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# A free telephone consultant

## **Brian Padden recommends mix of IP and digital phones**

[Small Business Technology Newsletter](#) By James E. Gaskin, Network World, 10/05/06

Many small businesses never think about upgrading their phone systems until they move. Each month the owners and managers curse the huge invoices but don't know where to go for relief. Too often the bills result from trusting the local phone company and accepting their recommendations. But the changing telecommunications market makes it possible to save money today. In fact, you may be able to pay for new telephone hardware from savings on service costs.

Brian Padden of [HxP and Associates](#), offers a great consulting rate to small businesses in the North Texas area interested in upgrading their telephone services: free. He leverages his experience and contacts made during 27 years managing Xerox data centers and more years consulting with Verizon and VarTec to find the right services and telephone equipment for small businesses. The carriers and service companies pay Padden a finder's fee, so the business pays nothing but saves plenty. Think of Padden as a marriage broker between telephone hardware and services companies and small businesses.

"If a company has three or more telephone lines from SBC/ATT or Verizon, I can save them enough on service costs to pay for new hardware," says Padden. His customer testimonials are filled with examples, such as the company that reduced its monthly service costs from \$5,000 to \$2,200. I met Padden through a referral from Cross/Talk Communications, a telephone service business that works with him on such projects.

"Companies want to appear professional and the right phone system helps," says Padden. For example, he designed a system for a company with three locations in Texas to prevent calls ending up in voice mail. If no one was available in one field service office, the call rolled to the headquarters office where the full-time receptionist answered with the name of the branch closest to the caller. Instead of leaving voice mail for service techs that tend to live on the road the customer reaches a person and is assured the techs will get the message in a timely manner.

The receptionist doesn't have to be at headquarters. Padden designed a system for a company with a factory in Florida but a receptionist in Texas. Using VoIP phones allows the company to ensure calls are answered fast and connected to the right individuals, and the caller shouldn't notice anything out of the ordinary.

While some phone resellers push an all-VoIP solution, Padden prefers what he calls a "converged" system. Digital phone systems today offer advanced services without the current high cost of individual IP-based telephones. Some IP phone benefits require IP handsets, but many advantages can be realized when a digital phone system controller connects to the Internet. Companies can save money by combining their voice and data calls over T-1 data lines that load balance bandwidth between voice calls and data packets. When a call stops, that bandwidth becomes available for data again.

A converged system may include digital (less expensive) handsets in the office with IP telephones at branch offices and employee homes. Calls come into the main office, and calls from the remote IP phones route back through the home office as well. Companies with remote sales people get a great benefit: they can track how many calls their sales people make, and can even listen to a call if necessary. That fact alone may "encourage" your remote sales people to pay more attention to the job at hand.

If your customers often call from cell phones, providing music on hold changes from nice to an important feedback tool. With nothing on hold, how do cell callers know if they lost the signal? With music on hold, they know if their phone dropped another call, and can call back. It costs little extra to turn music on hold into advertising on hold. If that amount of marketing offends you or your customers, use the hold time for a podcast about new products and feature upgrades on existing products. Such changes are easy and inexpensive with modern phone equipment.

Padden's real passion is saving teenagers from making fatal driving mistakes. [YouthDrivingSafe.org](http://YouthDrivingSafe.org) equips cars with GPS systems and tracking software so parents can monitor their children as they drive. Poor judgment in telephone services will cost you money, but poor judgment in young drivers is much more expensive. Padden can help reduce the costs of both.

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