



How to Grow Your Business, Not Your IT Budget

How SMBs Can Implement IT Solutions that Provide Tangible and Needed
Business-Process Benefits at a Reasonable Cost with Big ROI

Introduction:

State of SMB IT—Growing the Business

Small and medium-sized businesses (SMBs) face a tricky dilemma in today's challenging economic climate. It's no longer business as usual; companies need to figure out how to optimize for today and get on track to capitalize on new opportunities for growth. The challenge is having a definitive plan for IT that provides real ROI today and tomorrow.

The growing complaints of your workforce regarding business-process slowdowns, bottlenecks, and inefficiencies are the symptom of challenges that most businesses do not have ready answers for. Limited IT budgets are rivaled only by limited IT knowledge and time that the workforce has to grapple with these challenges.

The cloud, software as a service, virtualization, voice over Internet Protocol, and a host of other potential solutions are pretty much white noise without an advisor. Most SMBs need support in order to make the right decisions that increase productivity in ways that grow the business while lowering operating expenses as well as capital expenses. This eBook provides the answers you need in order to determine the best route to growing your business rather than your IT budget.



Business-Process Nirvana: Where You Are and Where You Want to Be

Every business has its own individual needs, so, inevitably, the perfect solutions will vary too. For some businesses, a simple “off the shelf” solution may suffice, but for many companies, the specific needs of their sector and clients will require something more tailored. The ideal solution is one that is highly affordable and scalable and uses tried and trusted underpinnings from a big provider such as Microsoft but can also be adapted in order to perfectly meet the specific everyday demands of your business.

Equally, ensuring that you have a highly reliable solution with a cloud-hosted backup (for full disaster recovery) and full user management and security updates is essential. No SMB can survive without its crucial IT systems in the event of an unforeseen disaster or emergency.

There are many challenges to the smooth operation of your business. Outdated technologies from network devices to desktops and laptops may still work, but it’s a struggle to update applications and operating systems. This can manifest itself in workforce complaints of long delays in everything from processing orders to communicating and helping customers online due to glitches and slowdowns.

The costs of communication between office locations and an inability to keep everyone on the same page and working when they are away from the office is quickly squashing any growth potential and slowly killing the business overall. You can no longer work effectively, because employees with some knowledge of computers and networking are always being pulled away in order to combat a problem encountered by other employees.

**The ideal solution
is one that is
highly affordable
and scalable**

You may not know about the specific IT solutions and the support that you need, but you do know that you need your business processes to happen without delay and frustration with the technology. Why can't your Microsoft applications work all the time and allow your employees to work on project documents wherever they are in real time? Why do you always have to think about software updates and whether or not new solutions that may help your employees work faster will work with the technology that you have?

Ultimately, you want a business where technology is pretty much invisible and always working at peak efficiency so that your workforce can be productive and happy. You also don't want to think about what technology you'll need in order to grow the business today and tomorrow. Most of all, you want all of the technology that your business uses to bring ROI today, not five years down the road.



Embracing the Cloud:

What Is It, and What Can It Do for My Business?

Right now, all of your applications and the data that your business produces from sales to marketing to proposals and even emails are stored on individual desktop computers or on servers in a room where you never go. What if:



You could have unlimited data storage space for the work product and communications that your business produces?



Your employees could communicate and work from their laptops, smartphones, and tablets wherever they are and still collaborate on documents and projects in real time?



You never had to think about updating any piece of software that you use?



You could do these things and many more that you want to do right now, and it could grow with the business and still fit within your budget?

That, in essence, is the promise of the cloud. Essentially, the cloud moves data and applications off your desktop or on-site servers to remote hosted services that can be accessed by any Internet-connected device. This enables your business to rent instead of buy the assets and services it needs. What's more, as your needs expand, so can the cloud services.

A recent survey by Microsoft showed that 63 percent of SMBs that use cloud solutions expect their sales to increase, because cloud solutions allow them to focus on the business. Cloud services offer a number of key advantages for SMBs:



Low cost:

Enterprise-level services without any investment in new hardware or software, as all services are hosted in the cloud.



Business expansion:

As your business grows and needs more services. Cloud-based storage has no limits. And hosted services can be purchased, as they are needed.



Improved business efficiency:

Fast and efficient collaboration is possible when cloud-based services are adopted. A workforce can access applications and data from any location at any time.



Increased security:

Encrypted data storage in the cloud is protected from unauthorized access.



Greater competitiveness:

Cloud adoption brings efficiencies that improve a business's competitive edge.



Freedom

from system maintenance, backup and upgrades, maintenance and managing servers, hardware, software, and other infrastructure components.

The cloud is not one solution but a variety of solutions and approaches that can bring increased productivity as well as process integration, agility, and flexibility. The promise of the cloud is its ability to maximize IT ROI for the workforce.

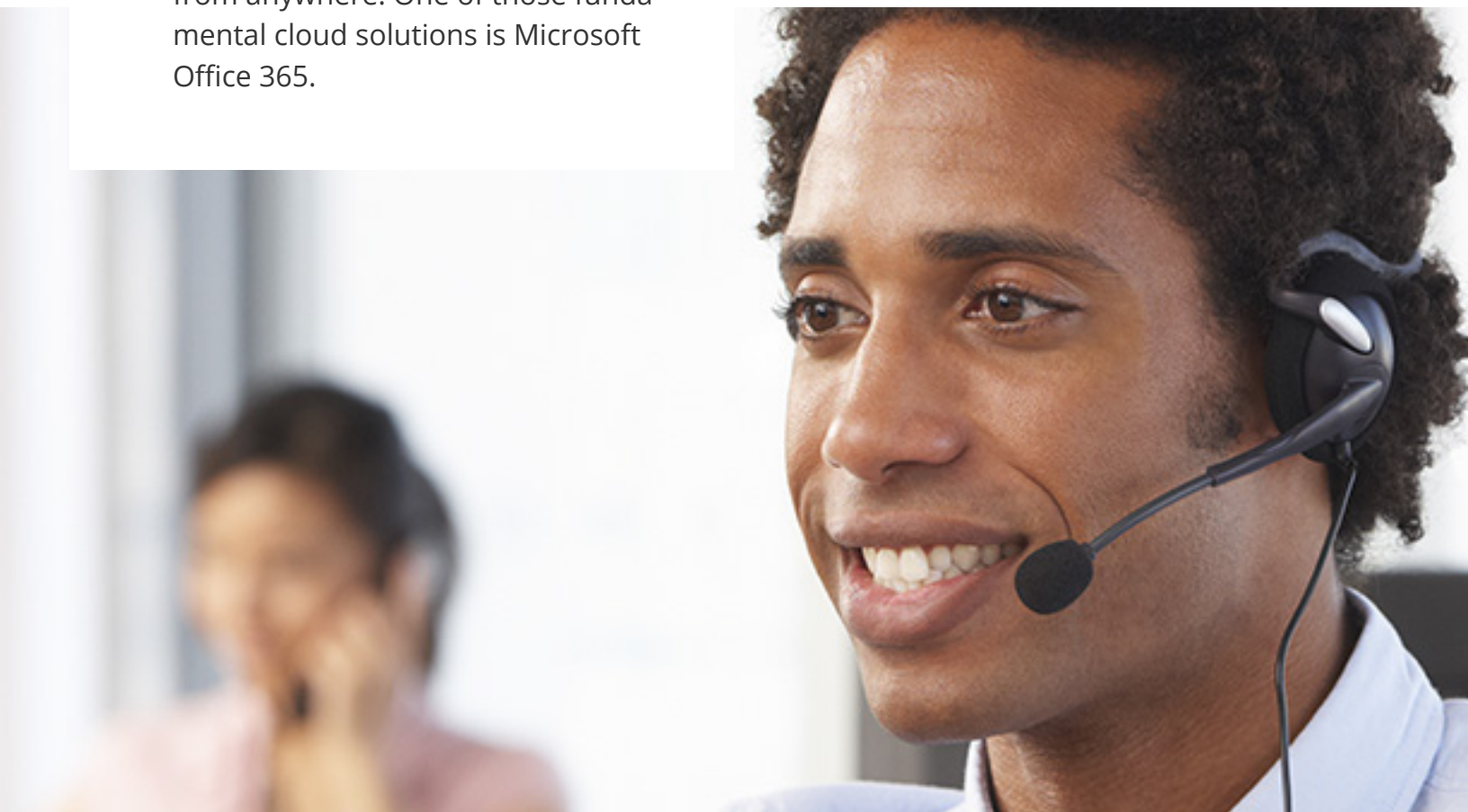
Maximizing IT ROI for the Workforce

According to Dell's second annual [Global Technology Adoption Index](#), orchestrating big data, cloud, and mobility strategies leads to 53 percent greater growth than not adopting these technologies. The only problem with that statistic is that it doesn't explain how these businesses use this technology in order to improve processes that lead to that growth.

Many business owners make platform decisions based on tools that their organizations already use or are most comfortable with. By having access to these applications via the cloud, your workforce can work and collaborate from anywhere. One of those fundamental cloud solutions is Microsoft Office 365.

Microsoft Office 365 for Business

Office 365 is a cloud-based IT solution combining the latest edition of Microsoft Office applications and unified communications that is scalable, flexible, and adaptable to each business's needs. The Office 365 suite of programs works seamlessly across smartphones, PCs, and tablets, so your workforce can work and collaborate from anywhere in real time. Download and edit files on the go, send emails from any device, check your colleagues' availability in real time, and then make a phone call or video call or send an instant message.



As a subscription-based software as a service, businesses pay a monthly fee in order to access all of the applications as well as the following features, depending on the service tier you choose:

- ✓ Business email featuring your own custom domain
- ✓ HD video conferencing with screen sharing and instant messaging (IM)
- ✓ 50 GB of storage per user, for documents and emails
- ✓ Five licenses per user so that each user can install the desktop programs on up to five different computers
- ✓ The inclusion of mobile apps for Word, PowerPoint, Excel, and Outlook that are available for iOS, Android, and Windows phones
- ✓ Instant software upgrades at no additional cost
- ✓ Group collaboration on documents, with edits seen and made in real time
- ✓ Seamless connection between work product on a desktop at the office and any other mobile device

Desktop as a Service:

Simplicity, Scalability, Predictability, Savings, and Security

Desktop as a service (DaaS) is a cloud service where all of the functionality and storage of desktops is stored and hosted by a cloud provider. In this subscription model, the service provider manages the back-end responsibilities of data storage, backup, maintenance, security, and upgrades.

One of the chief benefits of DaaS is that it reduces the hardware costs for workstations. This is accomplished by the fact that low cost thin clients can replace the much higher costs of new desktops since all of the hard drive and application aspects are stored in the cloud. This significantly increases the life of the workstations while enabling nearly instantaneous software updates (since they are done in the overnight) and remote monitoring for maximum uptime.





With DaaS subscriptions, your workforce has centralized data control, security, centralized backup, and disaster recovery for “virtual” PCs. DaaS is also another way for the workforce to work remotely using a variety of mobile devices. DaaS is a cloud solution that takes the headache out of managing desktops and applications internally, with the added ability of employees to work anywhere being an equally important benefit.

Mobility and BYOD: A Mobile Workforce Is a Productive Workforce

Bring Your Own Device (BYOD), in essence, is the ability of your employees to use their own smartphones, tablets, and other mobile devices in order to communicate and work remotely from the office. Some businesses may purchase the devices for the employees for greater control, but this isn't a necessity. BYOD offers a significant opportunity to mobilize the SMB workforce, increase employee productivity, and save on business communication costs.

The mobile point-of-sale (mPOS) system is a secure and mobile way for businesses to complete transactions with customers. Now mPOS has evolved beyond simple credit-card acceptance into a business-management and customer-convenience tool. Today's mPOS systems are cloud-based, with data stored remotely and available online. Cloud services have become more secure with the use of point-to-point encryption and tokenization, tools that protect cardholder data both in transit and at rest.

Secure cloud services give merchants greater flexibility in accessing their data remotely, allowing them to view reports and manage business functions from anywhere with Internet access. In addition to cutting the costs of payment acceptance, mPOS

solutions help merchants drive business management efficiency across multiple locations with offerings like inventory tracking, customer sales information, and employee scheduling.

VoIP and Unified Communications

Voice over Internet Protocol (VoIP) is technology that takes voice data and moves them along your Internet network, instead of through a phone landline.

VoIP providers deliver calls to your phones and software clients with no need for phone-system purchases without any hardware/telephone system investment or implementation, so phones can be "plug and play." There are also self-hosted, on-site VoIP systems that are more involved for the business. Both options enable the business to handle the basic settings for your phone lines or extensions over the phone, while tweaking more advanced options requires diving into your provider's online account interface.

BYOD offers a significant opportunity to mobilize the SMB workforce

Unified communications (UC) is a term that refers to the integration of multiple types of business communication used, such as IM, email, voice, and video conferencing. With UC, users can instantly switch from email to phone via a uniform platform interface.

While UC platforms consolidate data, they also enable employees to use a variety of tools for communicating with customers. This enables your business to expand its support channels so that customers have the option of calls, emails, and chat for communicating with the company in the way that is most convenient and comfortable for them.

Many UC solutions are offered as cloud-based applications, so on-site hardware and software are eliminated, while capacity is scalable to your needs. The business workforce can communicate from anywhere on any computing/mobile device via a variety of methods (IM, email, VoIP, video, etc.). Not only can they communicate from anywhere in the world, but they can connect to your phone system without a dial tone and long-distance charges.

Additional benefits of UC solutions include:



Calls and emails can be routed anywhere at any time. You can even pinpoint locations of recipients based on their last communication time and method (phone, email, IM, etc.) in order to determine the best way to reach them.



All calls and communications are recorded digitally for archiving and revisiting purposes



Improved profit margins via a boost in overall operational efficiency

VoIP can be a part of UC or a separate solution. Because these and other solutions rely heavily on moving data across the business network and IP, bandwidth for all of the different forms of communication and usage is always a challenge that only increases as your business grows. MPLS and VPNs are two potential solutions to ensuring that all data transfers across the network are fast (low-latency) and high-quality.

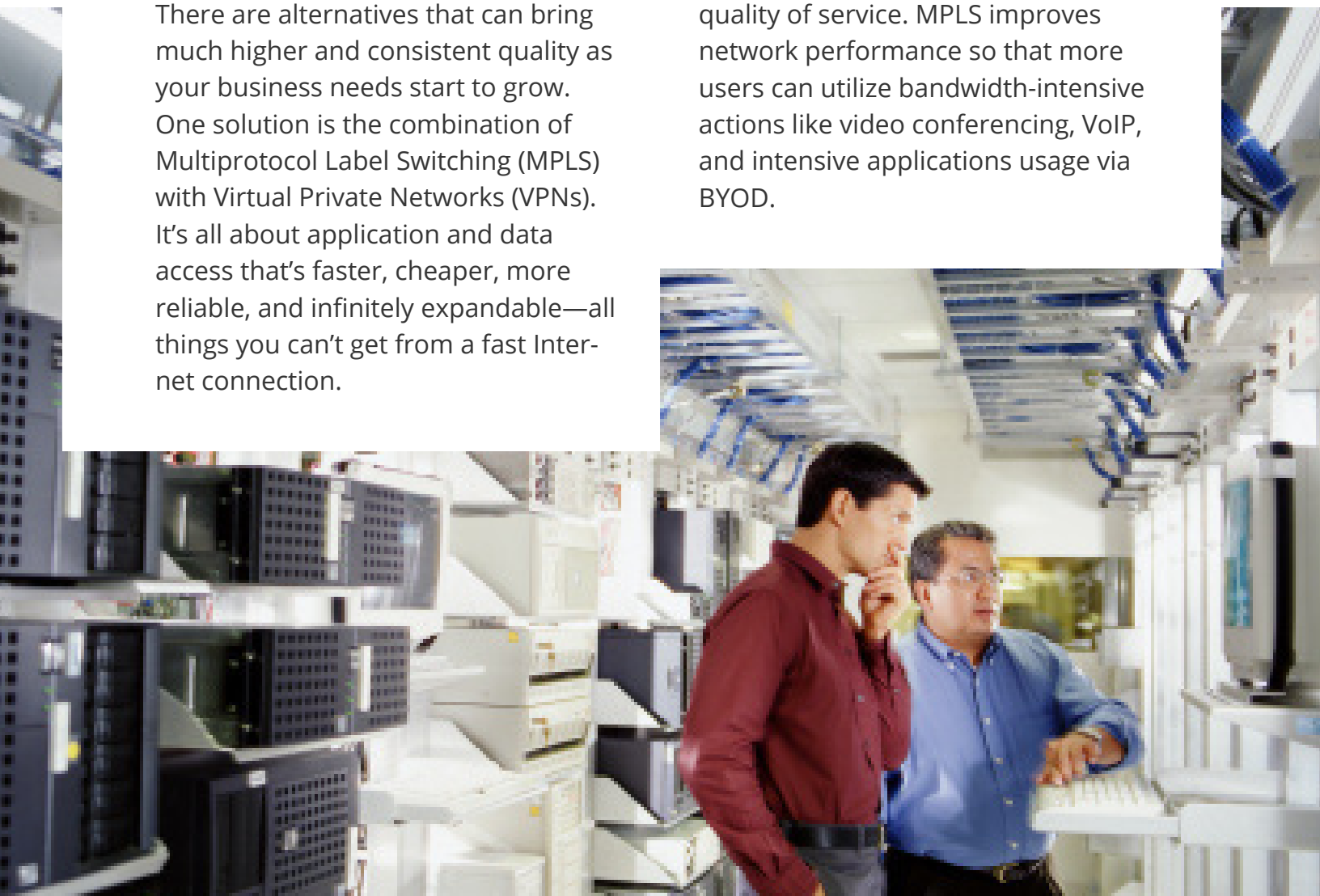
MPLS and VPNs

Your business is increasingly using video teleconferencing, VoIP, and mobility in order to connect the workforce. When you have video conferences, remote users collaborating via cloud applications and via VoIP and other avenues of UC, the public Internet presents problems. This can include jitter and lost information (that could translate to lost or bad voice and video connections, dropped calls, and worse).

There are alternatives that can bring much higher and consistent quality as your business needs start to grow. One solution is the combination of Multiprotocol Label Switching (MPLS) with Virtual Private Networks (VPNs). It's all about application and data access that's faster, cheaper, more reliable, and infinitely expandable—all things you can't get from a fast Internet connection.

MPLS networks enable businesses to converge business applications onto a single private network across locations. An MPLS network is a cost-effective technology that delivers predictable application performance, advanced security, and scalability, making it an ideal solution for multisite businesses.

MPLS networks prioritize application performance of business-critical applications, such as voice, video, and payment transactions, with built-in quality of service. MPLS improves network performance so that more users can utilize bandwidth-intensive actions like video conferencing, VoIP, and intensive applications usage via BYOD.



MPLS networks' architecture eliminates the poor quality, dropouts, video jitter, lost data, and other signal degradations and loss that are common to traditional routed IP networks (the public Internet). MPLS networks provide increased security with private routing domains and secure Internet gateways that protect network resources from label spoofing and malicious traffic.

A Virtual Private Network (VPN) enables a computer that is located outside the corporate network to connect to that network as if it were inside the building, allowing access to internal resources such as file shares, applications, and printers. Some types of VPN require the outside PC to use a client in order to access the network, while other VPNs use SSL (Secure Sockets Layer) and can function without the need for a client to be installed. And some VPN setups can provide both of these connection methods.

MPLS networks' architecture eliminates the poor quality, dropouts, video jitter, lost data, and other signal degradations.

It may now be clear that all of these solutions in the cloud can greatly improve the productivity of your business while also saving you a great deal of money. The challenge that remains is knowing which solutions are right for your business, as well as when and how to implement them. This is where a trusted, skilled, and experienced managed IT services provider can help you bring it all together. But what are managed services, and are they right for your business?

Managed IT Services: What Are They, and Are They Right for Your Business?

Managed IT services are the practice of outsourcing day-to-day IT management and computer network technical support as a cost-effective method for improving business operations, instead of having full-time on-site IT personnel.

Managed IT services are designed, implemented, and performed by managed services providers (MSPs). MSPs can seamlessly implement maintenance and monitoring of your entire IT infrastructure as well as help you decide on new tools and help you implement them throughout your organization's infrastructure without impacting daily workflows. They have technology platforms and highly skilled and certified technicians who can continuously monitor your IT systems in order to screen for and prevent issues that can cause your company IT downtime and a resulting lapse in productivity.

An MSP has the ability to set up appropriate email protections, efficient virus shields, powerful network firewalls, and extensive usage data that you need in order to secure your IT perimeters from external threats and confine sensitive client information to the proper user or users. Their skill sets include:

- ✓ Expertise in data security and the needs of regulatory compliance for businesses operating in industries such as healthcare and finance
- ✓ Expertise in creation of data backup and recovery plans and solutions so that your business is proactively prepared for a man-made or natural disaster and so that your business can keep operating
- ✓ MSPs can create data backups with a fully encrypted data transfer system that places your information into a secure, remote storage center. These data backup systems are compliant with various industry regulations including HIPAA and the Payment Card Industry Data Security Standard.

MSPs are the ideal solution partner for those businesses that:

- ✓ Rely on their computer network, email, database, and Internet access in order to properly support their daily business processes
- ✓ Do not have sufficient staff or time in order to formally deal with proper computer network maintenance, updates, and repairs
- ✓ Want to pay one monthly flat fee for services in order to maintain their computer network environment

MSPs work proactively rather than reactively, so they can monitor your IT infrastructure remotely and head off problems before they impact the business. As technology advisors, they can help your business make decisions on technology implementations that will benefit the business in definitive ways today as well tomorrow.

Working with an MSP can:

- ✓ Increase efficiency/reliability of IT operations
- ✓ Enable predictable capacity planning
- ✓ Enhance security and regulatory compliance

Building an Affordable IT Foundation for Business Growth

Real-world cost-saving use cases for VPNs

For an organization looking to provide a secured network infrastructure for its user base, a VPN offers two main advantages over alternative technologies: cost savings and network scalability. A VPN can deliver cost savings in several ways, including:

- ✓ Eliminating the need for expensive long-distance leased lines
- ✓ Reducing long-distance telephone charges
- ✓ Offloading support costs

Real-world cost-saving use cases for mobility

When organizations implement a BYOD program, cost savings may depend on how the company implements BYOD and what the company currently spends on mobility. When it is factored in with VoIP, UC, and other communications solutions, BYOD can bring many cost savings. In addition, when employees utilize their own phones, tablets, and even laptops, the annual cost savings from BYOD can easily be in the hundreds of dollars per employee, per year.



Real-world cost-saving use cases for VoIP

Business VoIP services are significantly less expensive than traditional phone services. These savings include:

- ✓ No hardware investment
- ✓ Predictable and low monthly subscription fees
- ✓ VoIP services also tend to be contract-free
- ✓ VoIP is cheaper than a traditional landline if you have staff in far-flung locations
- ✓ Because in-network calls travel exclusively over data networks rather than public phone lines, most VoIP providers let you make calls to your coworkers for free, regardless of city and state location
- ✓ Mobile apps that let you make and receive calls from the road using your data connection with simultaneous rings to your mobile and office phone
- ✓ Versatile network call routing and characteristic programming such as location and time-specific programming





VoIP solutions can deliver a deep and broad set of features beyond conference calling, voicemail, Internet faxing, and caller ID. They can also provide:

- ✓ Virtual receptionists and greeting functionality
- ✓ Customizable advanced call screen-ing and forwarding rules
- ✓ Integration with office software
- ✓ The ability to forward voicemail to your email or your mobile phone, and much more

Many providers offer these advanced features as part of a subscription that has predictable monthly costs that are less than what you would pay a traditional phone provider for the same services.

Conclusion:

The Willow Bend Systems Difference

The promise of business technology is that it should always make your life simpler and more productive. That means it must be transparent so that you never have to think about it, and it always works as intended. Ultimately, it must provide real-world savings and benefits today as well as tomorrow. It's time to invest the time and effort into new technology when one or more of the following situations are present:

- ✓ You have repetitive tasks that are eating too much time.
- ✓ You have repetitive tasks that are error-prone (when the errors can cost you time, money, and/or reputation).
- ✓ Your competition is using the new technology, and you need to keep up.
- ✓ The long-term technology benefits are more than the short-term implementation costs and ongoing maintenance costs.
- ✓ The new technology solves a problem you didn't realize you had.

Your business cannot afford to invest in technology for the sake of technology. It must serve specific purposes that further the business in foundational ways such as:

- ✓ Increased productivity
- ✓ Simpler and streamlined processes
- ✓ Better and more versatile communication
- ✓ Development of a business environment that is predictable and stress-free

The solutions in this eBook are geared to delivering the immediate ROI and freedom from high cost and complicated learning curves that many businesses want to avoid with technology. By having the support of a managed IT services provider like Willow Bend Systems, businesses have a consultant that learns your business and its goals.

That way, we can advise you on how technology solutions can improve the business in tangible ways. The goal is to make technology transparent through proactive monitoring maintenance and implementation of technology solutions that improve business processes today. By helping you grow your business and not your IT budget, we facilitate a business culture where you can concentrate on running and growing your organization and the bottom line.

Request a demo in order to learn how Willow Bend
Systems can be the managed IT services
provider that you need.

REQUEST A DEMO

