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Craig Peterson: Welcome back to Tech Talk with Craig Peterson.

We're talking about technologies that you can use to get your business going, to move it onto that next level, kind of back to work here for all of us.

We're going to talk right now about some VoIP based technology. That's voice over IP. It can save you a lot of money and it doesn't have to be confusing. That's why we invited phone.com to be with us.

We're going to talk a little bit about what they're doing to help us out when it comes to having special phone numbers, having one number to reach everybody, virtual offices and standard phones, kind of everything in between as well.

Joel Maloff is our guest. He's a VP over there, again, phone.com. Joel, welcome to Tech Talk with Craig Peterson.

Joel Maloff: Hello, Craig, it's my pleasure to be here.

Craig: Let's talk about what you guys are doing. I think most people have heard about voice over IP and some people have had some kind of bad experiences with it in the past. What are you guys at phone.com doing?

Joel: Well, what's interesting is that the voice over IP business, it's been around for about six or seven years now. Phone.com was one of the very earliest providers. You're absolutely right, early on, it was considered recreational, a novelty and so forth.

But what's happening now is that more and more people are moving away from traditional land line phones where you get your phone service from, quote unquote, the "phone company," and moving to an Internet based service.

There's a couple reasons for that, not the least of which is, it is less costly. If you're in a business environment, you don't have to go out and buy a business phone system, spending thousands or

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sometimes tens of thousands of dollars. You don't need any hardware at all except possibly the phones. It does more than your old phone service did.

We're very excited about it, it's been growing very rapidly. The knock about the quality of service, not as good anymore, you pretty much don't hear that.

Craig: I've been using voice over IP, in fact, for the interviews on the show for many years now. I found it to be really good, quite reliable and a lot less expensive, too. That's another key point here that phone.com talks about.

Joel: Well, you're absolutely right. One of the attributes of phone.com is that you'll find that there are a large number of what we refer to as ITSPs, Internet telephony service providers that are out there. Our focus is on the low end of the market. We focus on small office, home office, entrepreneurs, anywhere from 1 up to maybe 15 or 20 telephone lines.

I mean, we can go higher than that, but we believe that that is a very underserved market. If you think about it, the plumber, the pizza shop, they don't have the time to go investigate these technologies.

They're doing their business, a lawyer, an accountant, they don't want to be a phone specialist. We focused on trying to bring products and services to those small businesses that will help them get out from under some of the large and fixed costs that they've had to pay in the past.

Craig: Let's talk about some of the technology involved here. People are used to having a phone on their desk, for instance, and in the bigger businesses and the small business, still, you have a phone or two in the house. Right? You have your home line and then you have the business line for many very small businesses.

How does this work? As I see, you've got desktop, soft phone. You have some mobile apps, I think, the standard phone?

Joel: Sure. Well, what's interesting about it is that I have been using an IP, Internet protocol telephone connected to phone.com for four years. I've actually moved, I was originally in Florida, I moved to Michigan for a year and then I was in Baltimore for two years and now I'm back in Florida.

I never changed my phone number. I simply unplugged the phone from my router, plugged it in when I got to the new location and it works fine. It was always my Florida phone number. People could call me on that number and reach me wherever I was. Unless you knew otherwise, you'd never know that I was using the Internet and not plugged into the wall with a traditional phone company.

You mentioned soft phones. A soft phone is a client, an application that can load up onto your computer, and I can make and receive calls through the phone.com network anywhere in the world using that soft phone.

You also mentioned the applications for mobile devices. We have applications for the iPhone, for Android, for Blackberry. The advantage for that is that, instead of using my personal cell phone

and having my personal caller ID show up when I'm calling someone, I just simply use my phone.com app, and it is designed to propagate my business caller ID.

When they call me back, they're calling me back to my business. There's a tremendous amount of functionality. One last thing that I want to mention there. I mentioned moving from location to location. I can have phone numbers from anywhere. Let's say, for example, I currently live in Florida but I have elderly relatives in Baltimore.

Well, I can have a Baltimore phone number that they can call, you see, they're actually still paying for long distance. There's not too many of us anymore, but a lot of people still are. This way, they can just call those local phone numbers and it rings wherever I program it to, mostly in my Florida office or on my cell phone.

Lots of things that you can do with this technology.

Craig: It is, it's very, very nice. It is very simple to use, frankly. I think most people have been kind of scared off by it over the years, thinking it was complex, because it was something that ran over the Internet, and all you need, really, is an Internet connection.

I'm looking at the pricing here, again, on phone.com. I see, for instance, you've got a shared minutes plan, you have an unlimited user plan. The unlimited user, frankly, is lower than what our phone company charges just to have a phone sitting there without ever putting any minutes onto it.

Joel: Sure. Well, and also, what you have to add onto that is, as far as I still know, the traditional local exchange carriers are providing local service. But if you want to call long distance, oh well, you need a long distance carrier and they charge you for that as well.

Not only is your price higher with a local exchange service just for local service, phone.com includes all domestic long distance and there are a handful of international countries that are also included, as well. When you look at the cost, there's really no comparison.

Craig: You're right. It's 24.99 a month per user here for unlimited use here, I guess, it what you meant to say. One number, all of the calling features versus our local telco is \$30 a month if you never pick up the phone, then beyond that, it gets a lot more expensive.

Now, I have a phone number. Can I route it to any of my devices? Do I have to be near the computer to answer it?

Joel: Actually, no. We have what's called a web portal that allows you to go in and configure your account any way you want. It is possible to set up, if I don't answer after a certain number of rings on my home line, forward it to my cell phone. I can set that up even by time of day, day of week if I wish. There's tremendous flexibility.

But something else that I really like is that I also have the ability that if I don't answer and allow my calls to go to voice mail, those voice mails can be transcribed to an email.

For example, let's say that you and I are talking. I see another call coming in and I let it go to my voice mail. A moment or two later, it pops up on my email and I can see it's Joe wanting to place a \$2 million order, but he's going out of town in 10 minutes.

I'm going to politely say, Craig, you'll have to excuse me, I need to go make a quick call, and I can handle that. Imagine being a small business person and being that flexible.

Craig: Yeah, that's very, very nice, isn't it? You can be at the soccer game watching your kids and really, nobody's the wiser. You can be anywhere in the world, frankly, right, as long as you have an Internet connection.

Joel: That is absolutely correct. One other thing that I would add, you mentioned the soccer game. All of our accounts come with an ability to set up what's called call queuing. In the industry, we refer to that as IVR, integrated voice response. You normally would think of this as just for business, press 1 for sales, 2 for customer service, and so forth.

Well, you can even use it in a residential environment. I had one person using it for their children when they were away at summer camp. It was an 800 number, press 1 for Mom, press 2 for Dad, press 3 for Grandma and if it's an emergency press 4 and it will ring everybody and whoever picks up first will get it. Very flexible.

Craig: Yeah, I noticed you've also got some caller analytics which is good for marketing people to be able to do a little data mining.

Joel: Absolutely, because if you want to know who's calling you, where are they calling from, the types of demographics that are available, all of that is available as a service from phone.com.

Craig: Very simple, very easy, starting at just 14.99 a month for 300 minutes. You can find it all at phone.com, solutions for you and your home, getting that business going.

As Joel was telling us here, really great for small businesses. No big investments in hardware, configuration, trying to figure out how the silly thing works. It's all there for via you the web portal, as well. Phone.com.

Stick around, we will be right back with more Tech Talk with Craig Peterson. Visit us online as well, craigradio.com. We'll be right back.

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