



Phones as docking stations

The somewhat prosaic name for this innovative phone is the Mitel Networks 5230 IPAppliance. The PDA, which docks with the phone, provides the user interface and it is the control platform for IP telephony features.



Great ideas can be disturbingly simple. Sometimes they're so simple they appear to be obvious. Using IP Phones to dock and sync with PDAs is one such idea. Bob Emmerson considers the implications.

Most IP phones are dull-looking devices. There are exceptions but few generate the Wow effect. It was the same story when Motorola and AT&T ruled the wireless roost and then Nokia came along and turned mobile phones into fashion accessories. Consumers and business professionals kept on trading in their old phones for smaller, sleeker models and that helped Nokia reach the top spot. Is there a lesson to be learnt? Is it enough to add a larger colour screen and 'Lite' apps? Do softphones meet our mobile information and communications needs? They're important developments and until something better comes along the answer is yes, but they're extrapolated ideas; they are not great, not disturbingly simple.

Synchronising the data on PDAs and PCs is a well-established concept. PDAs such as the iPAQ have the computing and memory resources of earlier desktop machines. They can do 2.5G and Wi-Fi communications and they can be used as a phone. Not a great phone, but download SIP software and you can make free calls from any Internet connection and that is seriously great.

Thus, the iPAQ performs well on both the voice and data sides of the IP equation, so why not sync with the wireline phone as well as the wireline PC? And what happens when you do? Let's start with a very basic IPT feature. Phone calls follow users as they move around the WAN, but first they have to logon using a notebook that has softphone functionality. But if, as illustrated, the IP phone has a docking facility then you simply drop in the PDA and

sync with the network. Calls are forwarded, your personal profile and preference are transferred, and all your contact information is available. In addition, you can use the superior telephony resources of the wireline phone. There is an obvious analogy here to the way PDAs can employ the more powerful computing and display resources of PCs. This means that most everything you need on the information and communications fronts can be carried around in a shirt pocket or handbag. And in a W-LAN environment you can make Wi-Fi calls while moving around the building and pick up voicemail next time the PDA is docked.

PERVASIVE COMMS AND COMPUTING

Notebooks have replaced desktop machines in many organizations and become the PC of choice, but does it always make sense to tote these powerful devices around? Dock a PDA into a foldout keyboard and you've got a computing resource that is more than adequate for catching up on your emails and revising documents and spreadsheets.

The iPAQ's memory can be expanded up to 1 GB so you can transport all your files with ease. The Wi-Fi expansion module lets you send and receive both data and voice from hot spots and when the 2.5G module is released pervasive communications and computing becomes a practical reality. At the end of the journey you dock and sync into a spare PC at the other end. All that's missing is the ability to make PowerPoint presentations on the hoof (something most of us can do without).

PROMOTING THE CONCEPT

Free/low-cost access to the Internet via hot spots is bringing pervasive communications and computing to the marketplace. In turn, IP and Internet Telephony developments are enabling calls to bypass GSM and other cellular networks. The next logical development would be to locate data and voice docking stations in upmarket locations such as airport lounges and business centres. It's logical (in my opinion) because mobile professionals would pay for these added-value services. Then a pocket-sized PDA would be the only data device you need to take on business trips.

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