

# MANAGING YOUR MONEY

## Tough Economic Times Challenge Small Businesses To Find New Ways To Cut Costs

(NAPSA)—As experts continue to call out the latest signs of an approaching recession, businesses respond by cinching up their budgets. But, for those already tasked with keeping their bottom line lean, new ways of cutting costs require some creativity. So, from remote cities and towns to large metropolitan areas, businesses all over the country are further cutting costs by cutting the cord—the phone cord, that is—and using Internet-based digital telephone service.

Internet telephony technology, otherwise known as VoIP (Voice over Internet Protocol), lets companies deploy a full-featured business phone system over their existing broadband network for a fraction of the cost of traditional alternatives. For a small business, this can result in significant cost savings as there is no equipment to buy or maintain, and the monthly service fees—which cover unlimited calling and business-class features—are predictable and fixed.

Technology consultant Joe Rork has seen his home state of Michigan hit hard. Currently serving as chief technologist for Plymouth's Green Street Fair—an annual event founded to help educate and inform people of all ages about the benefits of green, organic and ecofriendly products and services—he's turned watching what he spends into an art.

"One of the easiest things I did right off was to be sure we were using Internet technology for our phone systems," he says. "Not only is it a huge savings for us in terms of cost, it's the safest and easiest way we can move our office from



**A growing number of small businesses are saving money through Internet-based phone service.**

headquarters to the event location without missing a beat."

The Green Street Fair has been months in the planning and has used 8x8's Packet8 Virtual Office digital phone service every step of the way. More than 150 vendors representing the "green" in everything from food and automotive to health and home are recruited, informed, scheduled and personally attended to up to and throughout the two-day event using powerful, customer-driven calling features.

With Packet8 Virtual Office, businesses are doing away with their expensive PBX system and the costs that come along with it. The system installs in minutes and is loaded with standard features like auto attendants, unlimited conference calling, music on hold, ring groups, one number dialing and more—all of which can add a big-business feel to an otherwise small-business setup. And because it uses a business' existing high-speed Internet connection and can be managed online by the customers themselves,

the cost of making calls—and of doing day-to-day business—is considerably less.

Business owner Bert Hamilton of Harvey Software, Inc., in Ft. Myers, Fla., can't go a day without being reminded of the recession's increasing impact. His company writes shipping software designed to give customers more control over their shipping costs. And, like Rork, Hamilton uses new technology to keep ahead and keep his customers happy.

Although it took Hamilton a few years to finally switch over to Packet8, he and his customers have been instantly rewarded for making the change. And, by moving his phone systems away from traditionally architected services, he has sealed the deal on an even greater gain—business redundancy. "Hurricanes are a big threat to our livelihood here," remarks Hamilton. "The ability of Virtual Office to allow for redundancy in our communications plan isn't just convenient. It's a necessity."

Packet8 isn't the only thing connecting Hamilton's 25-year-old software company and Rork's two-day show. It seems they've both been able to "go greener" by making the change—for greater energy efficiency and a smaller carbon impact.

Using the Internet to make calls is a technological marvel to some. For others, it comes down to simply making the smart play. "As to the future of the Internet and its use as a business tool, we've barely scratched the surface," says Bryan Martin, CEO of 8x8, Inc. "What really matters is the choice that businesses have in front of them right now."