

# BUDGET

# STRETCHING

# IDEAS

## Low-Cost Long Distance

(NAPSA)—Far-flung family and friends are discovering a new breed of telephone company that offers unlimited long-distance calling for as little as \$20 a month by using the Internet to route calls.

The technology is called Voice over Internet Protocol, or VoIP and people like Susan Jones of Orlando, Fla. are finding it inexpensive, simple to install and easy to use.

After retiring and moving to Orlando from Oklahoma, Jones started researching long-distance phone companies and calling plans on the Internet. She found 8x8 Inc., a company that sells a product called Packet8. It costs less than twenty dollars a month and lets Jones use her high-speed Internet connection and a regular telephone for all her local, long distance and international phone service. The cost includes her telephone number, voice mail and unlimited calls within the United States and Canada.

Jones said when she moved to Orlando, she planned her budget for housing, food and entertainment but forgot about long distance and was shocked to find she was often on the hook for over \$200 a month.

"I'm a gabber," said Jones, who has a daughter in New York, a son in Seattle and friends in Oklahoma. "So it really shot my budget to have to pay the big long distance bills I was getting from talking so much."

Bryan Martin, 8x8 CEO and Chairman, said customers like Jones benefit most from VoIP.

"These are the people who



**Today's technology can make long-distance calls cost a lot less.**

already have a high-speed DSL or cable connection in their home and use e-mail to keep in touch with friends but also like talking on the phone," said Martin. "Now they are able to connect a phone to their Internet line and start talking for a fraction of the cost of their previous long-distance service."

Jones said she was impressed by another feature of the product which allowed her to pick her own area code, even if it is far away from where she lives.

"When I signed up for the service, I chose an Oklahoma phone number even though I live in Florida, so calls from friends in Oklahoma to me here in Orlando are local calls for them," said Jones.

Setting up the service was a snap, said Jones. Her new phone company sent her a small adapter that she plugged into the Internet connection in her home. Then she plugged her telephone into the device and started making and receiving calls across the US and Canada for less than \$20 a month.

"I always thought that you had to be a computer whiz to use technology like this, but that just isn't true," Jones said. "I use a regular telephone to make and receive calls the way I always have. The only thing different is my phone bill. I laugh at myself because it really only took just a few minutes to set up just like the Web site said. It was a lot easier to set up than my VCR which is still blinking 12:00, 12:00, 12:00 after two years."

VoIP is gaining popularity with frustrated telephone consumers such as Jones who are looking for a simple, low cost option to complicated calling plans and big telephone bills. VoIP services are simple and straightforward: Customers can talk as much as they want for \$20 a month including voice mail, caller ID, call waiting, three-way calling, call forwarding and caller ID blocking. There are no long-term commitments.

Jones no longer counts minutes or schedules calls for nights and weekends. She no longer worries about the long itemized phone bills that never seem to add up right and never seem like a good deal. VoIP works for international calls, too. Most providers offer services to Asia and Europe with per-minute or flat-rate plans. For example, Packet8 offers rates of two cents per minute to most of Western Europe.

"Since I moved to Orlando, I'm on the phone all the time but I don't worry about the bill at the end of the month," said Jones. "My kids could probably use a break from all my calls but I still like to hear their voices anyway."