Factors to Consider When Choosing between
Open Source IP-PBX and Proprietary Systems

Before deciding on which specific phone system will best meet your company's needs, you need to decide which type of platform is right for you. This involves looking at the pros and cons of the two options to be considered: Proprietary systems and those based on an open source platform.

What are Proprietary Systems?

A proprietary system, when utilized in the service of information technology, refers to a product that is owned exclusively by a single entity. Knowledge about the technology used in the product is carefully guarded to engender uniqueness and loyalty to the manufacturer. Many proprietary products can only function properly when used with other products owned by the same company.

What is Open Source Software?

Open source software refers to software code that is made available for free by developers so that it can be modified and used by others. The development of open source code is frequently taken on by a community of experts that continuously improves and builds on the original code and engages in testing in real world deployment scenarios. The vast majority of open source IP-PBX vendors base their solutions on software called Asterisk, which is sponsored by Digium, and has been deployed for over 10 years.

Point-by-Point Comparison between Proprietary and Open Source

Cost Savings

One of the key considerations in purchasing an open source IP-PBX system is the significant cost savings, sometimes as much as 50% less than conventional PBX systems. Vendors of proprietary IP-PBX software have to recoup years of investment in developing and maintaining the platform for their products. Vendors that use open source software, which is free to use and is constantly being upgraded by the developer community, enjoy lower development costs and can pass these savings on to the customer.

An IP-PBX phone system can be installed on an already existing network and treats phones just like the network treats a PC (Personal Computer). This means that devices can be moved around and plugged into the network at different points without requiring cross connects to be changed, or a visit from an expensive technician. Open source IP-PBX systems enable adding phones, even at branch offices, at little or no extra charge.

Flexible and Feature Rich

Most IP-PBX systems come with a full set of features or the ability to add features that are available through the open source community. These systems can be customized and upgraded with add-ons for free or at low cost providing small businesses with the benefits of an enterprise level phone solution. The interfaces for these systems are highly user friendly so they can be managed by any computer savvy person with network experience.

Open source platforms interoperate with equipment and applications from multiple vendors.

As the prevalence of open source increases, more manufacturers are providing compatible products such as servers, graphical user interfaces (GUI), gateways, and SIP phones. These systems and the accompanying hardware are highly adaptable to the needs of your business as it evolves over time.

Interoperable and Widely Supported

With open source software there is no vendor lock-in so customers are free to choose different vendors for their hardware, network equipment, maintenance, repair, and additional needs. Third party applications can be easily integrated into IP-PBX systems. An expanding community of developers constantly conducts testing on different platforms, participates in support forums, and generates documentation to support the open source environment. Thousands of users throughout the world have developed and tested applications in a huge variety of environments ensuring interoperability with a wide array of hardware and systems.

Open source software is made available to developers worldwide who use it and test it many different environments.

Field Proven

The demand for open source IP-PBX is being fostered by growing numbers of value added resellers (VAR) and system integrators. Open source IP-PBX technology has become mainstream, accounting for thousands of endpoints in large enterprise installations.

Asterisk is the most popular, tested and documented open source software for IP telephony platforms.

IT managers are very comfortable in the open source software environment. IP-PBX software joins a host of open source applications that are in common use including, among others, the Linux operating system, Apache Web server, Firefox browser, and MySQL database.

In Summary

If you are a small or medium-sized business considering migrating to a PBX phone system, IP-PBX systems based on open source platforms provide numerous benefits, including: cost savings, a rich feature set, interoperability with existing hardware, and the flexibility to adapt to your business needs. These systems are becoming increasingly more popular among vendors and SMB owners providing greater choice and better value for your investment.

About Xorcom

Xorcom, established in 2004, designs and manufactures business telephony solutions that support both traditional PSTN and VoIP communication. All Xorcom products are based on the Asterisk open source platform, making them easy to install and maintain as well as cost-effective, since there are no per user license fees.

Xorcom has been awarded "Best of Show" seven times over the past four years by TMCnet, the world's leading business to business and integrated marketing media company, in categories ranging from "Best On-site Product Launch", through "Best of Open Source", to "Most Innovative Product". Xorcom sells its products through a worldwide distribution channel and OEM partners.

This paper is the second in a series about IP telephony platforms. The first paper in the series is intended for readers who are new to the field and wish to understand the terminology that is used in the industry. In the second paper (this document) we review the differences between IP-PBX systems that are proprietary and those that are based on open source. The third paper in the series provides an easy-to-use guide for choosing the best IP-PBX system for your needs. The fourth document presents Xorcom's advantages as a leading provider of IP-PBX systems based on an open source platform.