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General Information

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Avaya Gives Packets A Voice
VoIP Vendor Continues To Advance The Digital Switchboard

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VoIP has always held the promise of revolutionizing the corporate telecommunications environment. In a VoIP environment, data and voice traffic can travel over the same physical layer, remote offices can be integrated into the home office PBX and network with a single dedicated line, and telecommuters can even bring their office extension home through a VPN connection.

Avaya has been leading the charge with its family of VoIP PBX and key phone systems, and the next 12 months will continue this forward momentum, according to Saied Seghatoleslami, vice president of strategy and business development for Avaya. "We tend to launch products twice a year, so we just launched a family of products in May and we're coming up with a launch in November, and [we] hope for another launch in May of '05."

One major component of Avaya's strategy has been CRM integration for call centers. Its IP Office product packages a phone system, voice messaging solution, auto attendant, router, firewall, and VPN capabilities into a single box. Currently, IP Office is integrated with Microsoft's CRM products through an application called Compact Call Center, and this integration will be extended in the near future, says Seghatoleslami.

"Later this calendar year, you should see from us integration at the reporting level. Today we use Business Objects; [Microsoft] uses Crystal Reports. So you'll be able to see both systems use Crystal Reports," he says. "Also, Crystal Reports has more people who are skilled and knowledgeable on how to generate customized reports, and we have a fairly high level of demand for customized reports." That, says Seghatoleslami, gives Avaya's VARs a chance to offer customers additional reporting capabilities.

■ Pick Up On Line Two

Avaya also plans to bring new flexibility for key hybrid functionality in IP Office. Seghatoleslami gives an example of the type of customer that wants these features. "As it turns out, car dealers kind of heavily depend on key systems features. You know, 'Mr. Jones, pick up line two.' Except now they need that in an IP environment, so come November we'll have full key hybrid functionality in IP Office. For a lot of small businesses, it will be more compatible with their business processing."

Avaya is also going to make it easier to consolidate applications in the equipment closet. "Another thing that we're launching in November [is that] these applications all will be tested for 30-, 60-, and 90-user environments to all be able to run on one HP server. So for HP servers, we'll certify them to be able to run all your applications co-resident as a kind of a server consolidation."

The integration of Avaya's small and large product lines is also on the plate for the upcoming six months. "IP Office will be a gateway off of Avaya Communication Manager. So when you buy an Avaya Communication Manager, you can use an IP Office as the local gateway," says Seghatoleslami. "Let's say you're a financial institution and you have banks in grocery stores, and if you had 300 or 400 of those, you could put 300 or 400 IP Offices in [two- or three-person] small offices. Your phones will look like you're sitting on your central location communication manager, and if there were a failure in your network, then you revert to a local gateway, and your local gateway will appear as a trunk group to your Avaya Communication Manager system."

■ Losing The Wires

Looking forward, Seghatoleslami sees wireless technology becoming more central to the IP telephony picture. "Staying focused in the United States and the U.S. market, you'll see coming from us continued enhancements in wireless. 802.11e has not been approved yet. [That brings] quality of service over Wireless LAN. As soon as that's approved, you'll see that in IP Office." Other features upcoming from Avaya include chain store management and remote diagnostic capabilities for Avaya VARs so that they can provide a higher level of support to end customers without having to make an onsite visit.

■ The View From The Street

Adam Sulkin makes it his job, as president of TEQConsult Group, to track Avaya along with the rest of the enterprise communication market. He is very bullish on Avaya's financial future.

"Avaya seems to be on a positive trend, at least financially, in the last year. That's good. While the overall market has been improving, from a product portfolio perspective for enterprise voice systems, they pretty much are at the top of the pack in small systems, large systems, basic voice, the contact center, the messaging, and I also include in that area IP telephony," Sulkin says.

All is not rosy for Avaya, however. "It's Cisco who has been grabbing a bigger piece of the pie, and as they grab the bigger piece of the pie, there is less pie left for everybody else," he adds. "So Avaya has maintained a highly competitive position against the traditional players like Nortel, Siemens, NEC, and the others, but somehow Cisco has been able to get into the market with both basic voice systems and even contact center, despite what some of the vendors claim are weaker products from a company with less experience. [Cisco has] also been able to cream-skim the IP market as it develops."

According to Sulkin, Avaya has a good shot to maintain its advantage. "They have expertise in products; they also have applications expertise. They also have that installed base, and the easiest way to get a new system in is to upgrade or to sell to your existing customers." ■

by James Turner

Upcoming IP Office

• Enhancements From Avaya

• Better CRM integration

• Integration with Communications Manager

• Integration with existing key phone systems

• Wireless VoIP with 802.11e