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Mincher now taking calls on line one

Entrepreneur returns to telecom industry with hosted VoIP

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FORT COLLINS

Advances in technology and a quickly evolving market have a Northern Colorado serial entrepreneur returning to the telecom industry.

After taking a years-long sabbatical from the industry, Braun Mincher is preparing to launch a new venture focusing on hosted PBX phone systems utilizing Voice-over-Internet protocol, or VoIP.

Mincher started his first venture in the telecom world in 1997 with PCG Consulting Group. The company focused on finding the best telecommunications options for businesses in return for a portion of customers' savings. A few years later, Mincher started CTI Communications to sell, install and service onsite phone systems.

Mincher sold CTI in 2004 and put active consulting through PCG on hold.

He spent the next few years on a mission to increase financial literacy among Americans. He wrote "The Secrets of Money: A Guide for Everyone on Practical Financial Literacy" and recently put the finishing touches on his "Secrets of Money" documentary. Advances in telecom technology during the past few years brought him back to the industry.

"It's kind of like a new frontier," Mincher said. "We feel like we've built a better mousetrap."

Mincher is reviving PCG Telecom with a new twist. PCG will now offer FreedomIQ — a hosted VoIP offering developed by Encinitas, Calif.-based FreedomVoice Systems.

VoIP grows with broadband

FreedomVoice was founded in 1996 to offer virtual office technologies — hosted phone services using traditional technologies. VoIP technology was in its infancy at the time, and the quality was low.

"Back in '96, '97, the Internet was so young and the number of people with broadband connections was so few," said Eric Thomas, CEO of FreedomVoice Systems.

Internet connection speed is just one



Kristen Tatti, Northern Colorado Business Report

THE PHONE GUY — Serial entrepreneur Braun Mincher is preparing to launch into another telecommunications venture. PCG Telecom will offer businesses a hosted VoIP phone system giving the clients the ability to track calls, add lines and move phones all over the world.

of a number of elements that contribute to the quality of VoIP service.

"It's kind of an art form to make sure you have good, quality service," Thomas said.

FreedomIQ pairs a plug-and-play high definition phone with an easy-to-use online interface. The interface allows the client to adjust the phone numbers and number of lines, track call volume and length, record calls, set call forwarding standards and other features for the whole system.

"This VoIP technology removes all geographical barriers for companies with their employees," Mincher said.

The FreedomIQ service will work from any location with a decent broadband connection. An employee could unplug the phone from his desk, take it home, plug it in and go right back to work. Call forwarding details can also be set up to allow seamless travel and transi-

tions.

"I see the world becoming more virtual," Thomas said, now that people are officing from home or anywhere around the world. "There are more and more companies doing it and I like that we're providing them with the tools."

Redundancy, nationwide reach

Mincher added that while mobility is a great incentive, the disaster recovery element of these options is the most important. If a facility is taken down by weather or some other disaster, the phone system can be immediately managed to forward to home or cell phone numbers. Since FreedomVoice has a nationwide network with redundancies, there is no chance that a disaster will take out the entire system.

The national network also allows Mincher to set up clients with phone numbers from all over the nation. A Fort

Collins financial firm could have a New York number or a customer call center could have a number for each of its markets, giving the appearance of a larger or more local company.

FreedomVoice is offering FreedomIQ through a couple of hundred dealers throughout the country, although some dealers are much more active than others.

"We like to focus on the customer experience," Thomas said. "I think communications is a solution-sell — you need to be in their location."

Mincher is also focused on the customer. PCG will have no contracts, only month-to-month service fees. Mincher said the typical customer could get set up with PCG's hosted service for \$30 to \$50 per seat per month including all of the functionality. The idea is that the company continues to earn its clients' business.

"We want to be their trusted business adviser," he said. "Just like a lawyer or banker, we're the telecom adviser."

Room for growth

PCG Telecom will initially hire around five people. Mincher said the company could easily grow to 50, depending on how business regulation and law impacts the cost of employing more people.

There is room for tremendous growth in the VoIP market, according to Craig Clausen, senior vice president at New Paradigm Resources Group Inc. NPRG data show that the number of residential customers using VoIP technology grew from 10.9 million in 2007 to 15.6 million in 2008. Revenues in that market grew from \$4.4 million to \$6.1 million.

"It's interesting how fast the industry has taken off and has been accepted," he said. "It happened a lot quicker than many had expected."

Now that the technology issues have largely been addressed, service quality is no longer a barrier. Clausen explained that a big push to move to VoIP, especially to hosted services, is the ability to scale up and down with little extra investment.

"The hosted systems and offerings have taken off significantly faster," he said.

The technology, in terms of competence, is now fairly mature. However, the markets and uses still have room to grow, especially the medium-sized business market.

"The acceptance is what is crucial," Clausen said. "I think people are becoming generally comfortable with the technology."