

NORTEL'S LATEST SMB FOOTHOLD: VoIP

BY ANDREW R. HICKEY

Nortel Networks Corp. has again proved it's placing a strong focus on small and midsize businesses, with last month's release of a string of SMB-targeted VoIP products that VARs say can ease the transition to VoIP.

According to the Toronto-based vendor, the latest releases are designed and custom-built to work with Nortel customers' existing telephony investments. Products released include a feature set for the Business Communication Manager (BCM) 50, Nortel's flagship converged telephony platform for SMBs; a line of SMB-centric IP phones; a paging and text-messaging application suite and a cordless digital phone.

The BCM 50 updates, release 3.0, require a software upgrade and offer new features like SIP trunking, advanced conferencing and new reporting capabilities, such as on-box call metrics. In addition, it offers better platform integration with Microsoft Windows Vista and Nortel's Network Configuration Manager and improved applications like Intelligent Contact Center and unified messaging, said Chris Nantes, marketing manager for Nortel's global SMB portfolio.

Nantes said customers already using Nortel's digital Norstar key systems can extend up to 70 percent of their current investment by reusing the equipment they already have as they grow into IP telephony and converged communications with BCM 50.

On the phone side, Nortel released its IP Phone 1200 Series, a series of devices that come pre-programmed with the most common IPT features used by SMBs, including autodial, conference and messaging. Used with the BCM 50, the phones can also be customized to access more than 400 BCM features. Along with the new IP phone suite, the Business Series Terminal T7406E is a new cordless digital phone for Norstar and BCM users. The cordless phone offers a range of up to 1,000 feet.

Last, the Advanced Paging Productivity (APP) Pack offers a suite of software applications for BCM, giving SMBs access to overhead paging and text messaging. Best used in retail, APP Pack gives mobile workforces the ability to stay connected while offering streamlined customer service and a common in-store experience within a retail site or across several locations.

Nantes said VARs and partners have had success in offering the BCM, of which it has sold more than 75,000 units since its May 2005 debut. Integrating the APP Pack with BCM 50 can help VARs target not only retail customers, but also those in education, manufacturing or any industry that requires one-button paging, text messaging and pre-recorded announcements.

"We're getting tremendous traction from our partner community and VARs as well," Nantes said. VARs can also offer the line of SMB VoIP products bundled with Nortel's SMB data solutions, which can all be managed using the Business Element Manager.

Stuart Chandler, president and CEO of Jessup, Md.-based Optivior Technologies, said the vendor's new SMB VoIP roundup eliminates a lot of the growing pains SMBs face with phone systems and voice applications and squashes the traditional rip-and-

replace model. Allowing the installed base of Norstar users to upgrade to BCM but still utilize their digital handsets offers cost savings and can act as a catalyst for a VoIP upgrade.

For existing BCM 50 users, it lets them upgrade to more SIP capabilities as they grow from previous BCM releases.

"It solves the immediate and future needs. I don't want to buy a solution and paint myself into a corner

knowing in two years I'm going to toss it out and get another one," Chandler said.

Chandler added that he can sell a three-person office Nortel equipment and maintain that customer relationship throughout its growth to a 300-person company because of BCM 50's scalability and integration with new applications.

"It makes it a lot easier to sell," he said. "You can sell a customer something that's going to allow them to grow... This ensures customers will be with you forever."

The latest releases fall in line with Nortel's shift over the past year and a half to better serve the SMB market, a segment that has often been ignored by most powerhouse vendors, especially in the VoIP arena. In the past 18 months, Nortel has released a series of data networking and VoIP products specifically targeted at the SMB.

Nantes said the new products solidify Nortel's place in the SMB market. "We're in the SMB market," he said. "We're in it to win and we're in it to win big." •

