



OCS 2007 R2 - Time To eBay The PBX

By Mitchell Ashley - Created Feb 4 2009 - 2:57am

Is it here? Has convergence finally arrived? You know... replacing those arcane devices we call PBX's with an all software VoIP solution. Well, I don't know if I'd put the PBX on eBay quite yet, but we may actually be at a nexus point where this is possible. Two key features in Microsoft Office Communications Server 2007 R2, [released on Tuesday](#), now make it possible to replace a traditional PBX with OCS: SIP trunking and attendant console support.

On my [most recent podcast](#), Terry Gold of [Gold Systems](#), a Microsoft Gold Certified Partner (whew, that's a lot of "gold" in one sentence), discussed how he is finally replacing his company's PBX with OCS 2007, thanks to the R2 release. Those two features in R2, SIP trunking and attendant console support, were the only obstacles preventing Gold Systems from fully cutting over to OCS and ditching the PBX. Since Gold Systems sells and installs OCS (and builds VoIP applications), I guess Terry thought he should see if they can eat their own dog food and replace the PBX with OCS.

I talked with Terry back when he was testing the final bits of R2 and Terry indicated then that things were looking good to cut over to OCS 2007 R2. The only remaining issue now to full moving to OCS is purchasing handsets for all of the employees' desks.

The cost savings with OCS 2007 R2 come by dropping voice T1 lines and replacing them with data connections and services from SIP trunk providers, such as bandwidth.com, Global Crossing and Sprint. Long distance charges also go away since they are switched through the SIP services just like local calls. Since you wouldn't flash cut over to OCS, keep in mind there will be parallel costs of T1s, long distance services, and data/SIP services while you are transitioning. Terry estimates his company will save "a couple of thousand" each month by dropping their T1 lines and long distance services. (I would guess Terry's business size is around 100+ employees or so, an SME sized company.)

Another cost saving comes from eliminating audio (and video) conferencing services. OCS can now act as your conferencing service, connecting employees on your OCS server and outside attendees who call in. Depending on your use of conferencing services, this could mean thousands or even tens of thousands of dollar savings each month alone (about \$3,000/mo. in Terry's case.)

If you haven't seen the Office Communicator client that runs on desktops, it looks very similar to an instant messaging client. Like IM clients, it communicates presence information to tell others if you are at your desk, on the phone, or away. It also integrates with Outlook to tell others you are busy with an appointment on your calendar. Communicator can also start up a video call or send instant messages. Plus, traveling laptop users take their connection into OCS with them through the Communicator, operating just like it does when they are in office.

Not only does presence information work across users on an OCS system, you can also share and receive presence information with partners through a feature called Open Federation. It's just like adding another user to your contacts -- you now have presence information about that user, provided the user has allowed you to see their presence information.

What kinds of companies are considering the move to OCS? Terry indicated it's primarily large enterprises, though medium and some smaller businesses are also candidates for moving to an OCS 2007 R2 solution. I was rather surprised to hear both that OCS could handle the demands of a large company and that OCS was mature enough for larger enterprises. From what I learned, those are the kinds of organizations where most OCS trials and evaluations are happening.

Will we suddenly see a plethora of PBXs for sale on eBay? I don't think we're quite there yet, but if OCS proves itself in the enterprise and we start to see a good number of OCS deployments / PBX replacements, that would open the door for a lot of us to reconsider replacing the PBX. Costs whenever we make a PBX maintenance payment, pay for a PBX service call, or pay the bills for T1 data lines, long distance calls and analog conferencing services will also serve as a reminder.