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voip

Everything about VoIP that an individual want to know.

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Top 10 voIP services

In your quest to find a free VoIP service, you will quickly learn a harsh reality: "free" is a very subjective word. Keep in mind that you will never find a VoIP provider or program that is *completely* free. In the end, you are at least paying for your Internet service, right? However, the good news is you can steer clear of any **mainstream and costly** VoIP subscription services like Vonage or SunRocket. After all, the fact that you are shirking the telephone company in the first place means you are tired of hidden and needless fees.

The following lists the pros and cons of ten "free" VoIP options. Keep in mind that while many of these alternatives offer some sort of free and immediate service, you will first need something to speak through. From **headsets to WiFi phones**, there are many devices available to fit any budget or lifestyle.

1. Skype

Pros: Skype is a reputable service that, when used a specific way, will be completely free to you. The software is easy to download, and talking to any other Skype user is free. Rest assured that there are plenty of Skype users out there, too, as it is currently the most popular VoIP service. If someone you call frequently doesn't use Skype, you can merely send him/her the link to easily download the software. Long distance phone calls to your mom in another state,

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for instance, will at once be pain-free for both you and her. A professional site and customer service, in addition to clear sound, makes this a legitimate winner for most.

Cons: The free feature is only available when calling from one computer to another. If you are interested in dialing regular landlines from your computer, Skype offers unlimited calls to all of North America for \$30 a year. Not steep by any means, but still not free. Also, there is controversy about their use of **supernodes**, which could put your computer at risk of contracting a virus.

2. Raketu

Pros: Raketu is a hip site, combining state-of-the-art communications with the networking style of **MySpace** and **YouTube**. Free calls can be made to landlines and mobile phones in 42 countries, which is very impressive. Also, features like live stream television allows for people to chat with their friends about what they are watching together.

Cons: Although seemingly perfect, this site does have some discouraging fine print: you will be required to make a \$9.95 deposit into your account when registering before you start making free calls. They do not consider this a membership fee, however, but a "credit" for your new account. Think of it as insurance, should you wish to make a call to a location that isn't covered by the free plan. It will likely be the only money you will ever have to spend at Raketu.

3. VoipCheap

Pros: VoipCheap should be more aptly titled "VoipFREE". Unlike Skype, VoipCheap will allow you to make free phone calls to regular phone lines. This free service also includes many other countries, not just USA and Canada. The software is free to download and simple to start using right away, provided you have a headset or phone ready to plug in.

Cons: While VoipCheap does allow for free calls from your computer to regular phones, there is a weekly limit of 300 minutes per IP address. Watch that limit, or rates will apply to your calls! Should you choose to make a call to a paid destination, VoipCheap does require a very small credit deposit before dialing, not unlike Raketu's credit system. Although their **regular rates** are still very cheap, the object here is to call for free.

4. Gizmo

Pros: Like Skype, Gizmo offers free software and free calls to all other Gizmo users. The interface is very user-friendly and the company claims it "is as simple as instant messaging". A bonus to this service is the "All Calls Free" plan, which states that Gizmo users can call other Gizmo users' landlines and mobile phones, not just their computers.

Cons: Although Gizmo proudly boasts that users can make free calls to landlines and mobile phones, they really prefer you to make PC-to-PC calls. There are some very tedious (sneaky, some would say) **rules** to the "All Calls Free" plan at Gizmo. If not used properly, some hidden fees could sneak up on a Gizmo user, which is unfortunate.

5. Windows Live Messenger

Pros: PC-to-PC calls are always free when made between those who have Messenger installed. VoIP novices may feel more comfortable with a provider like Windows, as the conglomerate is more likely to offer round-the-clock customer service should any problems arise. Also, the interface will look and feel familiar to longtime Windows aficionados.

Cons: There are no drawbacks to their PC-to-PC plan. However, should you decide to pay a low rate to call a landline with your computer, phone calls are limited to five minutes. For some, that is a major deal breaker.

6. Yahoo! Voice

Pros: This is a simple and free PC-to-PC calling software like Windows Live Messenger. Similarly, the free calls must be made to other active Yahoo! Voice members. Those who are already familiar with the regular Yahoo! Instant Messenger system should feel right at home with the application. Since there are already so many Yahoo! IM users, this may be a great place to begin experimenting with VoIP technology.

Cons: There have been many **complaints** about inconvenient technical difficulties with Yahoo! that could make the Voice feature less than desirable. Yahoo! is admittedly a busy site that is growing exponentially. As such, constant updates to their applications can trip up their services at times.

7. WengoPhone

Pros: WengoPhone intends to circumvent any restrictions that Skype or Gizmo users experience. Their software allows for users to make free PC-to-PC calls to anyone else with compliant software, no matter who their VoIP provider is. This is a very subversive program and many tech-savvy folks are very happy with it.

Cons: The interface is very crude when compared to well-known providers like Skype or Raketu. Likewise, you may find their customer care to be lax when experiencing technical difficulties. Many Wengo users depend on their **peers** to help with any problems.

8. Internetcalls

Pros: Internetcalls is a popular alternative to services like VoipCheap, although they are practically identical. Like VoipCheap, all calls should be free to most destinations. Also, the service is now boasting improved sound quality, which is a relief to those wishing to use it for business purposes.

Cons: If you are a stickler about perfect sound and a short delay, you may wish to go with a larger company for VoIP service. This is a free to cheap program that is mainly used for personal calls, particularly people with friends and family out of the country. A **troubleshooting guide** can be found at the site, but it isn't as nice or thorough as a paid providers' 24-hour, live customer service.

9. Level3

Pros: Level3 is a **giant** in the business of communications, so many companies will probably adopt their revolutionary VoIP service in the near future. Businesses can now handle all their toll-free calls through VoIP, thanks to Level3, and this is a completely free service. The prospect is a boon for call centers in particular, as well as offices that conduct a lot of conference calls.

Cons: There aren't any drawbacks to this service to speak of, but it is limited to businesses and probably of no use to individuals making personal calls.

10. Google Talk

Pros: Another PC-to-PC application that is free to use for fellow members, Google Talk offers a very polished and user-friendly

interface. BlackBerry addicts will be happy to know that Google Talk is available for free on their handheld lifelines. Also, the newly introduced **Google Talk Gadget** offers fun tools like YouTube interaction between chatting friends.

Cons: This is a brand new VoIP service, still in beta mode. Any number of kinks could be discovered with Google Talk, despite the brand name backing the software.

Although you can receive free VoIP through any one of the above services/programs, they all have a limitation somewhere. Choosing which is the best one really depends on your needs. If you are looking for unlimited calls to distant lands, in addition to perfect sound and customer support, you may well be better off with a **paid service**. However, you will certainly save a lot of money if you are able to drop your phone bill in lieu of one of these recommendations.

Posted by liveblue at **10:20 PM** Labels: **voip**

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