

Crossing the Digital Divide (v54)

“One Number”

By Joseph Feigon for the Observer

It's easy to miss the changes in technology when we remain somewhat isolated by lack of adequate broadband solutions. We're working on change, and fighting all the battles one might expect when tossing stones at Goliath.

One of my favorite tech frontiers is voice - yes, voice. People need phones, businesses need phones. The phone companies really don't want to provide “phone” services; it is a well known fact that basic dial-tone is capital and resource intensive. The better phone companies realized, some 10-15 years ago, that everything they were doing with analog technology could be converted to a digital format. Voice-over-Internet-Protocol, or VoIP for short, is anything but leading edge technology - AT&T has been digitizing ALL voice traffic across their long distance circuits for decades, and why not? VoIP, like most Internet protocols, can share the same circuits with email, web traffic, etc. Traditional voice communications required full access to an entire circuit for the duration of a call; resource intensive, difficult to scale, and not really cost effective, while VoIP, a packetized implementation of “voice”, can be routed over the open Internet, and delivers, in most cases, call quality equal to or greater than a traditional home phone.

Traditional voice services can be augmented with specialized hardware and software to manage both inbound and outbound calls, balance workloads, and improve a business' customer service levels. I'm a huge fan of One Number, and use VoIP to provide myself with a Findme/Followme function that's been a huge time saver. I have several phones, and often use my computer and a headset to make calls, or use my cellphone to make calls when I'm connected to a wifi hotspot. Why?

I have clients in the Bay Area who've been calling me on the same number since I launched my practice in 2003. Normally, if I receive a call, my desk phone rings. If I don't answer, it will route the caller to voice mail. If the caller leaves me a message, I will receive an email with the voice mail message attached - I can listen to that message without picking up the phone. I could, if need be, send a copy of that message to someone else - without having to share my voice mailbox password.

I grew tired of missing phone calls, and reviewing voicemail messages when I may have been available, but not at my desk, when the caller called me. I've since setup “Findme, Followme”, which means, when I'm not at my desk, the VoIP system will ring my cell. No need to publish “office”, “cell”, “ranch”.

Control those things you can control.