Acronyms Explained

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There is no other industry I have seen, including the military, that uses acronyms as much as the telecom industry. Something that seems as simple as picking up the handset, dialing a number and getting someone on the other end can be rendered totally confusing by acronyms when talking about how it all takes place and the equipment needed. This tends to cause people to shy away from dealing with their system and why a lot of companies still have equipment that should be upgraded or replaced. As long as they still get that dial tone and can make and receive calls it is easier to avoid talking to a vendor or provider who can make an intelligent person feel inadequate in about thirty seconds.

The entire industry, from manufacturers to service providers to equipment vendors is to blame for this confusion. Maybe I should add consultants to the list, although I do my best to speak English. I have seen client's eyes glaze over after a five-minute conversation with a vendor who throws acronyms such as GUI, ISDN, T-1, PRI and IP around like they were throwing rice at a new bride.
That's why I try to use the most basic language possible when discussing a client's telephony needs.

Of course, I do come across those IT people who know their telephony inside out. That's

when it's my eyes that glaze over. At that point I say: "wait a minute, explain what you just said".

That's the key to figuring out what your needs are and what you need to do with your equipment to achieve your objectives. You have to be able to say to the person you are talking to that you want them to slow down and explain everything in layman's terms

instead of falling into 'acro-speak' (my own little potato in the pot.) It's so easy for people in the telecom industry they don't even realize they are doing it.

With VoIP being the biggest advancement in telephony since the tin cans connected by string I thought it would be helpful to explain a few acronyms so you can toss them around and impress your bridge club. VoIP, or Voice over Internet Protocol, is the process of your voice going over the Internet instead of telephone lines. (Why 'Internet Protocol' is the term used is beyond me.)

Your words are broken up into little packets and 'shipped' to the destination (the person you are talking to) where the packets are put back together into the words you spoke. This used to be a problem because the packets sometimes arrived in the wrong order and mumbo-jumbo was heard by the other end. This is pretty well a non-issue now.

GUI, pronounced 'gooey' is what I describe as point and click on your desktop. The desktop can show where everybody is and what they are doing; such as in a meeting, on the phone, on vacation, gone for lunch and so on. You dial by clicking on the person's name.

By using a headset and the computer speakers you don't even need a telephone set. This is another application used in conjunction with GUI known as a 'Softphone'. You can see how a laptop combined with a softphone enables your office to be wherever you happen to be. It's one more big advantage for voice over the Internet. It's a very useful application, something in today's vernacular that would be called cool.

T-1 is a digital transmission link containing two pairs of twisted copper wires, one for sending and one for receiving. Or it could contain fibre optic lines. If you have a bunch of local lines it is cheaper to have a T-1 line from the provider to your telephone system. PRI is another term that is synonymous with T-1. Telecom purists would say I am oversimplifying but you get the idea. There's a lot more to this but in a lot of cases it is a money saver for many companies as well as providing better and more features.

A 'Hosted IP PBX' is having voice over the Internet but somebody else owns the switch (PBX system). It is located off site, maintained by whoever owns it and the company pays a monthly fee to the owner. There are advantages and disadvantages, much the same as leasing a vehicle. It requires a needs analysis to decide the best way to go.

Voice over the Internet (let's call it VI) blends voice, video and data by specifying a common conduit collapsing three networks into one. The result is increased manageability, lower support costs, and a lot of new features resulting in increased productivity. Possible applications for VI telephony include telecommuting, distance learning, employee training, video conferencing, video mail, and video on demand. Oh, and let's not forget our GUI.

There are many more acronyms, in fact way too many, but we will touch on some of them another day.

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