

Vendors Offer Super SIP Bundle for SMBs

A handful of cable suppliers have put together an integrated package of hardware and software to help cable operators quickly deliver lucrative SIP-based voice services to commercial customers.

The joint solution combines gear and software from five vendors: Acme Packet (Nasdaq: APKT - message board), Arris International Inc. (Nasdaq: ARRS - message board), BroadSoft Inc. , Camiant Inc. , and Sigma Systems Canada Inc. (See table for the breakdown of gear and their basic functions.)

The consortium also has tapped Pure Integration LLC to tie the whole thing together.

Such a combo could come into play for operators that are launching commercial packages for small- and mid-sized businesses. Among them, Comcast Corp. (Nasdaq: CMCSA, CMCSK), which hired cable business service specialist Bill Stemper away from Cox Communications Inc. last August, is entering this service category by targeting businesses with fewer than 20 employees, and has forecast it could capture 20 percent of that market in roughly five years. The MSO has already set aside about \$250 million in capex in support of that strategy for this year.

The vendor-led package also falls in line with cable's rapid introduction of SIP-based technology that complements its original

PacketCable 1.x architecture for VOIP services. The vendor combo also addresses cable's migration to PacketCable Multimedia (PCMM), another CableLabs -led architecture that injects QOS into a wide range of IP-based applications and services.

One ingredient that appears to be missing from this commercial services concoction is an IP-PBX that hangs off the end of the SIP trunk, according to Mark Galvin, the president and CEO of Whaleback Systems , which – surprise! – specializes in such technology. Although the integrated package looks to be sufficient for businesses with six or fewer "seats," it might require some PBX help for larger deployments, he estimates.

Table 1: Commercial Cable SIP Dream Team

Company	Product(s)	Function
Acme Packet	Net-Net session border controllers	Acts as the edge SIP element and P-CSCF (Proxy Call Session Control Function) supporting security, service assurance, and regulatory compliance requirements.
Arris	C4 cable modem termination system and Touchstone multi-line embedded multimedia terminal adapters.	eMTAs support SIP and PacketCable 1.x-type Network-based Call Signaling (NCS) protocols. Depending on eMTA model, device can handle between two to 12 lines of voice services, plus some business features.
Broadsoft	BroadWorks	IMS-complaint application server, covering a range of VOIP applications, including hosted PBX, IP Centrix, and mobile PBX and business trunking.
Camiant	Multimedia Policy Engine	Provides real-time quality of service control for VOIP calls and other apps delivered over the Docsis network. Also a key ingredient of the CableLabs PacketCable Multimedia (PCMM) architecture.
Sigma Systems	Service Management Platform, Commercial SMB Voice Service Package, and Service Management Applications	Automated order management, network/device/service provisioning, BSS integration, and administrator/user self-care for commercial VOIP services.

Source: The companies and Cable Digital News

Still, BroadSoft, which counts Cox among its recently announced cable customers, appears to be adding a hosted PBX and IP Centrix feature to the plumbing of the integrated system announced Monday. (See Cox Chooses BroadSoft.)

Some models from Arris's new class of eMTAs are also being equipped to support up to 12 lines.

"But I believe [this deal] takes SIP trunking a step forward," Galvin adds. "Overall, it's a very positive technology direction." Whaleback, he says, has a lab trial underway with a "major" but unnamed MSO, and another that is scheduled to start a different tech pilot next month. In addition to doing integrations with operators, Whaleback is also moving ahead with more "over-the-top"-type IP-PBX services offered through networking partnerships with operators such as Bright House Networks and Time Warner Cable Inc. (NYSE: TWC - message board).

Many MSOs are expected to deploy SIP and PacketCable Multimedia well ahead of the full PacketCable 2.0 platform, which borrows heavily on the IP Multimedia Subsystem (IMS) and fixed/mobile convergence apps. (See The Slow Road to PacketCable 2.0 and CableLabs Issues FMC Specs.)

The new vendor-fused package, to be shown at next month's CableLabs Summer Conference in Keystone, Colo., "gives cable operators an opportunity to deploy SIP in advance, and get some experience ahead of PacketCable 2.0," says Randy Fuller, senior director of alliances and solutions at Camiant. "The challenge the early adopters have is how to get everything to talk to one another so the solution works."

Although PCMM can support high-speed data apps such as "Speed Preview" and turbo buttons, the most common application for it over the last six-to-nine months has been commercial VOIP, he says.

Fuller says an integrated system can cut three-to-six months off the time it would take an operator to get from the RFI (request for information) process to getting the service up with paying customers.

Vendors are not disclosing pricing or a detailed list of operators that are already testing or deploying the solution. But Fuller says most of the deployment activity is occurring with North American MSOs. "There are very large operators and small operators that have found this type of solution to be economical."

Of course, not every MSO is a candidate for this exact set-up, as they may be using CMTSs or eMTAs from other vendors.

It's for that reason Fuller calls this a "loosely-coupled solution." An operator can certainly swap one product for another and do the extra integration work, but there's no guarantee it will work as well as the bundle, he adds.