

Windows® IT Pro

IP Telephony

3CX Phone System

Our company used to have an office located in an executive suite, and the landlord owned the PBX system. We've grown over the years, and in July 2007 we moved into a location with more office space. With the move we also needed to purchase and install our own phone system. We began looking at our options, and wanted to go with a Windows-based PBX.

We originally considered going with the open source Asterisk and Asterisk based appliances, but also packaged Windows-based PBXs. I liked the Asterisk solution, but given that we're a Windows-based shop we had plenty of old servers around loaded with Window Server 2003. After seeing an advertisement for the **3CX Phone System** in *Windows IT Pro* we decided to give it a try. Based on my research the other Windows based PBXs cost more money and weren't as accessible from a trial standpoint.

We have a 30 extension VoIP phone system for our office, and the 3CX software was easy to download, install and run. I had it downloaded and running a two extension system in about an hour in a test environment. Deployment to production wasn't bad, as 3CX provides configuration templates for most popular phones and PSTN gateways. What cost the most time was (like most deployments) the planning and configuration of the dial plan and extensions.

One of my favorite features of 3CX is the simple web-based administration console. I also like that 3CX can use our Exchange server for voicemail, which emails our voicemails to our email inboxes. Ease of installation was another nice feature, as I performed the entire

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—Michael R. Faster, president

implementation without ever talking to their customer service. We did start with the free version, which 3CX supports via their online forum. It sometimes took a 12 hours period to get a question answered, but there are some pretty dedicated and technical people around the world that know this product well and help.

As for things I would like to improve about 3CX, I do wish there was a dial by name feature. I managed to create one by recording the same information and configuring the auto-attendant, but a dial by name that uses a directory or the user info contained in the extensions would be cool. We also struggled a bit until we found a good PSTN gateway, but we've been happy with a gateway from Patton Electronics that we found. It may be more expensive than other PSTN gateways, but it's worth it. We also had to manually code the configuration files for our Cisco IP phones, but there was lots of good information available on the Web to do this.