



Personal Contactability for Mobile and Home Workers

White Paper

Abstract

In a modern business people are not tied to their desks, they move from desk to desk in a building, they work at other offices, they work from home and they are one the move in cars and trains. One of the central issues to any business is how to route calls to people easily and efficiently? This paper will look at some of the options available.

Introduction

Recent analysts' reports are highlighting the increase in flexible and remote working in modern business practises. Over 50% of businesses are expecting an increase in home, remote or flexible working¹. This raises the question of how we contact the right people in an organisation with ease and efficiency. In recent surveys, more than half of companies have over 20% of their work force working remotely². These remote workers can be highly mobile, such as the sales force, home workers (both permanently or just occasionally), or staff who work in different locations within the same organisation. The problem doesn't change – how do you contact these members of staff? We are all familiar with the business card with at least 3 phone numbers; office, mobile and home number. Now, suppose that the person you want to contact often works abroad, or works in different offices or, possibly, works from another company's office; that means more numbers to try.

This paper will examine the options available to improve contact processes for a mobile worker. These will include use of the PBX fixed line features, using the mobile phone as the primary contact number and using personal numbers.

How to call the person needed - wherever they happen to be

When a customer wants to speak to someone in an organisation they know works away from the office sometimes, they have to work out how to do this.

Some of questions that spring to mind are

- Which number do I use to ring Joe Blogs?
- Will he answer?
- If he doesn't answer, will he retrieve his voicemail?
- How much is the call costing me? (and possibly how much is the call costing him?)

Solutions

The PBX

There are several options available that help solve this issue. The first option we will look at is the solutions available as part of the private branch exchange (PBX) installed on at the company's offices. These features can be provided by an independent application server or be integral to the PBX and they offer some flexibility of working practise. They are based around working in the office and being connected to an extension of the PBX.

Ring All (Personal Use) - Desk Phone and Mobile Both Ring

This solution is very inelephant for contacting a known individual. Typically used where a fixed mobile convergence scenario is needed but not available. Both desk and mobile phone ring simultaneously.

¹ Bespoke research by PMP research for TeleWare March 2007

² Bespoke research by PMP research for TeleWare March 2007

There is always an additional call set up. If the user is hot desking, then they may not have a permanent phone so, in this situation, the solution does not work. If the desktop phone is answered by the 'wrong' person the call is terminated and no longer available to the mobile.

Hunt Groups, Follow Me, Find Me

Hunt Groups are technically multiple diverts and are based on the same concept as Follow Me services. They use a list of numbers entered as part of system administration and the system follows the list sequence seeking a call pickup. If a mobile or home phone is part of the hunt sequence, then there is a risk that its messaging service will answer the call and, therefore, there will not be a single repository for voice messages (and an extra voice mail cost plus a charge for returning the call is incurred). There is a delay while the system works through the list of possible numbers and only numbers on the defined list are called.

Team Ringing, Group Pickup, Ring All

A different and independent capability from a "find me, follow me" personal profile, this is a separate feature usually part of the standard PBX. The feature means that all phones in a group will ring and the first to pick up gets the call. A useful scenario in a sales situation where the first to answer the call then gets the commission on the sale. In this situation it encourages fast time to answer. This feature can be irritating in a busy office where ringing phones creates disturbance.

Call Divert/Divert-on-Busy

Probably the most common means used in the business world today. Call divert has a number of issues. A divert will lose the call control as the call is not supervised. This causes issues such as:

- If someone else picks up a ringing phone in the office they would break any hunt group in operation and will waste time dealing with the call.
- If you set a 'divert-on-busy' to a colleague and they do not answer, then voicemails will be left in the colleague's mailbox - your colleague will get messages intended for you.
- Inability to use telephony features such as call recording and call transfer from a mobile when the call is diverted.
- A diverted phone cannot be used by another user to receive calls occupying a PBX port.
- Diverts have to be set up prior to leaving the office so, when leaving in a hurry due to an emergency or time pressure, the divert may not be in place.

Administration

A common problem with all these solutions is administration, either centrally or personally. Features like hunt groups have to be set up by a skilled PBX administrator, often an outsourced resource. Call divert is usually a user controlled feature and, if a divert has not been put in place before leaving the main fixed line phone, it may be difficult to do it later.

A second problem with these options is use within a mixed vender network. Issues of administration are increased. There are considerable difficulties associated with setting up a hunt group that rings around different PBXs at different locations within the same telephony network. The same is also likely with diverts where users have to learn a different method of setting and un-setting diverts depending on the phone at the desk.

The end result of this strategy is difficulty of administration and confusion for the user.

The Mobile Phone

An obvious answer and one used by many organisations is to issue people with a mobile phone and advertise this number on their business cards. The mobile phone will naturally become the primary contact number.

A risk with this solution is that, as Joe works in different locations and is not often in the office, the office number will go to voicemail and the caller has no idea whether Joe will be notified of this voicemail. This risk means that the mobile phone becomes the number of choice to call Joe on. However, this will usually mean that this becomes the primary number for incoming calls. The investment in the on-premise PBX is not being used, the corporate voicemail is not being used and there is almost no audit trail.



A typical confused business card

Let's further examine the thoughts of a user selecting which number to call.

Which number shall I use?

The caller doesn't know where Joe will be so could try the main office number where Joe is based and the call might go to the corporate voicemail. However, in practise the number that people are most likely to use is the mobile number, simply because this is one he is likely to answer.

Will he answer?

If the caller doesn't know Joe's location he could try all the numbers on the card and still not speak to anyone and have to leave a message for each call. Of course, this is why the mobile phone becomes the number of choice.

What happens if he doesn't answer?

If the caller has dialled into the corporate number and left a voicemail, will Joe know that this has happened. If Joe is in the office and returns to his desk the desk phone will most likely have a

message waiting indication of some sort to let him know. If he is out of the office this is not going to happen. So Joe ends up having to ring in regularly to check his messages.

How much will the call cost?

Calls to Joe's office number will be at normal land line rates and if you call the mobile number this will be normal mobile rates. It is, however, worth looking at these issues a bit more carefully.

Calling Joe's office from an office phone would normally be free but if you are used to Joe being out of the office then you would probably call his mobile first at normal mobile rates. This would be the same for people using the corporate PBX and also external callers. Suppose that the person calling Joe is also outside the office and using their mobile, that is a more expensive mobile-to-mobile call. It is also worth considering the costs of Joe calling to check his corporate mail box regularly. Each call could be charged at peak rates by the mobile operator.

In organisations that are focused on delivering a quality experience to its customers, the aim should be to have a strategy in place that ensures calls reach the right people in a timely fashion as often as possible. Presenting the caller with a plethora of optional numbers is not a good first impression. Having no way to record calls and provide a clear audit trail is not ideal. Not getting a reply to a voicemail in good time gives a bad impression. This is not a good solution for a company wanting to deliver great service to its customers.

The end result of this strategy is frustration for the caller and expensive in time and money for Joe.

Personal Number

A personal number is a virtual number that is associated with an individual or a job function rather than a physical handset or location. The user is issued with a simple, typically 4 or 5 digit extension number, as their personal number. When they are at a phone all they have to do is dial into the maintenance system and make themselves available to whatever phone they are using. This will work for any phone connected to a PBX and the number will be recognised for any phone that presents calling line identification, which could include mobiles or home phones. It could also include a hotel room phone, a soft phone or an alternative office phone.



Joe Blogs

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An example of a business card with a personal number

If we address the same questions we considered above:

Which number shall I use?

If I want to call Joe I dial the one personal number provided on his business card and my call is routed to his registered location/phone. This could be his desk phone, his mobile, a phone at a hot desk or meeting room or even his home phone. This is subtly, but importantly, different to options like hunt groups. Joe has nominated a phone to be the one he wants to receive calls on at any given point in time and, when a call is received by the system, it is the system that looks up Joe's registered phone and places the call to him. This does not occupy a fixed line PBX extension for a divert, nor does it mean the system expects him to be in any given place at a certain time, Joe has total control of where his call is being sent and can change it at any time, either over the web or through any handset. An important consequence of this is that, as the system is making the call, other applications can be overlaid on the service. Joe has access from any phone to business applications such as call recording and conferencing.

Will he answer?

As Joe has made himself available to the extension or phone, he is ready to receive calls to that phone. Of course, he might be in a meeting or away from the handset when a call comes in, but he is unlikely to register to a desk home in the office when he is at home and vice versa. This means the call is more likely to be answered. If he knows he is not going to be available he can divert calls to voicemail, avoiding having a ringing phone and, optionally, he can nominate an alternative number for calls to be diverted to until he registers as available again.

What happens if he doesn't answer?

If Joe does not answer then the call can be returned to the corporate voicemail system or, if the service permits, it could be routed to an alternative, a member of a team or even a message desk. These services are fairly standard features of corporate PBXs and are available to PBX handsets. However, they are not available to uses of mobile or home phones. Joe will only have one mailbox to check for messages when he becomes available again.

How much will the call cost?

If Joe is registered to the PBX then the call will be free from another extension. People will not be as likely to ring his mobile number when they become used to reaching him on a personal number. So internally or intra-site, more calls will be extension to extension dialling, saving the business money. The incremental cost of calling Joe on his registered phone when he is not in the office that will be born by the organisation, not by the caller, creating an additional call charge for the business. However, the costs are typically offset by reduction in cost for calls made to the corporate voicemail to check for messages, calls from internal to mobiles and by the savings in the users' time.

As an almost incidental business benefit, personal numbering removes the need for PBX moves, adds and changes (MAC) management. This can be a significant cost saving to an organisation. Typically, MACs cost about £25-£50 and about 10% of the extensions an organisation uses will need to be changed every month. With personal numbering, the user is effectively making these changes when they register to the system, no costs are incurred.

The business that is focused on customer service or understands the value of calls reaching the correct individual will benefit from a properly planned and executed personal numbering strategy. A single number on a business card removes confusion. The system manages the call and provides a full audit trail with the opportunity to record inbound calls to any destination. Any unanswered inbound call could be rerouted to a colleague or message desk instead of simply sending them to voicemail.

The end result of this strategy is to route the call to Joe wherever he is.

TeleWare Customer Experience

TeleWare intelligent Number is a personal numbering solution used by 90% of our customer base to improve their call handling. One of the largest platforms delivered as an on-premise solution found significant benefits from installing TeleWare intelligent Number and intelligent Assistant. The organisation is a leading business consultancy and accounting company and went through a process to analyse the call outcome of their business before and after implementing personal numbering. This showed that, across their user base of 10,000 users, an average of only 19% of calls had previously reached the right person but, after personal number was rolled out, this went up to more than 55% of calls reaching the right person first time. Additionally, abandoned calls dropped from 13% to 5% with the introduction of a personal numbering solution. They extended their process so that the most important calls never reached voicemail. Calls to key account managers are always routed to a team who act as a message service. Callers are getting the service they expect and require and the organisation is not wasting time chasing missed calls. Personal numbering has helped to maintain the competitiveness of this organisation.

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