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25 Things You Didn't Know VoIP Could Do

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One of the greatest advantages of VoIP over traditional phone service is its versatility, but with the wide array of new features coming out it can be hard to keep track of all of the options that are available. Don't feel bad, unless you are attached at the hip with your computer it can be almost impossible to keep up- but that doesn't mean you shouldn't be enjoying the same features as those with a less healthy attachment to their computer. Here are a few ways to get you started using your VoIP in ways that you might not have thought possible.

Basic Features

1. **Call Forwarding** — You can't be everywhere at once, but fortunately your VoIP can help you get calls where ever you are. Most VoIP providers have a call forwarding system, in case you can't reach your home phone, your power is out, or the service simply isn't working. Call forwarding can send your calls to an alternate cell or land line so you won't miss any important calls, or even not so important calls.
2. **Call Recording** — Almost all VoIP programs have some kind of [call recording](#). Some, like Sightspeed and Gizmo Project, have the capability built into their software, but most should be able to record calls by using an additional program like [HotRecorder](#). HotRecorder should work with almost all VoIP clients, and has a great selection of features. Call recording can be a great add-on for those who do a lot of VoIP interviews for podcasts or those who simply like to have a record of their calls.
3. **Voice Mail to E-mail** — Ever want to review your voice mails without having to listen to them one by one? Many VoIP providers such as Vonage and Lingo have voicemail that is linked to your e-mail. When you receive a voicemail you are sent an e-mail with the caller's number and name and an audio file containing their message. This way, you can listen to voice mails in order of priority, not necessarily in the order that they were received.
4. **Call Mapping** — Want to know where your calls are coming from or going to? [Gizmo Project](#) users have the built in capability to map their calls. Simply place a call, click "map it" and your location and the location of your recipient will be laid out on the map. Aside from alerting you to potential [Vishers](#), it may not be an entirely necessary bit of technology to have, but it sure is neat.

Business

5. **Find Me, Follow Me** — Also referred to as Call Hunting, Find Me, Follow Me is a feature that can increase the efficiency of your business' VoIP service. Not at your desk? No problem. The system will find you. When your number is dialed the system routes the call through a list of numbers that you define. You can have the numbers called simultaneously, so all your phones ring at once, or sequentially, either in a preferred order or in accordance with your scheduled activities and locations. Once the list has been called and no connection made, the system may route the call to voice mail.
6. **Enhanced Voice Mail** — If you're using your VoIP line for business and personal calls, enhanced voicemail can be a great way to manage those messages. Enhanced voice mail allows users to set up different voice mail messages depending on the caller so that business and personal calls hear a different message. If you're out of the office and want to make changes to your pre-recorded messages or listen to your voicemail the service can be accessed remotely, allowing you to take care of business from anywhere.
7. **Real-Time Document Editing** — The ability to change and create documents while on a conference call can be a great advantage for any business working with remote clients. Skype users can download [TalkandWrite](#) which will allow them to work with another user as if they were in the same room. You can type, draw, erase, point and change anything within the shared document. All of this while voice or video conferencing, making team projects a lot easier to manage.
8. **Customer Service** — For a small business, providing customer service can be a [costly endeavor](#), but using VoIP you can reduce your costs and make getting in contact with you as simple as clicking a button. VoIP clients such as Skype and Gizmo Project have small icons you can embed in your webpage, [eBay auctions](#), or e-mail allowing users to simply click on them to contact you. They also let customers know when are you available to take calls or when you're away from the computer making business interactions easier and simpler both for you and your customers.
9. **Language Translation** — Don't let language barriers be an obstacle to taking your business global. Skype now offers a downloadable add-on called the [Universal Chat Translator](#). Don't get too excited, it only works on text conversations, and is by no means a fail proof method of communication, but it does offer translation for over 14 different languages, a great start for those wishing to communicate with foreign clients. And if you're interested in learning a new language, the program also provides voice reading of the text so that you can learn to pronounce words and have conversations in real life as well. If you need something more advanced, Skype also offers a [language line](#) which routes calls through interpreters who can translate English into over 150 different languages. It is a bit pricey, though, at 2.99 per minute, but if your business stands to make a profit from the call, it could be worth the investment.

Entertainment

10. **Music Streaming** — Many VoIP clients provide ways of integrating music into your VoIP experience. Yahoo Messenger has [Music LaunchCast](#), which gives you free streaming radio with stations options that will please just about everyone. Yahoo users can buy and download songs from the website as well, a subscription is \$7 a month for unlimited downloads. And if you're in the mood for something new? The [Last.fm](#) plug-in for Skype can give you recommendations based on your old favorites and allows you to share your playlists with your Skype buddies.
11. **Avatars and Sound Effects** — Almost all VoIP clients have access to some sort of pure silliness designed to entertain and possibly reduce your productivity. Many clients have this feature built in, but if for some reason you don't, you can download an add-on like [vEmotion](#) which will let

you add sound effects and background music to your conversations. If you want to get even more creative with your VoIP, you can download CrazyTalk. [CrazyTalk](#) allows users to create avatars which will lip-sync what they are saying. So if you're not having a good hair day (or a good face day for that matter) and you have to video conference, let a fluffy kitten do your talking for you.

12. **Gaming** — In the old days, online gamers had to communicate with each other through text chat or third party VoIP services. It's pretty hard to concentrate on building or conquering a fantasy empire when you have to keep switching back and forth. Now, VoIP is seamlessly interfaced with many online gaming programs. The biggest of these, [TeamSpeak](#), has over a million users. With integrated VoIP precious gaming time isn't wasted typing out instructions to teammates and all of those previously wasted minutes can be spent conquering, killing aliens, or negotiating deals much more efficiently.
13. **TV and Video Streaming** — If your computer isn't located conveniently near a TV, not to worry, your VoIP can let you watch TV and videos to maximize your free time. Raketu has [ipTV](#) as part of its basic services allowing users to watch a wide variety of programs including an outdoor adventure channel, reality show, cartoons, and music videos. Now you can watch TV with your friends without having to leave the house.
14. **Voice Distortion** — So you're dying to make prank calls with your VoIP but want to make it a little more interesting (and not get caught). [Scramby](#) has got you covered. Its preset voice distortion settings allow you to sound like anything from a tiny elf to Darth Vader. It could be particularly fun for gamers who play different characters and want their voice to match. If you're more ambitious, you can create your personal distortion settings to get just the sound you want. Scramby also comes complete with a variety of sound effects and background noises. It's enough to bring out the kid in anyone.
15. **VoIP Dating** — Need a date? Your VoIP might be able to help you out. A service called [Verbdate](#) uses Skype accounts to allow users to talk to each other over a VoIP call before meeting. Verbdate isn't your only option- one of the largest online dating services, Match.com has also started a similar VoIP option called [MatchTalk](#). With both, security is taken care of, as the calls are made from anonymous numbers, so you don't need to worry about gaining a stalker instead of a dream date, and whether or not the service tells other users you are online is up to you.

Mobility

16. **Mobile Phone VoIP** — While VoIP is getting increasingly mobile there are still some limits on where and how you can use your VoIP when you're away from home. Many companies now have VoIP phones that allow you to make calls on any available Wi-Fi connection. This could be great if you need to make mobile calls at VoIP prices- but be aware that there are disadvantages to this as well. You have to be near a Wi-Fi connection in order to make a call, making your ability to make and receive calls somewhat limited. Plus, since most people already have a cell phone, this requires carrying around an additional phone. There is currently one alternative to this for Skype users called [EQO](#). EQO lets users access their contacts (primarily through Skype, but other VoIP clients such as GoogleTalk, MSN Messenger and Yahoo Messenger should work as well) and make calls through on their mobile phone. How is this possible? The service sets up a conference call between your cell phone, your computer, and the person you are trying to call. The only disadvantage to this is that you are paying for the call both on your cell phone and with your skype account since most cell phone plans charge for incoming calls.
17. **Bluetooth Capabilities** — Bluetooth can't totally free you from ties to your computer when you're using VoIP but it can give you a little more freedom to wander around (not too far) while making VoIP calls. Bluetooth technology seems to be in just about everything nowadays, so most newer computers should already be set up to use Bluetooth. In fact, you might not need much at all if you already have a phone that uses a Bluetooth [earpiece](#). Synching it up with your computer

can be pretty easy, and allow you to get out of your desk chair once and awhile.

18. **Remote Desktop** — Ever had someone call you to ask about help with a computer problem and you would be more than happy and able to help if you could only see what it was they were talking about? VoIP might have a solution for you. [Unyte](#) which works with Skype, or Unyte Lyte for Yahoo, allows you to share your desktop with other users. With a simple click of a button you can allow users access to your desktop and shared documents, which can make helping someone over the phone a lot simpler.
19. **Wake-Up Calls** — If you've ever been late for a very important meeting you know how critical a wake up call can be to the business traveler. Fortunately, there is an easy solution for Skype users. In about 5 minutes by following these simple [instructions](#), your Skype can be used to set up a call that will ring your hotel phone, hopefully waking you up and getting you out the door.

Convenience

20. **Telemarketer Blocking** — There's nothing more annoying than dinner being interrupted by a phone call from a telemarketer. Well, VoIP has an option to prevent getting those annoying calls. Telemarketer blocking allows you to automatically disconnect the line when a telemarketer tries to reach you. How does it work? Telemarketers use machines that automatically dial numbers- much faster than normal- so if you're unlucky and pick up one of these calls you will hear a pause before the salesperson tries to give you their pitch. The blocking feature detects these calls by the few minutes of silence, and sends a tone to the dialer mistakenly telling them your phone is out of service. All that and your phone never even rings!
21. **Calls on your TV** — The phone never fails to ring right at the climax of your favorite TV show or in the middle of a critical part of the game. Normally, you'd have to get up to answer to know who the call is from without even knowing if it's important enough that it can wait a few minutes for you to call back. Now, if you are a Skype user, you can get VoIP phone alerts on your TV with [mcePhone](#). You can see your online status, get information on incoming calls, or if you're watching a something particularly good you can block all calls for a given time period. And the best part is that all of these features can be controlled by the remote, meaning you never have to get out of your chair.
22. **Audio Caller ID** — Caller ID is a simple enough feature, but you have to be near the phone in order to see who is calling and if you're not in the room this isn't always the best situation. Audio ID lets you set up a different ring for each of your users to let you quickly know who's calling without having to be in the same room as the phone. This way, you'll know if you need to make a mad dash for the phone or if you can simply let it go to voicemail so you can finish your laundry or beat that level on your video game.
23. **Click to Call** — Since the web has made paper phone books almost obsolete it makes sense that being able to dial without actually having to dial would be the natural next step. Now, almost all VoIP providers have a click to call feature, allowing you to click on a phone number in your address book, on the web, or in an e-mail and be able to instantly dial that number.
24. **Home Security** — So you've left the kids at home while you've gone away for the weekend and want to make sure things are under control and your house isn't being destroyed by an all-night party. VoIP can help you set up a simple monitoring system that you can access from a remote computer, provided you have a webcam at home and more than one sign on for your VoIP service. Just leave your VoIP client and set up to auto-answer calls and get your webcam running. Then, sign onto your VoIP from a remote computer, dial home, and voila, the webcam video should pop up.
25. **Track Your eBay** — If you're an eBay fanatic there's an easy way to keep track of everything you've bid on through a simple to use add-on for Yahoo Messenger. After you've installed the addition you'll be able to track watched eBay listings, monitor bidding activity, and view items

recently won.

As use of VoIP expands, so does its versatility. These 25 items are only a few of the possible uses for VoIP out there, but they are a great way to get started in taking advantage of all that VoIP can offer. Get started on making the most of your VoIP experience and who knows, maybe you'll come up with a few ideas of your own!

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