Definity-G(x) Demystified:
By Walt Medak

Q: We are in the process of moving our business into an office building that provides telephone service to the tenants through a Definity PBX. The property management people are telling us that they can't make the phones work like our key system phones do now. Our people are used to having each of our lines appear on their phone, and even though one person answers most calls, anybody can answer the calls. Then, to have someone else pick up a call, whoever answered would just tell the other person what line to pick up. Why can't the Definity do what our key system was able to do?

A: Comparing a Definity to a key system is a little like comparing apples and oranges. Each system is designed to handle a completely different type of environment. Key systems work well in an environment where you have just a handful of lines and a relatively small number of users. As you stated, it's usually a matter of someone answering a call, and then telling someone to "Pick up line two". The very basic systems would often just have a button to press to access the lines set aside for making outbound calls. Many of the more advanced types would have at least a basic Least Cost Routing (LCR) or Automatic Route Selection (ARS) feature built in.
When you start talking about the Definity system, you really enter into a whole different world. The Definity is designed for a much larger environment. Depending on the configuration, they can handle hundreds of trunks and thousands of users. Usually in a Definity environment, or any PBX system for that matter, incoming calls will be handled by a centralized receptionist, an auto-attendant in the voicemail system or a vector in the switch that gives callers options to press numbers for different departments, or even directly to a user by the means of a DID number. Calls are then normally passed from phone to phone with the use of a transfer feature rather than pressing a button to pick up a particular "line".
As far as outbound calling is concerned, virtually all Definity systems are set up to utilize the ARS feature. This way, your employees would dial a number assigned to the ARS feature, most commonly a '9', followed by the phone number. The Definity would then decide which trunk to use for the call based on how it is programmed. In this case with multiple tenants using the same Definity, programming would have to be done to make sure each tenant was only able to access their own trunks.
In your case, there are a number of ways to give everyone the ability to answer incoming calls. Since the office area is relatively small and open, you could do something as simple as having all of the phones in the same pickup group, and assign a Call-Pickup button to each phone. That way, when a call is ringing at your main phone, anyone can press their Call-Pickup button and answer the call. Or, depending on how fancy your property managers will allow you to get with your phone service, you could have them set up an auto-attendant and give your callers the option of reaching a particular person or group.
The important thing to remember is that the main objective is to get the caller to the right person in the timeliest manner possible. Each system, whether it is a small key system or a large Definity, has it's own ways of accomplishing this. Each type of system works

fine for the environment for which it was designed. However, the Definity has so much more to offer in the way of features I think your people will begin to see the advantages once they have enough time to get used to the differences in the way it works compared to your key system.