Overcoming telephony challenges in Healthcare

How you could benefit from a medical-grade network

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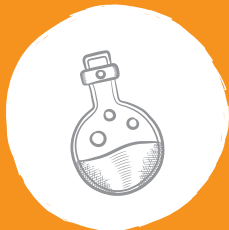
The state of Healthcare
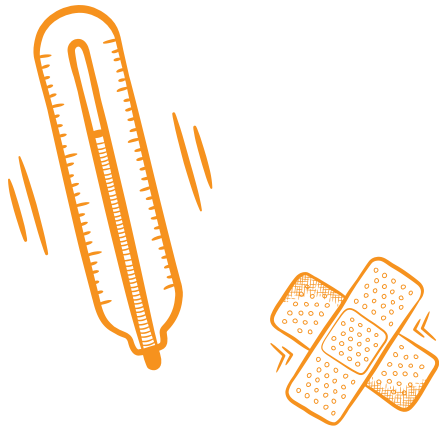
As with many Government organisations, Healthcare bodies face the continued challenge of doing more, with less.

Demands on the sector are coming from a growing and ageing population. A national shortage of qualified nurses and paramedics has seen NHS trusts looking abroad in an attempt to fill posts. And with more people visiting A&E departments every week, even more pressure is put on staff and waiting times. All the while, budget cuts are forcing many organisations to make fundamental changes to the way they are structured and operate.

Addressing these demands is no easy feat. A long-term shift in care management is essential.
For this to happen, operational infrastructure needs to match modern working needs.

This eGuide will explore how Healthcare organisations can make the most of innovative telephony solutions to help transform the sector – with cost efficiencies, workplace flexibility and operational continuity at its core.

Telephony today

For the last two decades, ISDN has been the dominant telephony service across the country. However, today, its popularity is diminishing and modern telecom solutions are bringing many organisations into the modern world along with them.

SIP trunking combines voice and data traffic so that it is carried over a single network. This brings about a number of practical and financial benefits, including rationalisation of the telephony estate, cost-efficiency, increased resiliency and productivity gains. And, while

the technology has been widely accepted in commercial businesses, its adoption is steadily gaining traction in the public sector.

SIP trunks are ideal for Healthcare organisations, especially for those that require a resilient, emergency-ready service. The need for intelligent call routing, queuing, recording and messaging features make the sector perfectly suited to the technology. Yet it can also help address the sector's numerous challenges, from rising demand and staffing shortages, to budget cuts and the need to innovate.

Time and money

Acute NHS trusts spend £55.6 billion a year, of which £33.9 billion is spent on staffing.

According to Lord Carter, a 1% improvement in staff productivitywill save the NHS £280 million a year. This would be the equivalent of hospitals using new working methods that would save every member of staff 5 minutes on an 8 hour shift.

Modern, integrated telecoms could easily help achieve this goal.

Working with budget cuts

With funding reduced and demand rising, many public healthcare bodies have fond it increasingly difficult to live within their means. Considerable changes in services and operations have been necessary. In fact it has been estimated that, if no effiency savings are made todays, the NHS would face a national £30 billion funding gap by 2020.

Upgrading telecoms infrastructure can be one strategy in releasing much needed funds. As seen in many businesses already, SIP trunking can create savings of up to 50% on line rental and up to 25% on call costs.
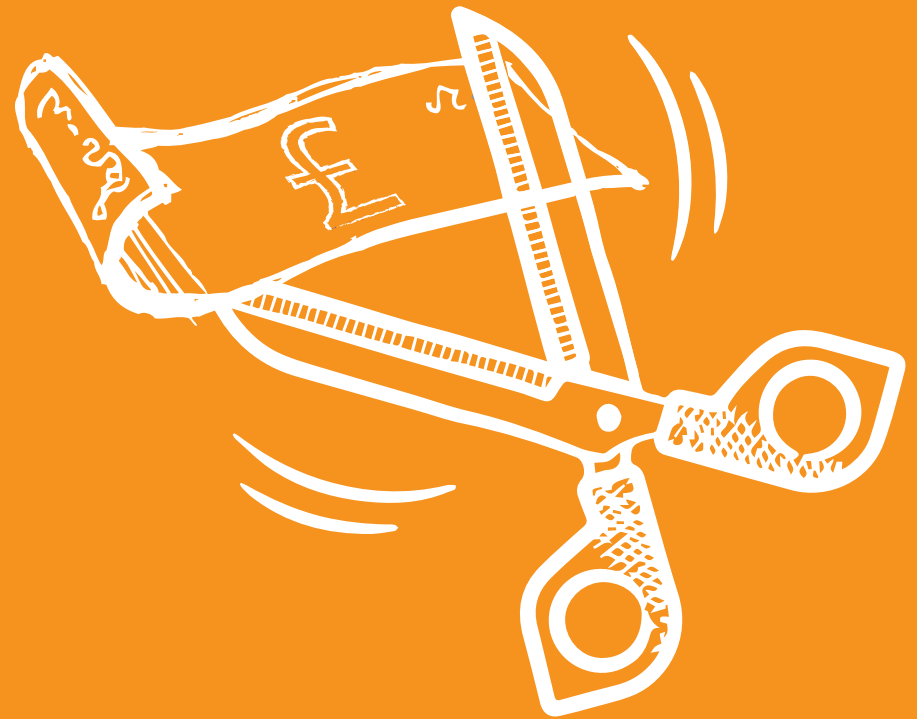
Consolidating the savings

With line rationalisation, organisations are no longer obligated to pay for lines they rarely need nor use.

**Example:**
An Ambulance Service has two ISDN lines.

Site	Nber of channels	Peak hour
A	30	9.00AM-10.00AM
B	30	6.30PM-7.30PM

The alternating peak times mean that not all 60 channels are ever needed at once.

Instead, the Ambulance Service could use SIP trunking to rationalise their telephony infrastructure. As a result, they would only pay for the number of lines they need.

Unlike ISDNs, which are sold in line bundles, SIP trunks allow users to buy the exact amount of lines (or trunks) they need. This means organisations are no longer locked into paying for excess or partially used analogue lines, and so are able to create consolidated savings.

What's more, SIP trunks allow for organisations to make the most of their telecoms infrastructure, as voice is carried alongside other IP traffice on the network. From a risk perspective, there is little change. The majority of Healthcare organisations already have stringent IP traffic protection in place.
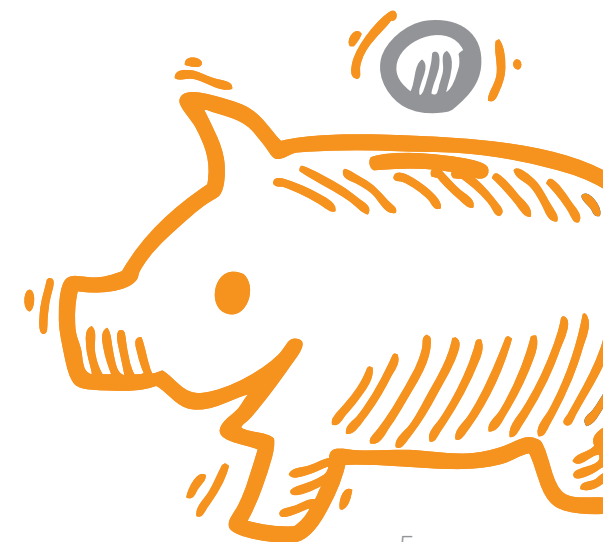
Free calls

Enabling free calls

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Calls between any SIP enabled site on the network are free, and this can add up to substantial savings for organisations with numerous sites. External calls are fed through the IP-enabled PBX and are charged at a competitive rate.

Reducing administration costs

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An IP-based solution takes the complexity out of running a telephony system. With telephone billing now a part of IT spend, SIP trunking removes the overhead of managing technology, allowing Healthcare companies to instead increase their focus on other process and administration goals.

Restructuring to meet demand

The delivery of health care has changed. Patient expectations, technological innovation and the growing need for continuous care have all played a part in its evolution. This is especially noticeable for emergency services, where there is now an increasing need to provide care at the scene, or give out advice over the phone, rather than simply transport patients to the nearest hospital. Likewise, for NHS hospitals across the country, Patient Centred Outcome Measures (PCOMs) are putting patients, families and carers at the heart of individual healthcare goals, rather than clinicians deciding what is best.

To cope with changing needs, both in terms of public expectations and professional roles, Healthcare organisations must have suitable telephony infrastructure. It needs to be both flexible enough to cope with external pressures, and provide the insight required to help plan for the future.

Allowing for scalability

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Whether it's the busy summer holiday period for paramedics, or the flu season for GP clinics, every healthcare provider experiences peaks and troughs in demand. As such, they must be able to scale up or down immediately. While the traditional system is set up for patients and organisations to absorb the mismatch in supply and demand, modern telephony can help lessen the impact. SIP trunks allow organisations to add more users or numbers in a matter of minutes with a simple software configuration and without a long-term financial commitment. And, because there is little dependency on hardware, there is also minimal pressure on capital spend.

Delivering greater interoperability

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Modern workers need flexible access between fixed lines, smartphones, IP phones, desktops and laptops. They also require a user-friendly system that can deliver a consistent experience across numerous devices. SIP trunking can help – the technology allows calls to seamlessly move between numerous devices.
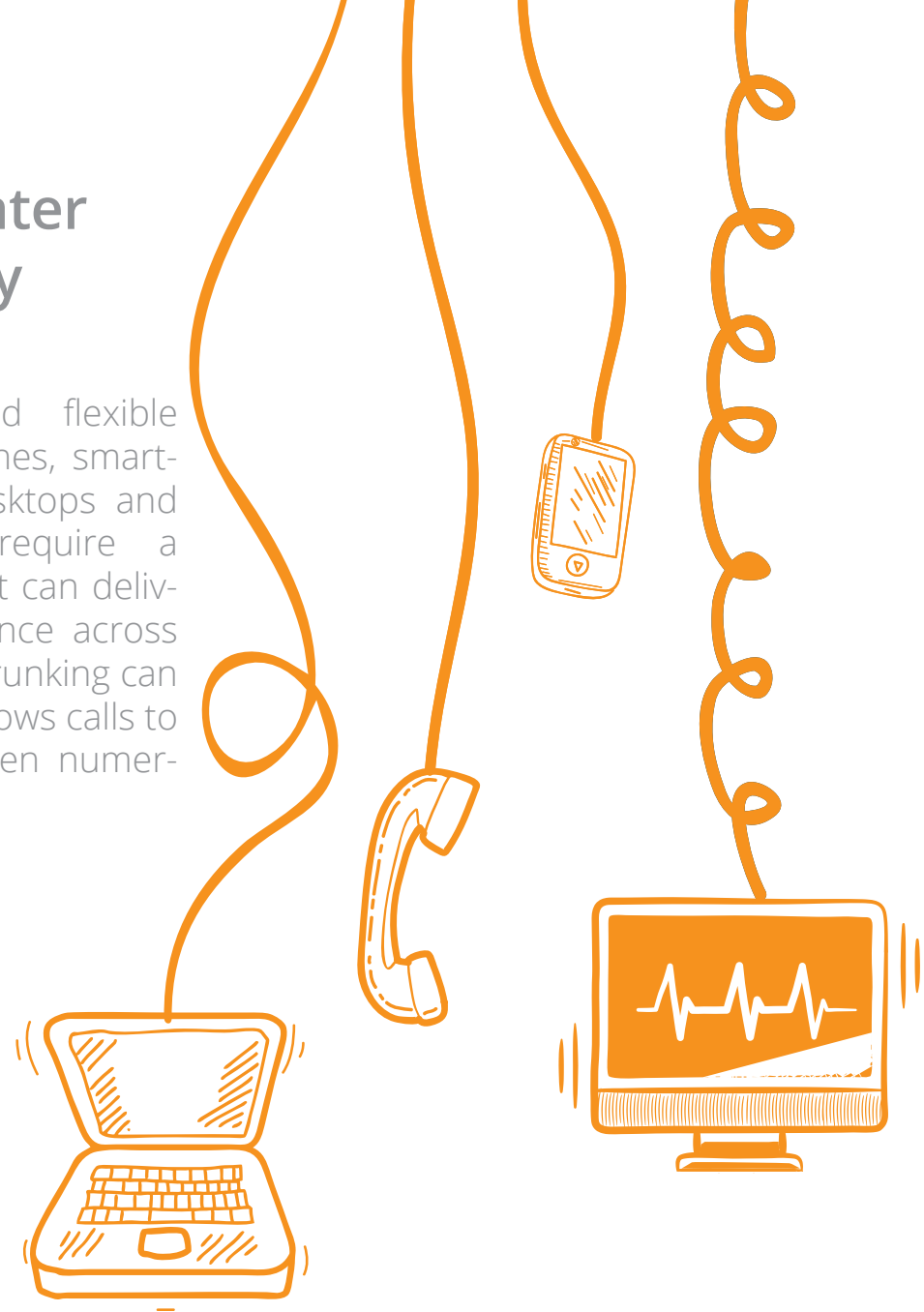
Gaining insight
for the future

Rising patient expectations and the proliferation of available information has resulted in a growing need for healthcare professionals to bring about improved quality and effectiveness of care. A part of this is the patient experience. With SIP trunking's call monitoring capabilities, healthcare organisations can report on how calls are being handled; from call waiting times to the number of transfers. This real-time and historical reporting feature can give organisations the insight necessary to plan staffing numbers and workflows.

Challenge 3

Safeguarding quality and continuity

Providing guaranteed telecoms availability is paramount for the Healthcare sector. Telephony continues to be the main way the public seeks emergency help, and as such, a need for a more resilient service is essential. In fact, demand for this service is under pressure. According to latest figures, the number of serious (Category A) emergency calls requiring an ambulance at the scene, has grown by 6% a year on average.

Yet it is vital all healthcare organisations safeguard their telephony availability. Technology must complement staffing, facility and workflow contingency plans in the event of an outage or disaster.

In-built disaster recovery

SIP is IP-based technology meaning that, unlike ISDN, single points of failure can be removed completely. For healthcare providers, this is essential. With resilient SIP trunking, services can continue to run and the public can remain at ease in the event of damaged lines or closed facilities, whether due to natural disaster or otherwise. Calls can be automatically diverted over alternate routes on the network, or redirected to alternate devices easily using intelligent call-routing, ensuring patient assistance is always at hand.

Ensuring a 'Business Class' voice

Smart call routing allows for calls to be easily transferred. As a result, reception desks across multiple sites can be centralised and any incoming calls are answered and handled more quickly.

When synced with a booking system, appointments can be easily scheduled in, both reducing the duration of the call and improving the patient experience.
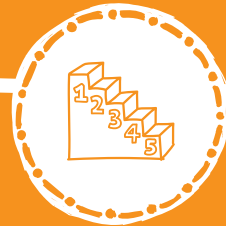
Case Study

## How SIP consolidated and saved money for ABHB

Who

Aneurin Bevan Health Board (ABHB). Formed in 2009 as part of a merger between seven separate health bodies, the board currently serves almost a quarter of the population of Wales-through 15 hospitals, as well as clinics and health centres across the country.

Challenge

The board wanted all of its major acute hospitals to have a sophisticated telephone-linking paging system that would summon critical care staff whenever an emergency arose.
However, the potential supplier would have to work seamlessly with all the inherited complex telephony estate and deliver the best value.
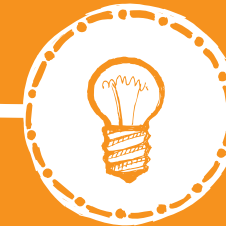
Solution

ABHB took on a combined calls and lines service. By using Flip SIP Trunks, the board were able to significantly reduce call costs and line rental, while consolidating its various, previously dispersed, call systems into one.