2. **Presence Detector:** Add a presence management feature to your Microsoft Outlook and dynamically detect a colleague's presence in their office. A green

dot appears next to the person's name in an email to show he is logged in and at his desk. By right clicking on the dot, you can automatically call him. When he answers, the green dot switches to red to indicate to you and others that he is on a call.

3. **Instant Chat:** Presence management also allows you to right click on a person's name in your email and begin chatting. This goes beyond common instant messengers by authenticating participants and ensuring privacy.

4. **Virtual Meetings:** Microsoft Live Meeting allows you to share new products with customers, have spontaneous virtual meetings with another employee to work on a document or host large-scale trainings for 250 employees across multiple locations. You can schedule a meeting through Outlook, invite people from a variety of organizations and share your PowerPoint or other handouts with participants. Microsoft RoundTable takes Live Meeting to another level by providing a 360-degree panoramic view of the meeting. The camera also tracks the flow of conversation so the person speaking is spotlighted in a main panel on the screen while displaying other participants in smaller side-by-side shots. This Live Meeting technology also allows participants to record and store these meetings or training sessions.

These powerful communication tools allow employees—working in the office or remotely—to more efficiently manage their time and communication while reducing travel, training, telecommunication and facility costs for the business.



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