

## Session Initiated Protocol: What's all the hype about?

SIP, or Session Initiated Protocol, is a buzzword that gets plenty of airplay in telecommunication circles. But what is it really? How could it benefit your business? And most importantly, what is the best way to deploy such a technology?

SIP is an open-standards-based technology. What that means is that it can interface with any phone system available from any vendor. This liberates you from being anchored to one specific vendor for every component of your phone network, allowing you to shop for the best price, features and functionality to meet your needs. Think of it this way: You may have 20 handsets on your network made by the same manufacturer. When you decide to add additional handsets, you may find that another manufacturer has a better price. With SIP, it's possible for both types of handsets to coexist on your network without compatibility problems. This makes SIP a great choice when flexibility is a key requirement in your phone platform.


But there is a drawback to deploying SIP across your entire network. SIP technology has a very limited feature set in most cases, with on-hold and call transfer often being the only options. While it's possible to configure SIP during the installation so that additional functionality is available, this is usually still restrictive. And it normally involves an extra step on the part of the user in order to access certain features. With a digital IP phone, a user may only have to press a single key to execute a command. With SIP, they may have to "hook flash" (quickly pressing the receiver hook) and then hit multiple keys in order to execute the same command.

### SIP the Right Way

Given SIP's advantages and disadvantages, there is a right and a wrong way to use it. With SIP's limited feature set, we do not recommend it for "power users"-executives who make full use of the capabilities of an IP-digital phone. These users include anyone who is holding multiple conference calls and using their handset to access many different technologies across your network.

The right way to deploy SIP is to deliver it to users that may handle a high volume of calls, but do not need any of the traditional "bells and whistles" of a digital phone. These users may include warehouse employees or a front desk receptionist.

Another way to use SIP is with a stand-alone technology, such as your voicemail system. SIP can actually interface the voicemail platform with your network. The advantage of this is now you can use any voicemail technology you wish, while the rest of your network is still using the robust features and functionality that they're accustomed to using.



SIP also presents some unique capabilities that you may not be aware of, such as:

- SIP works well with wireless technology. Your employees can use it with mobile handsets and stay connected no matter where they are in your office building, usually for no more cost than a traditional cell phone.
- SIP is great for point-to-point communication. You could use the technology to set up front lobby security by interfacing a web cam, front door speaker, and even the switch to buzz in the person requesting entrance. And with SIP, you can mix and match vendors in any way you choose.
- SIP also delivers great flexibility with video technologies. You can integrate real-time video with your phone system without massive integration issues, giving you the long-distance conferencing abilities of Fortune 500 organizations.

SIP is a great enabler of communication between disparate handsets, switches and other equipment. It just needs to be applied properly in order to recognize the most benefit. Where you deploy it, and how you use it, will determine whether it enables the real Return on Investment that you're seeking.