

IOWA CITY

## Keystone IT offers VoIP services to small businesses

By Gigi Wood

[gigi@corridorbiznews.com](mailto:gigi@corridorbiznews.com)

While it is no easy chore keeping up with technology changes, there are many companies throughout the Corridor to help small businesses keep up. One of those is Keystone IT, which installs, upgrades and provides support for voice over Internet protocol (VoIP) telephone systems.

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These days, VoIP can offer stable, consistent telephone service at affordable rates for companies of all sizes, said Mike McKay, vice president and general manager of Keystone IT, located at 365 E. College St. in Iowa City.

"It took awhile for the technology to get out there where everybody could test it and standards were put into place so that it wasn't a terrible experience," he said.

Those who want to switch to a VoIP service can maintain their current phone numbers. Keystone IT provides its own phone service within Iowa City and plans to expand its reach to Coralville and North Liberty by the end of the year. Pat McKay of Keystone IT can coordinate the transfer for those in Coralville and North Liberty who want to use VoIP but will still need to use a traditional phone

service, such as Qwest.

"You do need somebody that understands computer networks as well as phone technology, because your network has to be really tuned up and working right," Mike McKay said.

Instead of using telephone lines to transmit calls, VoIP sends phone calls over the Internet, which can provide many benefits to companies, especially for frequent business travelers and mobile executives.

"You can go anywhere in the world and put your phone in your briefcase and then plug it in anywhere in the world on the Internet and they're local calls out of your local office," he said.

It also allows easy moving of extensions, when employees move to different desks or areas of an office. There are no wires to reroute because the system is Internet-based.

"When an employee moves or a new one comes in, all you have to do is add them to your computer network, you don't have to have the phone company come in and rewire everything," he said.

There are typically four fees for implementing a VoIP service. Handsets range from \$130 to \$400. Setting up the service is about \$100, with another \$25 charge for each handset. Monthly system access is \$20 plus another \$10 for each phone number. The monthly fee covers all local and long distance calls.

Keystone IT sells two systems, one that is installed on the premises of the business and another, where companies pay a fee to be connected to Keystone's

servers.

"It doesn't need to be a big, beefy thing," he said.

It can also add lines throughout the year, during a company's busiest times.

One feature of VoIP systems is it allows small companies to appear more sophisticated to first-time callers, Pat McKay said.

"One attraction is that it can make businesses appear more professional; they can have it go to menus and say, 'Thank you for calling,' and things like that," he said. "Those things give a customer experience that you're dealing with a company that has its act together a bit better."

Other features include an auto-attendant to direct calls, music or advertising while customers are on hold, call forwarding to cell phones and other numbers, unlimited mailboxes, conference calls and more. The system can also sync up with Microsoft Outlook.

Larger companies, such as Cisco, sell phones and VoIP service, as well. Mike McKay said those companies are not always a good match for small businesses.

"They're bigger and their technology is around selling equipment and services that go with it so you kind of get locked into some proprietary equipment," he said. "Those systems carry a \$30,000 to \$40,000 price tag to start. And there's not been anything until the last few years for small businesses, that they can afford. And that gap is quickly getting attention." **CBJ**