

PC to Phone VoIP over Dial-Up

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So you've heard that you can use your computer to make cheap long-distance calls over the Internet. Maybe you've even tried it. Chances are though that if you've attempted VoIP calls over a dial-up connection, you've experienced intermittent quality, 'call drop-outs' and annoying speech transmission delays. The good news is that there are some quick, easy steps that you can take to dramatically improve the quality of your VoIP calls over dial-up connections.

There's a lot of hype these days surrounding Internet-based voice communications (VoIP) replacing traditional telephone service. Most of this revolves around companies such as Vonage who coin themselves as the 'Broadband Phone Company'. So what about those of us who don't have a broadband connection? Just because you don't have high speed Internet, doesn't mean that you can't save a fortune by using VoIP for your long-distance calls. Whilst a broadband connection will usually result in more consistent VoIP call quality, comparable results can be achieved using a dial-up connection provided some simple guidelines are followed.

Shop Around

Not all VoIP service providers support dial-up users. Companies such as Vonage bill themselves as alternatives to traditional telephone service and shy away from the dial-up community (who are tied to those 'traditional' networks to access the Internet). Furthermore, some service providers only support dial-up above a certain speed (e.g., 56Kbp). Two companies whose VoIP softphone applications work well over low speed connections include Callserve and Go2Call.

'Free-up' your System Resources

In order to ensure the highest call quality, close programs that are running in the 'background'. For Windows users, these applications can be seen in the taskbar at the bottom right of your screen. 'Right-click' the icons and close those programs that aren't critical to system security (e.g., don't close anti-virus software, firewall applications and the like).

If you're using Windows XP with user switching enabled, log off all users except the one that will be used to make the call. This will prevent the other user identities from running software and/or using your bandwidth while you're making calls.

'Free Up' your Internet Connection

Given the limited data capacity of dial-up connections, it's important that you devote as much of your bandwidth as possible to the VoIP softphone application. To achieve maximum call quality, don't do anything that uses your bandwidth whilst making calls. This includes instant messaging, checking email, using a webcam, browsing the internet, downloading, etc. In Windows, you can look at the two little computers in the bottom right of your taskbar to see whether your connection is being used prior to calling (the little computers illuminate when data is being uploaded and/or downloaded).

Scan your System for Viruses, Spyware, Adware and Malware

Some of these malicious programs can hijack your browser, tie up your internet connection and slow down your system (not to mention seriously invade your privacy!). I recommend AdAware for free scanning and removal of Spyware/Adware. Once you've checked and cleansed your system of these nasty programs, your virus definition files should be updated to minimise the chances of re-infection.

Use a Headset with an Integrated Boom Microphone

Last but not least, using a headset with a boom microphone should eliminate those annoying voice echoes often associated with PC to phone calls. Echoes are caused by your microphone detecting the voice coming from your computer speakers and re-transmitting that voice signal back to the person you're talking to. By using a headset, the voice signals are limited in volume (due to the headset being directly adjacent to your ears) and thus the chances of your microphone 're-transmitting' those voice signals is greatly reduced.

So there you have it. A lack of high speed Internet needn't mean a lack of PC to phone VoIP capability.

About the author:

Nathan is the owner of <http://www.netphonedirectory.com> which deals specifically with PC to Phone and PC to PC VoIP. The site includes a comprehensive directory of PC to Phone service providers as well as general information on VoIP and what you need to make inexpensive long-distance telephone calls using your computer