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Product review: Allworx 24x

Allworx wows with a smorgasbord of flexible telephony features, but setup and administration can be daunting

By Mike Heck
April 29, 2008

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Allworx's trio of product lines include two VoIP telephone handsets, three combination telephony and network servers, plus five software packages that are separately licensed for unlimited use. The PBX contains many standard features, including unified messaging and site-to-site access; the five separate applications add specific advanced functions, such as call queuing or conferencing, allowing you to purchase only the capabilities you need. Each server eases administration with automated backup.

Allworx loaned me its high-capacity 24x server (supporting 100 employees per site with extender hardware) and top-of-the-line 9212 phones. The slim server connected to my LAN hub and external Internet, and provided five FXS ports for analog phone lines.

Allworx recommends configuration by a reseller, and I won't argue. Although its Web-based administration console centralizes setup of all server and telephony functions, and takes you through a checklist for a typical configuration – network configuration, enabling VPN, and final testing – a lot of settings aren't especially clear. It took me a few days to get the system totally running. Still, I appreciated the network installation tools (new in the latest Version 6.8 system software). One helped me avoid IP address conflicts. Another, Trace Route, identified lags in my network so that I could improve QoS.

[Return to the introduction. Read the review of Critical Links EdgeBox Office, Fonality PBXtra, Microsoft Response Point, or Sutus Business Central.]

Experienced system administrators can use this software to quickly perform other tasks, such as adding extensions and managing the nine auto attendants. Again, you might want to leave this to your reseller, which can remotely manage your setup.

My Allworx Manager, an internal Web site, lets users configure their personal settings, including presence, conferences, call routes, and phone features. Even with the depth of features, such as seven presence settings for each user, the software makes these changes fairly goof-proof.

For example, determining how calls are routed is all done through drop-down list selections that you make in logical sequence. This solution, like PBXtra's, has follow-me calling. Put simply, based on your presence setting, you can route your call to multiple external phone numbers, and then back to Allworx voice mail.

When I put Allworx through heavy real-world testing, its flexibility was very apparent. The 9212 VoIP phone, with 12 programmable function keys and an informative LCD, should be welcome by employees who place or receive a lot of calls; this made tasks like call transfers a breeze. Additionally, the handset's voice quality was high.

I wasn't surprised that the system's basic telephony features – listening to voice mail, forwarding messages, and changing presence – worked without a hitch from the phone; Allworx has been in this business for 10 years. Yet it was some of the new features that made Allworx a bit more polished compared to other solutions.

For instance, now you can make outbound calls through the system no matter where you are – and the person you're calling sees your business caller ID. I also liked voice mail text messages and escalation. Here you have the option of getting an SMS text message from the system each time a voice mail is received. Moreover, if the message isn't retrieved within a set time, it could be sent to your backup coworker -- valuable for on-call medical personnel or support staff serving customers paying for guaranteed response times.
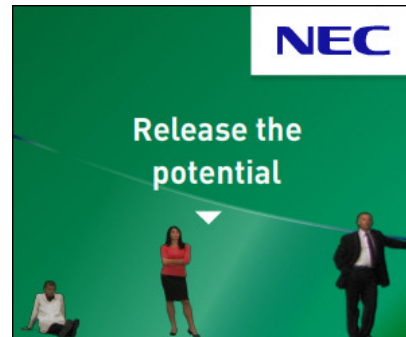
Similar to PBXtra's Heads Up Display, Allworx's optional Call Assistant would be a worthwhile add-on. This PC-based attendant console's GUI lets the operator drag and drop calls from one extension to another, see the status of all lines, record calls, and view call history. Unfortunately, this 32-bit software isn't supported on 64-bit Windows OSes (which I had on my workstation), so I couldn't do a hands-on test.

If you have Conferencing installed, the Web portal lets users easily reserve conference bridges. The system also reserves several IDs for unscheduled conferences. Allworx Call Queuing lets you establish up to 10 simultaneous queues, with a total of 32 callers at any time. That's very good by itself, but you can also allow remote users to answer queues.

Lastly, this solution offers complete reporting – ranging from real-time status of

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The Bottom Line

Allworx 24x v.6.8
Allworx, allworx.com

Very Good   8.6

criteria	score	weight
Telephony	9	25%
Management	9	25%
Ease-of-use	8	15%
Scalability	9	15%
Setup	7	10%
Value	8	10%

Cost:
$4,345 for Allworx 24x 24-user server (as tested); $269 each for Allworx 9212 VoIP phones

Platforms:
24-, 60-, and 100-user core systems and four models of VoIP phones

Bottom Line:
A true all-in-one system, each Allworx appliance combines full PBX and VoIP duties with networking functions including automated backup, e-mail and Web server, security, and LAN management. Rich communications features include unified messaging and presence awareness, along with options such as call queuing, a conference center, and group calendaring. Another important differentiator is site-to-site access, with 100 sites supported.

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queues to call details.

Allworx had me a bit perplexed during setup and presented one software compatibility barrier. In fairness, if you go the expected route of a VAR performing the configuration, all should be smooth sailing. But that means additional costs. Most important, Allworx has solid hardware, a nice collection of standard functions, and à la carte pricing for optional features to keep overall cost reasonable, while allowing for future upgrades.

Mike Heck is a contributing editor of the InfoWorld Test Center.

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