

Computer TELEPHONY

The Magazine for Computer and Telephone Integration

1998 PRODUCTS & SERVICES OF THE YEAR

Taken as a whole, they include almost every type of computer telephony system, software, service and resource you can imagine. They have one thing in common, however: They were all things we've seen and played with over the last year and liked very much. You will, too.

By the Editors



ADVANCED QUEUING SYSTEMS' CROSSPOINT VIRTUAL PBX

This was definitely one of the most interesting CT enhanced services we saw introduced in '98. Essentially, what AQS (San Francisco, CA — 888-825-0800) provides is a **virtual** network-based phone system that includes voice/faxmail, auto attendant, one-number employee access ("follow-me") and ACD routing.

Don't confuse it with a Webley-type service. Those are generally crafted for a single person. The CrossPoint Virtual PBX, however, doesn't make sense for a single person; it's aimed at either multiple people who do not work in a single, physical office (or don't have one) or a company looking for a complete backup phone system.

The latter is another intriguing nuance here. AQS touches on it with their CrossPoint PBXParachute service. It lets you build a mirror image of your company's phone system that is on hot-standby and available at a

moment's notice in the event that your primary phone system fails. The CrossPoint PBXParachute is implemented with the CrossPoint VirtualPBX, so, again, there is no equipment to purchase, install or maintain.

Advanced Queuing Systems charges users a nominal setup fee based on the number of extensions (users) and a small monthly fee. The service can be activated within a matter of minutes when needed.

Great stuff. Our west coast office used "the service" for nearly a month with a lot of success. We've also heard of other companies that have used it to handle full-blown customer service apps, this thanks to Advanced's built-in Automatic Call Distribution (ACD) features, which will actually cycle through logged in "agents" around the globe, queue callers, etc.



Advanced Queuing Systems Inc.

1922 Page Street
San Francisco, CA 94117

www.aqsys.com
1 (888) 825-0800

Products of the Year

AND THEN THERE WERE 10

by Rick Luhmann



In this issue, our collective editorial staff names its annual Products & Services Of The Year — a process hardly based on objective science.

We got together and hashed it out, with the chief requirements for selection remaining pretty simple. At least one member of our group had to: a) personally test, use or witness in the field a new product and / or service with great success sometime during the past year; b) nominate said product and / or service to the rest of the committee; and c) have no one else shoot it down (finalists needed a unanimous vote).

In the end, we picked just over 100 products and services for 1998. And while that may sound like a rather fat number, when you consider that we literally saw thousands upon thousands of new product and service launches this past year, it's really not.

However, in an extra effort to carry over our "not-everybody-is-a-winner" theme from last month I thought it might be of some interest to narrow down the big list into a more digestible Top-10 chunk.

Unfortunately, to get the entire gang to settle on such a short list would have been impossible (*everybody has their own areas of interest and, frankly, we don't like each other all that much*). Thus, we'll have to settle for yours truly to whittle things down.

The upside is you won't find any industrial computer stuff amongst my personal POTY selections. Zippy wouldn't want me muscling in on his technology territory; besides, I wouldn't know a NEBS-compliant platform if it slapped me across the head with its fire-resistant ultra-wide SCSI interface.

So without further ado:

10. Panamax's TowerMax SOHO. Although not a highly "CT" thing, it's a great product and so I'm including it. Perfect for any home office, the unit provides

surge protection for two telephone lines, AC lines (four outlets) and an Ethernet connection.

In short, do yourself a favor and pick up one of these. You can find them for under a hundred beans.

9. Voice Information Systems' Audio Tool-Box. You can thank this useful tool for all the goofy prompts and message-on-hold audio we routinely employ on our West Coast office comm server.

I recommend it for developers, resellers and end users alike. Why not be creative with your automated CT's personality?

8. SpectraLink's Pocket Communications System (PCS) 150. This is a wireless phone solution for both traditional phone systems and comm servers. It's made up of three components — the Master Control Unit, Remote Cell Units and Pocket Telephones.

Installation is very easy. Attach analog extensions coming out of your phone system (perfect for comm servers) to the Control Unit and you're pretty much ready to roll.

The Pocket Telephones themselves are great. They can be configured with multiple extensions, feature keys and display capabilities.

7. Liebert's Little Glass House with Inova's ComPilot 1000 Monitor/Keyboard. We needed this bad in our rented West-Coast labs (*oops, this is turning into Rick's Top-10 equipment scam list, isn't it?*). The Little Glass House is basically an "instant equipment war room" on wheels.

It includes a top-of-the-line UPS (Uninterruptible Power Supply) and air conditioning unit. It also monitors pre-set environmental conditions 24 / 7, buzzing you if something bad happens.

6. Advanced Queuing Systems' (AQS) Crosspoint Virtual PBX. We used this for a month in between phone systems earlier this year. For the right enterprise, it's a great solution.

Here's the right enterprise: a group of people who don't have a physical place to go. With the Virtual PBX, callers will

think they're calling into one of the world's best PBX / ACD systems.

5. Apex's Prepaid System. I played with this myself down in LA just after CT Expo and I also saw it in our labs when they set up Brandon in his Zip Card biz. The thing I liked about it best: they shield you from a lot of the CT-nerd stuff; all you need to be is a businessperson to succeed with this enhanced services platform.

4. VCON's MediaConnect. I didn't actually set this system up. Brandon did. But he did it pretty fast and with relatively few obscenities, so it must be pretty easy.

Bottom line: This system, working with either two or three BRI lines, gave us great videoconferencing from San Francisco to New York, allowing me to stay as far away from the Big Apple as possible.

3. Parity's Graphical VOS. I think I was one of the first people to see this in their R & D labs over in Sausalito. Like everything that I've ever seen from Bob Edgar and company, it looked like a winner from the start.

In this case, success was almost guaranteed. Just look at the equation: take the industry's most robust and popular development language — VOS — and front end it with a graphical "flow-chart"-styled interface. How could it miss? It didn't.

2. Interactive Intelligence's EIC comm server. This will be in my top-ten list forever if for no other reason than it's the CT product that scares — and spurs on — the traditional PBX makers the most.

1. Artisoft's TeleVantage, packaged in an Alliance Systems computer. Hey, it's the main communication system of choice in the office I run. And if somebody makes a more feature rich, more reliable, more intuitive and more affordable first- and third-party call-control server with built in auto-attendant, visual voicemail and follow-me call forwarding for the small business, I'd like to see it. ❖