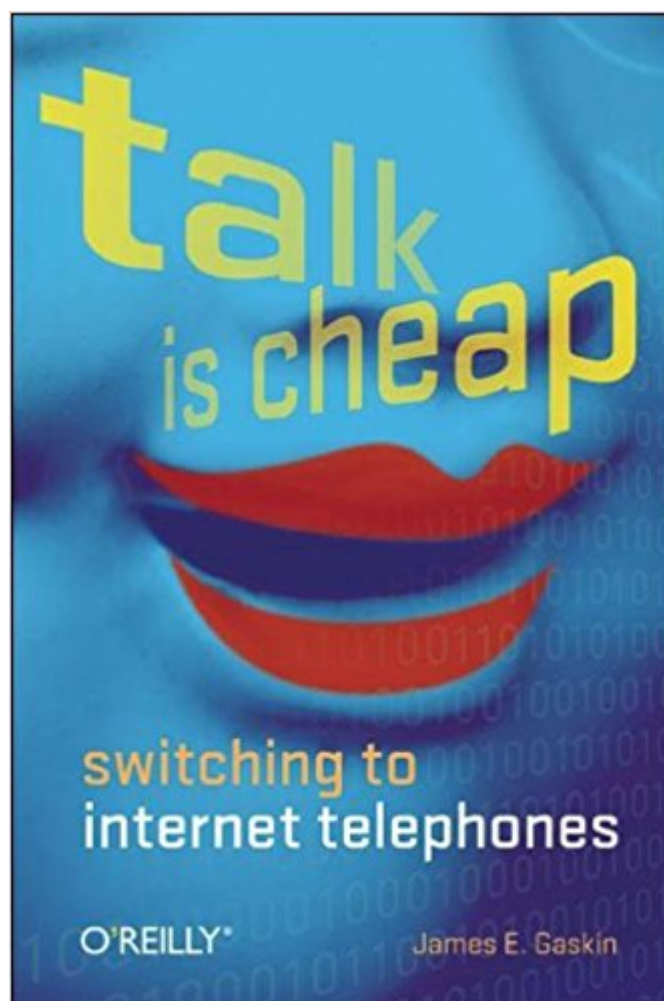


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Talk Is Cheap: Switching To Internet Telephones



Synopsis

Fed up with the high tolls charged by your ordinary telephone service? If you're itching to cut the copper cord with your costly, traditional phone service, you need *Talk is Cheap*, the new, easy-to-understand guide to understanding and using Voice over Internet Protocol (VoIP) and other Internet telephone options. Technologies such as VoIP are gaining a great deal of attention these days as more people switch from standard telephone service to phone service via the Internet. But while the cost savings are outstanding, there are some issues with Internet telephony that you should know about. Are the connections reliable? Is the quality comparable? Will it include 911 services? James Gaskin's *Talk is Cheap* addresses these issues and many more by explaining how to make the switch and what the tradeoffs will be if you opt for Internet telephony over traditional phone services. *Talk is Cheap* focuses on the increasingly popular services from Vonage, which uses VoIP, and Skype--a free service that operates as a peer-to-peer (P2P) network with the ability to turn any PC, Mac, or Pocket PC into a telephone. The book explains your options; explores the background behind, the workings of, and differences between VoIP and P2P networks; and discusses the advantages and drawbacks of both technologies (including service offerings, quality, capabilities, completion rates, and more). *Talk is Cheap* then goes into detail on what you can expect in Internet service from traditional phone companies such as Verizon and AT&T. In addition, you will learn more advanced techniques, including how to turn your Palm or Pocket PC into an Internet phone and how to work with Wi-Fi phones and videophones. A straightforward, quick introduction to the ins and outs of using Internet telephone services, this book provides everything you need to make informed telephone decisions--whether you're thinking about the switch from traditional phone service or have already made it and want to get the most out of your new Internet telephone.

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Customer Reviews

"This is a great introduction to VoIP services, with lots of focus on easy-to-use options, such as Skype and Vonage." Computer Buyer, December 2005

James E. Gaskin has been solving computer and network problems for businesses small and large since 1984. He also writes books, articles, and jokes about technology AND real life. In 16 books and hundreds of articles, network consultant Gaskin tells people faster, cheaper, newer, and smarter ways to connect to each other and the world. A founding member of the Network World Lab Alliance, Gaskin focuses on small office issues and product testing. He is the leading voice for the small business market through his long-running Small Business Technology newsletter distributed by Network World. As a speaker, Gaskin travels the country in Hawaiian shirts helping people laugh at their IT pain while teaching them new ways to put technology to work. In venues such as Network World Technology Tours and seminars at leading industry conventions such as Network + InterOp, Gaskin delivers objective information stripped of marketing hype in his trademark "unbiased and un boring" style. When avoiding computers, Gaskin plays classical chamber music on the violin and tennis (but not at the same time) in the Dallas area.

This book happened to arrive on my doorstep while I was doing my own researching on switching my traditional phone service over to Broadband. I had a lot of questions, and this book does a good job of providing answers to many common questions and technical details behind making the switch. The author goes into great detail on both telephone-type broadband service (Vonage, one of the author's favorites) and computer-based Softphone systems (Skype, for example). He explains various packages, benefits and technical details behind each. For example, I want to keep my traditional telephones since for some reason my 15-year old, as computer-savvy as he is, seems to have this need to "grasp" onto a traditional telephone receiver. Thanks to this book, I now know how to hook-up those phones (directly to the router provided by the broadband provider) and how to make sure that I maintain my current coverage throughout the house (get a base station phone setup with remote stations). I also found out a lot about how the services that are available as they

compare to my traditional phone company today, and some of the pitfalls as well -- Fax machines don't work with broadband service without an extra fee from most providers, and my ADT alarm system is going to need to be retrofitted. If you are curious as to how broadband phones work (and also want a short, but good overview of how traditional phones work) the author starts the book off with going behind the scenes to explain the details. How does my call from my broadband phone reach my mother, who still believes that computers are those strange machines in the basements of banks and other big companies that manage to overcharge her, who still uses a service provided by Ma Bell? How can I live in Missouri, but have a number in Las Vegas? How can I go on a month-long vacation and still receive all my phone calls? How many licks does it take to get to the center of a Tootsie-Roll pop? Ok, so maybe the author doesn't cover that last one. About the only gripe I had with this book was the author does a lot of moaning about the traditional phone companies. I am no big fan either, but I still realize they are necessary and will be so for many, many years to come. I also would have liked to see a little less emphasis given to just Vonage and Skype, though to be fair they are the major market players at this stage in the game. A good read for those considering making the switch. It's written well and is at times humorous which makes for a very easy read.

Want to say good-bye to your plain old telephone service with the high cost of taxes, add-on fees, and long-distance? Check out James E. Gaskin's book *Talk Is Cheap - Switching To Internet Telephones* (O'Reilly). I certainly learned quite a bit from this book... Contents: How Internet Telephone Calls Work; Your Internet Phone; Free Internet Phone Features That You're Paying For Now; Choosing Your Internet Phone Equipment; Vonage And Other Broadband Phone Carriers; Skype And Other Computer-centric Services; 911, Alarms, And Other Outgoing Calls; Tips, Tricks, And Techniques For Advanced Users; Go Wireless; Index As more and more people switch to broadband internet access, there's an emerging option for telephony services in the home. Using your internet connection (DSL or cable), you can switch to internet telephony, also known as Voice over Internet Protocol (VoIP) and go all digital. Gaskin does an excellent job in explaining exactly what this is, how it works, and the pros and cons of switching to a service like this. He's a pretty strong advocate of VoIP, so you can pretty much figure out where his bias is going to lie. The book focuses on two major types of internet telephony: phone-centric and computer-centric. In the phone-centric area (using your phone much like before, but only through an internet service) he uses Vonage as the primary example of what to expect. On the computer-centric side (no telephone, just headphones and speakers attached to your computer), he uses the Skype package

as the leader in that area. In this growing technology area, it's impossible to write a book covering every option such that it won't be out of date before it's printed. To Gaskin's credit, he does a good job in covering the current playing field, as well as giving enough detail to figure in new options as they emerge. Even though you can come away from a book like this thinking all is rosy, that's not quite the case. There are very well documented customer service issues with Vonage, and no player in the field is mature enough to get it right as often as Ma Bell does. Still, if you're an early adopter of technology, this is definitely an area you need to check out. And if you have no exposure to residential VoIP up until now, I'd recommend a copy of this book to get you up to speed quickly.

Now that there are alternatives to using Ma Bell, people are switching (or contemplating it) to broadband phone services. Granted, those on dialup are still out of luck, but some of the services offered provide motivation to get a broadband account. With the proliferation of broadband phone companies, it gets confusing when trying to decide which service is the best, or which one offers the options you need most. This book explains the services that broadband companies like VONAGE offer, as well as the ones that companies like Skype offer. It also explains (in the first chapter) how internet phones work, as well as an explanation how Voice Over IP works. I also liked the analogy about how innovation over the years has forced traditional phone companies however grudgingly to offer better service. It makes one wonder how they eventually will adapt to VOIP. There's also a chapter devoted to features that you now pay for that you can get for free using an Internet phone (several of them are the various fees your phone company adds on to your bill), such as call waiting and forwarding. I find it interesting how the phone company manages to slip in various fees as a "cost of doing business." 911 service is also touched upon. Broadband phones will likely have complete 911 service within the next two years, whereas their computer-centric counterparts may not for a few years. It seems to be one drawback to using this type of technology, but one that will likely be ironed out the more popular this technology becomes. This is a great "consumer guide" to Internet telephony, one that you should buy if you're considering the move to Internet phones.

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