



BUG-BYTES

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WHAT IS VOIP?

VOICE OVER INTERNET PROTOCOL



There are new ways to phone locally using Voice over IP (internet protocol) to phone and to make long distance calls within the US and Canada. As a result, VoIP providers are vying with one another to compete with the traditional telephone companies (telcos) for your business. Names such as Vonage, ViaTalk, Net2Phone, Jajah, and Skype (among others) are becoming household words.

These new services have one thing in common. They use DSL or Internet cable to transmit messages from users with the same service, such as [Vonage to Vonage](#), for example, or [Skype to Skype](#). For many VoIP service providers, calls made from a computer user to another computer user (such as Skype to Skype) are free within the US and Canada. You may also make calls to telephones using landlines, however there is a charge to do so.

VoIP services do not provide emergency calling, such as 911. For that reason, the providers do not recommend stopping your traditional telephone service. In addition, if your ISP's service is unavailable,

then you can't make or receive calls. What VoIP provides is very inexpensive voice messaging depending on the plan that you have and whether you make just computer-to-computer (i.e. [Skype-to-Skype](#)) calls or you involve phone landlines, plus the subset of features that your plan offers such as Call Waiting, Caller ID, 3-way calling, Voice Mail, Call Return, Text Messaging (SMS) and Call Forwarding which may be extra cost options.

SO HOW DOES IT WORK?

Let's look at a mostly free service, Skype (www.skype.com). In preparation for this article I downloaded their free software and installed it on my main computer. You need a headset with a microphone to talk to other Skype users (or a web cam with a built-in micro-

phone), and you hear via your headset and/or via your computer's speakers. I already had such a headset to evaluate Vista's Speech Recognition capability.

Fortunately, Jim Frago was already a Skype user and I could talk to him while he was sitting at his computer. With Skype, you can talk to other Skype users or chat with them using their instant message application, or you can do both.

It was reported in early trials with VoIP that the sound was often very poor. However, that was not so when Jim and I talked using Skype. In fact, it was a little like a minor miracle, at least for me. I have profound hearing loss in both ears. As a result, I cannot understand speech on a telephone, even with an expensive amplified telephone such as the XI-30 Amplified Telephone. However, I

could hear and converse with Jim via Skype. We were also able to chat via Skype's chat application. See the screen shot from www.answers.com using "Skype" (without quotes) as the search term.

See the following link for reviews of popular VoIP offerings.

<http://voip-service-review.toptenreviews.com/skype-review.html>

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VOIP PHONE CONFIGURATIONS

SOUND CARD



USB PHONE



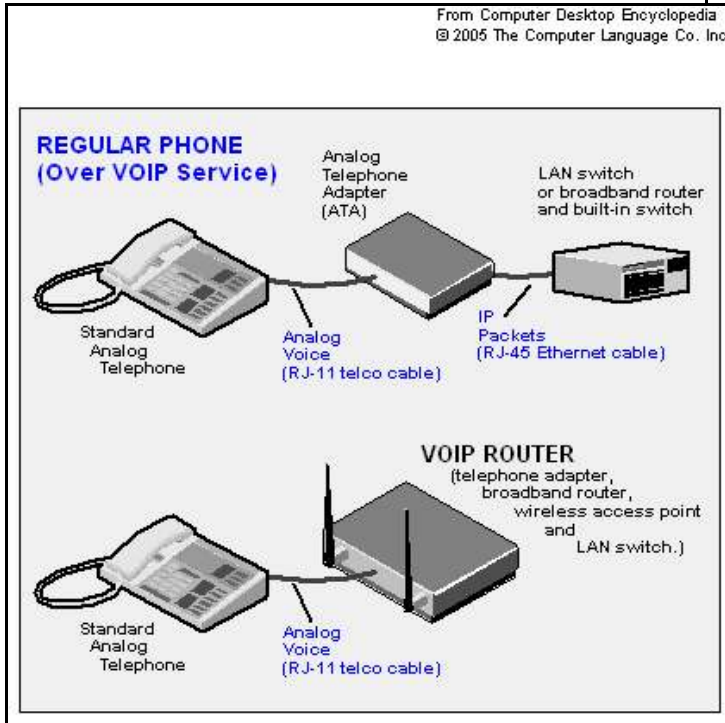
USB phones may have dial pads as well as speakerphones. If there is no dial pad, dialing is done via the computer's keyboard or clicking soft keys on screen.

Cordless and headset models are also available.

BLUETOOTH WIRELESS PHONE



SOFTPHONES



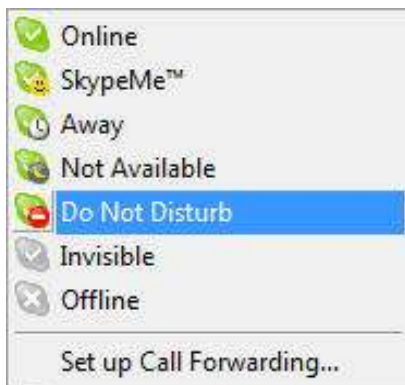
Initially, you add the Skype names of your family and friends to your Skype Contact list. If your friends do not have Skype, you invite them to download the software and to setup an account with Skype. You follow a similar procedure if you choose another VoIP provider, such as *Vonage*.

With a service such as *Vonage*, the vendor provides an adapter that connects to your internet cable modem or DSL connection. Thus, with some services you can make VoIP calls without having your computer turned on.

ARE YOU ALWAYS AT SOMEONE'S BECK AND CALL?

No, as with popular instant messaging clients, such as ICQ,

AIM, MSN Messenger, and Yahoo Messenger, you can show whether you are available, away, etc.



The screen shot at the left shows the available status choices for Skype. Your contacts see the status you choose when they open Skype on their computer. If you are in the midst of a big project, choose Do Not Disturb. If you turn off your computer, your contacts will see the grey Offline icon in Skype.

CAN YOU MAKE CALLS FROM A LANDLINE TO OR FROM SKYPE?

Yes, you can call a phone number, or receive calls from a landline phone. Skype charges Skype-in or Skype-out charges for such use, but the costs are much less than telcos charge. You can purchase unlimited calling for a nominal monthly or yearly charge. Full service vendors, such as *Vonage*, charge more, but they also offer many more features. In fact, some VoIP services offer more options than your regular phone company.

WHO BENEFITS MOST FROM VOIP SERVICES?

If you have a high monthly phone bill due to long distance calls, especially for calls made overseas, then you can save some serious money using VoIP services.

For many VoIP services, computer-to-computer calls are free. While it may not be as convenient to call from your computer rather than to use one of your phone extensions, beating the price is hard . . . free or nearly so. The downside of computer-to-computer calls is that both parties have to have the same software. Some services provide voice mail, so you can leave a message for your party. That helps break the telephone tag (computer-to-computer tag) routine.

CAN NON-VOIP TELEPHONE USERS INTERACT WITH YOU AT YOUR COMPUTER?

The answer is yes. You give them a VoIP phone number that rings your computer. Thus, if you decide to

cancel your regular phone service, people can still call you.

IS VOIP FOR YOU?

Only you can answer that particular question. Your answer depends upon some are all of the following questions.

Is the long distant portion of your telephone bill large enough to warrant changing your way of handling calls?

Do you plan to use VoIP almost exclusively?

Will the cost of VoIP result in a net savings to you over a year?

Will you get features that you want that are either not offered by your telephone plan, or that saves you money on your regular phone bill?

Will you be comfortable making calls at your computer rather than from anywhere in your home where there is a phone extension, or using a VoIP phone number where you pay a discounted rate to use your landline?

Are you comfortable with using a headset with a microphone to make and receive calls, or using a web cam with a built-in speaker?

Do you have a small list of family or friends that you frequently call long distance, and do they have a computer and a broadband connection? Will they be willing to install VoIP software and to use a headset?

WHEN IN DOUBT, SETUP A FREE TRIAL OF ONE OR MORE VOIP SERVICES, SUCH AS SKYPE.

A free trial will let you evaluate how well VoIP works for you and for your selected callers.

Click on the following link to review the list of available providers and their calling plans.

<http://voip-service-review.toptenreviews.com/skype-review.html>

Match the features you want and review the rates for services other than computer-to-computer, such as the rates for overseas calls or calls to or from landlines.

Do you need or want unlimited calling?

Vonage allows you to keep your phone number and provides unlimited phone calls for \$24.95 a month. See their site at . . .

<http://www.vonage.com/index.php?ic=1>.

Another option is Jajah at www.jajah.com. Jajah uses landlines and calls are free from Jajah to Jajah members. Microsoft also offers Windows Live Messenger. <http://get.live.com/messenger/features3>.

SUMMARY

VoIP can enable you to drastically lower your communications costs if you do lots of long distance calling, and have many extra cost phone options. In addition, VoIP provides

features that are not available to you via your traditional phone, such as chat mode, and video calls. Sometimes, VoIP provides many more options than your telephone company plan. See if a VoiP plan is right for you. Compare estimated total costs with your existing phone plan.

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

How can I get Outlook Express to Spell Check?

Some of you may well ask, why is anyone asking that particular question? If you have Microsoft Word, Microsoft Office, or Microsoft Works, those programs add spell check functionality to Outlook Express. **OE does not ship with a spell checker.** It is sad but true.

For those of you who would like to be able to spell check in OE, and who do not have a program that automatically provides spell checking in OE, download the following free program.

<http://www.majorgeeks.com/download.php?det=2952>

It is Spell Checker 2.1 for Outlook Express.

WHY SPELL CHECK?

E-mail messages tend to be very informal. Nevertheless, spelling errors reflect poorly on careless writers. We all know how easy it is to produce typos when we are typing quickly. Set your spell checker's spelling option to automatically spell check your documents before sending them.

In XP, open Outlook Express, click on Tools, Options, Compose. Select Spelling and review the settings as shown in the screen shots on the next page.

In Vista, open Windows Mail (replaced Outlook Express), click on Tools, Options, Compose, Spelling. Review the settings and select the options that you want.

Continued on next page

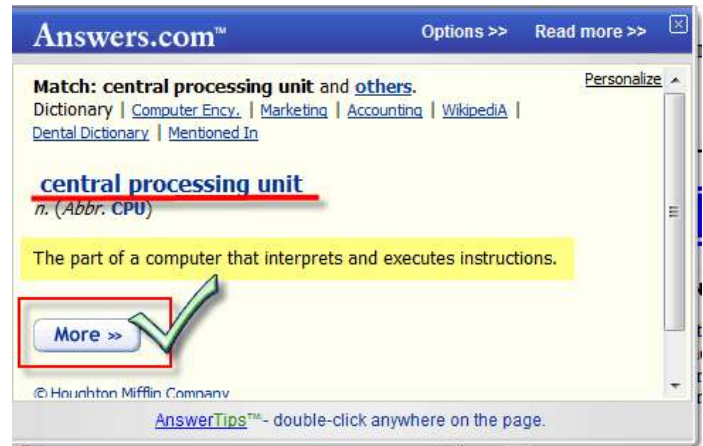
XP OUTLOOK EXPRESS COMPOSE/SPELLING DIALOG



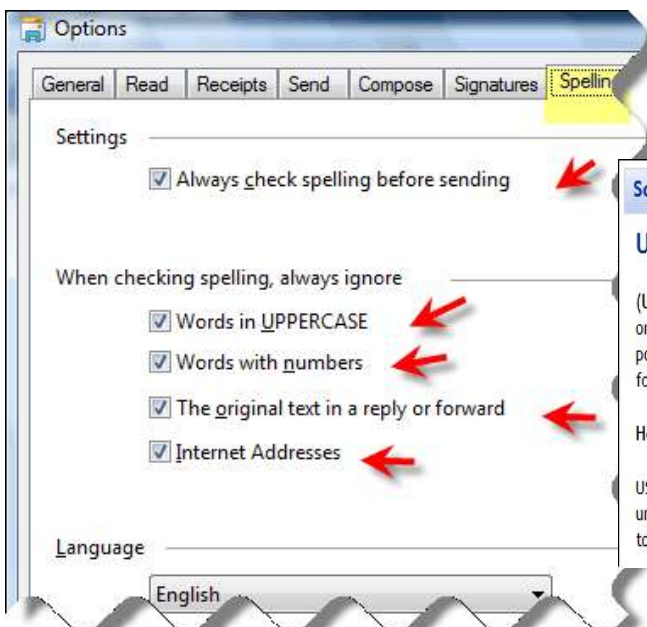
WANT ADDITIONAL FUNCTIONALITY IN OUTLOOK EXPRESS?
(Or in your word processor?)

Download and use the free program from www.answers.com. Once the program is installed, you can alt-click any word and the program will give you the correct spelling, the usage of the word, and other information about that word. You can also click on the small icon at the bottom of your screen and type in longer queries.

For example, here is what you get when you alt-click on the word CPU. This particular answer is very brief.



VISTA WINDOWS MAIL COMPOSE/SPELLING DIALOG



Now let's get information about USB connectors. After the dictionary meaning comes encyclopedia information, a thesaurus, and other data. Click on More to see the additional information. Try it. I think you will like it.

