

BUSINESS CONNECTIONS

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Ashe County Government now using VoIP phone system

(Left to Right) Craig Poe, SkyLine Field Services Technician; Graham Brown, SkyLine Business Sales; James Williams, Ashe County Sheriff; Robin Miller, SkyLine Inside Sales Coordinator; Dan McMillan, Ashe County Manager; Brent Keith, SkyLine Business Sales Executive; Gary Brown, SkyLine Field Services Technician



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Sheriff James Williams and Ashe County Manager Dan McMillan

BUSINESS CONNECTIONS

Business Connections is a quarterly publication of SkyLine/SkyBest created for our business customers. As a local, member-owned cooperative, SkyLine Membership Corporation was established in 1951 to bring telephone service to rural residents of Alleghany, Ashe and Watauga counties. Today, SkyLine is the second-largest of eight telephone cooperatives in North Carolina. In 1998, SkyLine established SkyBest Communications, Inc. as a wholly-owned subsidiary to assume operations of SkyLine's deregulated businesses. Today, SkyLine/SkyBest provides a wide variety of telecommunications services—from basic dial tone services to advanced business systems and networking solutions.

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Change is a constant part of the business environment. The needs of your customers change. The activities of your competitors change. The capabilities of technology change. You have to adjust to these twists and turns in the marketplace in order to successfully navigate a path toward success.

This issue of *Business Connections* celebrates the power of change. We begin on page 3 with a look at network convergence, an important communications change in recent years. Then on pages 4 and 5, you'll hear about how Ashe County Government has put network convergence into action with their new Voice over IP (VoIP) phone system; it enables voice and data to ride over one network. You'll also learn about the SMART Board (a change in how training and meetings are conducted) and how SkyLine is playing a role in placing them where they're needed.

Another changing dynamic in the business landscape is the increasing popularity of having teleworkers on your staff. You can read more about this on page 7, including tips for how to make this type of arrangement work for your business.

If you have any questions about the topics covered in *Business Connections* or need assistance with your communications systems, just give SkyLine/SkyBest a call. We're here to meet your changing needs.

Sincerely,

Kim Shepherd
Customer Service and Sales Manager





Network Convergence Streamlines Communication

Voice and data now integrate on one IP-based network

There's a lot of talk in the communications industry right now about network convergence. What exactly is it? Network convergence is the integration of all communication technologies into a single Internet Protocol or IP-based network. Voice and data information that used to require several different types of signals are now being transported via the same signal, accessible by multiple types of devices. This development is drastically changing the way people communicate and exchange information.

In the business environment, network convergence can contribute significantly to an organization's success. It supports new technologies and applications as they become available, and makes it easier to change functions as the needs of a company change. In addition, network convergence can save businesses money by helping to reduce both network infrastructure and management costs, and by creating operational efficiencies that improve productivity and streamline business processes.

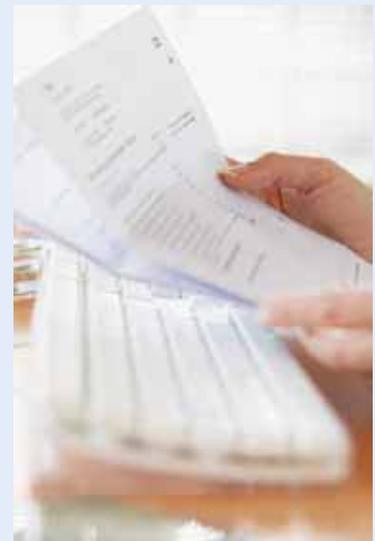
SkyLine/SkyBest offers a variety of business solutions that utilize the power of network convergence. For example, our Voice over IP (VoIP) services allow you to incorporate your business telephone system with your existing data network to provide seamless integration of both voice and data on one network. The true value of IP communications is at the user desktop, where combining voice and data enables advanced applications that enhance productivity and create business process improvements across the enterprise. Businesses see benefits in terms of staff mobility, team working, customer interaction, messaging and presence. What's more, users enjoy unprecedented levels of personal control over their business communications.

Are you interested in exploring the use of network convergence at your business? Contact one of our Inside Sales Representatives at 800-759-2226 to find out more about our selection of Mitel IP devices. They integrate voice communications with PC and Web technology to provide users with real-time access to powerful IP applications.

It Pays to Shut Off Computers

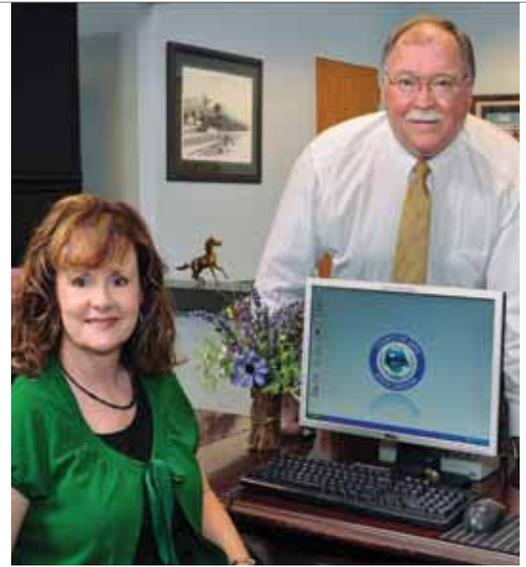
Is it worth it to turn off your company's computers when they're not in use? Here's some food for thought: Ford recently announced that their company will save \$1.2 million in energy costs annually just by shutting off computers during non-work hours. It's estimated that by shutting off just one computer each night, you could save more than \$30 per year in electricity.

Energysavers.gov recommends that you turn off the monitor if you aren't going to use a PC for more than 20 minutes, and both the CPU and monitor if you're not going to use a PC for more than two hours. They also suggest that monitors, printers and other accessories be on a power strip/surge protector. When this equipment is not in use for extended periods, turn off the switch on the power strip/surge protector to prevent them from drawing power even when shut off. Another energy-saving option is to put your computer in "hibernate" or "sleep" mode if available.





Ashe County Courthouse



Ann Clark and Dan McMillan with Ashe County Government

PHOTO BY TODD BUSH PHOTOGRAPHY, WWW.BUSHPHOTO.COM

Upgrades for Ashe County Government

New VoIP phone system keeps pace with users in multiple buildings

The new Ashe County Law Enforcement Center was one motivating factor for upgrading the phone system used by the many offices of Ashe County Government. After consulting with SkyLine/SkyBest, they chose to replace their Nortel phone system with a Mitel 3300 ICP VoIP PBX. This system is used in the Ashe County Law Enforcement Center, Ashe County Courthouse and Administration Building and Ashe County Agricultural Extension Office.

Brent Keith, SkyLine/SkyBest Business Sales Executive, notes, "The Mitel 3300 ICP VoIP PBX is a big leap forward in technology for Ashe County Government. It's an integrated system that uses one network to converge both voice and data. Since everything rides over the data network, it requires less cabling infrastructure. And because the software-based machines are very upgradable, they have a longer life. This phone system also shows presence, meaning a status indicator conveys the ability and willingness of a potential

communication partner to communicate. Convenient features include conference calling, video calls and document collaboration, as well as the use of wireless headsets."

These wireless headsets enable employees to move freely about the three buildings. Ashe County Sheriff James Williams, appreciates this and other features of the new system. "It works well to have wireless headsets and be able to walk through the different buildings while still on phone calls. I also like managing voice mail on the computer and connecting to other Ashe County staff members by dialing just four digits," says Williams.

Ashe County Manager Dan McMillan, agrees that the new phone system is beneficial. He explains, "It's a wonderful system and I can count on it to work. Granted, I'm not the most technical person but our IT people and our users have great things to say about the system's many features and how they help streamline communications. I know this system

will continue to benefit us in the future and allow us to work more efficiently."

Efficiency was also cited by Lisa Harless, Administrative Assistant at Social Services, when asked about her experience with the Mitel 3300 ICP VoIP PBX. Says Harless, "It's great for receptionists to see if staff are on the phone rather than having to walk back to their office and 'hunt' for them. It's also great to have wireless headsets and be able to take your phone with you if you are going to another office. I can now check voice



SkyLine Technicians Tony Holt, Craig Poe and Gary Brown were instrumental in the successful installation of the Mitel system

mails on my computer, which is incredible, and the speed dial keys and direct page options are superb. Best of all, the system is really user friendly.”

Redundancy was another important issue for Ashe County, especially since phone communications are literally a life-and-death matter for 911 Emergency Management. SkyLine/SkyBest made sure the system provided super redundancy; hardware is able to shift, and if one controller is down, calls go through the other controller. Each controller also has double hard drives and double power supplies.

“I can’t tell you how much I appreciate SkyLine,” says Williams. “They worked day and night to get us in here; they practically did back flips. You don’t get that kind of service everywhere. They’re a top-notch organization to work with.”



PHOTO BY TODD BUSH PHOTOGRAPHY, WWW.BUSHPHOTO.COM

“It works well to have wireless headsets and be able to walk through the different buildings while still on phone calls.”

— JAMES WILLIAMS, ASHE COUNTY SHERIFF

McMillan agrees, adding, “SkyLine has been a partner with Ashe County on many issues; this new phone system is just one of many examples. They make sure we have the latest and most advanced technology available.”

Harless is impressed with the personal attention from the SkyLine/SkyBest staff. “I could go on and on about how patient they have been with us. The SkyLine folks have checked and double-checked to make sure we were all ‘up and running’ when the phone system was installed. Since then, they have been quick to respond to our questions about phone use and programming features. How wonderful to work with local people that you can actually find when you need them. On a scale of 1-10, SkyLine gets a 20!”

SMART Board Aids Training

The days of copying notes from dry-erase boards are over. From classrooms to board rooms, the dry-erase board is being replaced with the SMART Board—an interactive system that lets presenters and trainers share information, record ideas and decisions, save presentation notes and easily distribute the results via printouts, e-mail or Internet publication. With a SMART Board, users can write notes as they would on a conventional dry-erase board, and these notes are recorded as digital ink and can be saved as screenshots to send out as PDF or PowerPoint files. Users can also write and save notes directly into applications such as Microsoft Word, Excel, PowerPoint and Adobe Acrobat.

Since 2006, SkyLine has donated SMART Boards to school systems in our five-county service area as a way to enhance education by supporting technology and communications needs. Familiar with our SMART Board program, the Ashe County Sheriff’s Office approached SkyLine about the possibility of securing a SMART Board for use in the new Law Enforcement Center’s training room.

Karen Powell, SkyLine Public Relations Director, explains, “We set up a meeting with the SMART Board distributor, Smarter Systems, and the Ashe County Sheriff’s Office staff to see what their needs were and how Smarter Systems could help them acquire a SMART Board.

Greer Dickerson, Client Development Manager of Smarter Systems, worked to get a SMART Board installed quickly in the training room of the Law Enforcement Center. This room is used for certification classes as well as interdepartmental meetings, press conferences and briefings.”

Notes Dickerson, “We’re proud to partner with the Ashe County Sheriff’s Office and SkyLine to help provide state-of-the-art technology to their staff and community. The new Law Enforcement Center is amazing, and we’re fortunate to be a part of it.”



Sergeant Randy Lewis uses a SMART Board during a training session in the Ashe County Law Enforcement Center

Cyber Security Essentials

Is your business taking these important precautions?

You've invested so much time and money into building your business. To protect it, you buy property insurance, put locks on the doors and install fire alarms. Have you made cyber security a similar priority?

Every computer can be vulnerable to a cyber attack, and the consequences range from simple inconvenience to a devastating data loss. Today's businesses face three major online threats: spam, viruses and phishing. Fortifying your company against these threats is critical in order to prevent valuable information from falling into the wrong hands or your computers from malfunctioning.

Taking these small steps today will go a long way towards avoiding trouble down the road:

1. Use antivirus and antispyware software and keep it up to date
New threats are discovered daily and keeping your software updated is one of the easiest ways to protect your business from an attack; simply set your computers to automatically update for you. Also activate your firewall and regularly download the security protection updates (known as patches) that are released by most major software companies.

2. Educate your employee not to open e-mail attachments from unknown sources
Computer viruses are commonly spread



through e-mail attachments so it's vital to pay attention to the source before opening them. In addition, make sure your employees don't click on links within unsolicited e-mail messages or install any software programs unless they're from a reputable source.

3. Use strong passwords
Lock your online accounts, computers and other devices with passwords of at least eight characters that contain a mixture of uppercase and lowercase letters as well as numbers. Keep passwords and PINs secret, and change passwords frequently.

4. "Look before you leap" with sensitive information
Make it a policy to check for signs that a webpage is safe before you or your employees conduct online transactions. Check for an "https" at the beginning of a Web address (URL) and a closed padlock icon beside it. This is an indication that the Web site has taken extra security steps to protect your information. Never give sensitive information in response to an e-mail or instant message (IM) request.

5. Take special precautions with laptops and mobile devices
It's a good idea to have written cyber security practices that address the use of laptops and mobile devices. For example, when public Wi-Fi is used, train employees to confirm the exact spelling of the wireless network they're connecting to and watch out for clever, slightly misspelled fakes.

SkyBest Internet Guardian

SkyBest makes it easy and affordable to add cyber protection to your small business with our SkyBest Internet Guardian service. For just \$2.95 per month (for up to three computers), you get protection from viruses, worms, Trojan Horses, hackers, phishing attackers and spyware slow-downs. You also get firewall protection, Wi-Fi intrusion detection, content filtering and identity protection. For more information, visit www.skybest.com.

SkyBest Internet Guardian
Powered by TrendMicro

Telework Offers Many Benefits

It can increase efficiency and help prepare for emergencies

It's estimated that about 26 million Americans work from home at least one day per month, and 22 million do so at least one day per week. While telework (or telecommuting) has been popular for years, escalated growth of this trend is being attributed to a number of factors. These include advances in communications technology that make such work arrangements more feasible, and an increased need to prepare for business continuity in the event of pandemic flu, severe weather or other emergency.

Can telework be successfully implemented at your business? Jobs that can be done independently from others, or that require only e-mail and phone communication, are typically best suited for telework. While some managers may balk at the seeming loss of control, businesses with teleworkers have found that both the organization and its employees benefit.

More Productive, Happier Employees
Increased productivity is a common result of telework. These employees re-allocate time previously devoted to commuting, and spend it checking e-mails, beginning their day's work or preparing for the next day. They also do not have distractions from colleagues stopping by to chat, and can more successfully focus on tasks. Companies often report that their teleworkers overcompensate; they value the



Dos and Don'ts for Managing Teleworkers

Do:

- Trust your teleworker.
- Encourage goal setting, ask for periodic status reports and give timely feedback.
- Manage based on productivity and results.
- Communicate regularly to keep appropriate team members in the loop.

Don't:

- Check in too frequently or over-supervise your employee.
- Ignore your teleworker when they submit work or questions.
- Set unrealistic deadlines that couldn't be met in an ordinary work environment.
- Expect perfection. Any job requires occasional adjustments.

work-at-home arrangement so highly that they work even harder.

Employees tend to be happier when they have flexible schedules that improve their work-life balance, and this enhanced job satisfaction helps to reduce turnover rates. By lowering recruitment and training costs for business owners, telework can positively impact the bottom line.

Reduced Use of Resources

Since full-time teleworkers do not require space in office buildings, companies are increasingly able to pare down the size of their locations and decrease overhead costs. As a business grows, staff increases can be more easily accommodated. Less commuting by employees also reduces

energy consumption, which is better for the environment.

Flexibility to Continue Operations

Concern about flu outbreaks has prompted many companies to establish telework policies. That way, if mission-critical employees can't come into the office or don't feel comfortable doing so, the business could still operate via phone and Internet connections. Having employees work from home can also help slow the spread of the flu virus.

Without question, telework can be a versatile and powerful tool for organizations of all sizes. Explore the options and consider putting your own telework policies in place soon.

SkyLine/SkyBest – Delivering the Power of IP to your Business



The Mitel IP Desktop portfolio puts the power of IP communications where it matters most – on the user's desktop. Designed with ergonomics and modern office aesthetics in mind, Mitel IP Desktop devices and peripherals give users easy, intuitive access to feature-rich IP communications plus advanced IP-based applications. From affordable entry-level IP phones, to self-labeling HTML-enabled phones, to wireless phones, consoles and conference units – only the Mitel IP Desktop portfolio answers the diverse communications needs of everyone across small, medium and large enterprises.



The SkyLine logo features a stylized blue wave with a yellow sun rising above it. Below it, the text 'SkyLine' is written in a blue, sans-serif font. The SkyBest logo features the text 'SkyBest' in a blue, sans-serif font, with a horizontal line above the 'Best' part. Below the SkyBest logo, the phone number '800-759-2226' and the website 'www.skybest.com' are listed in a smaller, black, sans-serif font.

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