

Q: We are getting questions from management to look into the cost vs. advantages of upgrading our Definity to accommodate Voice Over IP. All of the journals they read are giving it wide publicity, and they are wondering why we haven't any plans to implement the change. What is your take on Voice Over IP?

A: In the case of enabling current PBX's to utilize Voice Over IP, although we are currently demonstrating it and running through the installation process and programming in our advanced implementation class, we are also giving our less-than-enthusiastic interpretation of the usability of the system. We are not proponents of Voice Over IP as it exists today other than for trunking through a Cisco or equivalent router connecting to a Frame-Relay T-1 that extends to a distant PBX. There are also some limited usage applications for "road warriors" to use the IP-Softphone over a high-speed internet connection (not just a dial-up) to enable them to become part of a calling group while off-site. Other than that, we think until the LAN becomes a much broader bandwidth (say 500meg or 1 gig), Voice Over IP is a wonderful development who's time has not quite come yet due to the huge benefit/cost negative ratio and an absolute requirement of prioritized packetization with guaranteed bandwidth requirements over an already, in most cases, crowded LAN. Most IT departments wouldn't buy-in to the concept once they understand they will lose probably over half of their LAN's bandwidth. And over the Internet?..... not even close to ready for all of that traffic in this day and age. It would grind the Internet to a complete dead stop. Think of it like trying to drive a modern car on the narrow winding two-lane highway system of the 1920's or 1930's..... lots of power, but what the heck are you going to do with it?.....

Q: The following is my view regarding several comments by system administrators from varying corporate backgrounds.

A: Choosing a maintenance company other than the OEM can be a difficult and frightening undertaking. How does one know if the proposing company can really support a Definity system to anywhere near the degree the OEM has? And what other unknowns will rear their ugly head and put yours on the chopping block? First of all, have you ever considered where all those folks who are no longer with the OEM have gone? They didn't vanish into the retraining programs proliferated by the claims of the supposed demise of the spotted owl. They are still doing what they've spent their lives learning and what they know best. Telephony! Only they're doing it with companies other than the OEM. The best way to judge whether a company can support your system is to call their references. If they are legitimate, they will have many and will encourage you to talk with all of them. Also check to make sure they have 24-hour support, 7 days a week, 52 weeks out of the year. There's nothing wrong with a small company of just two or three good technicians, as long as they don't expect to all go hunting together several times a year. And check to see what their supply of equipment contains, making sure it can support your system completely. But most of all, it's back to the references; don't be bashful to call them. If they are a good thing for the people who use them, they will be very happy to share that with you, and conversely, if not, they'll be anxious to tell you that, too! Lastly, ask them to demonstrate their expertise by giving you a couple of hours training on some feature or option you are curious about in your Definity system. Instinct will tell you what you need to know about how effectively they can support you. Additionally, you will be delighted to find that most interconnect companies have a greater commitment to service and response time than to what you are probably accustomed, and due to not segmenting their knowledge base, each technician will probably have a greater general understanding of your system than to what you have previously been exposed. Don't just take my word for it..... check it out!

Q: We have a group that has just moved to our facility that used a key-system in their previous location. In the past you have stated never to use bridged-appearances. I can't find any other way to satisfy their request for implementation, and their manager tells me not to change the way they use the telephone. Is there any way to use bridged-appearances and do it right?

A: I have always used a blanket statement that there is no way to use bridged-appearances right. Now, it appears I may have to eat some crow. In some recent release of software there has popped up a feature called "Auto Select Any Idle Appearance?" on the second page of the station form. It is the answer that makes bridged-appearances now an almost feasible option, and thus allowing the Definity to appear as a key-system to the die-hards that must have a simple system showing all lines. This method allows the transfer of a call on a bridged-appearance button to be able to use one of the primary extension buttons for that transfer. Heretofore a transferred call would require the use of one of the bridged-appearance buttons,

requiring a need for all three buttons to appear on the bridging voice terminal. This then makes the usage of bridged-appearances nearly acceptable (old dogs are reluctant to learn new tricks). The qualifying factor is you must have a release of software that allows this feature, and I'm not sure what release it began with. It will take a bit of research on your part.

Q: We have four Definity-G3's tied together over a DCS network. We are looking at adding a fifth, which will be a small 50-or-so station site. When we added the fourth system, we thought about making it a Prologix, but didn't care for the QSIG method of networking, as we are comfortable with the DCIU method. Is there any method other than QSIG to be able to use the smaller system?

A: We implemented a Prologix utilizing the QSIG method with a Definity-G3i and it worked just fine, but it did take a bit of getting used to. However, your question has a better answer for you than QSIG. There is a fairly new method called PPPNode integration. It utilizes a C-LAN card and IP addressing (Version-8 or better) that fairly emulates the DCIU method, only uses the 23rd channel as if it were a LAN and sends the IP packets over it. Each switch has its own IP address and can be any configuration of hardware, including the Prologix. We have used it and like it more than the traditional DCIU method. As usual, if you have any questions, give me a call.