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October 31, 2004 - By [Ellen Muraskin](#)

## Microsoft in the Telephony Middle—Again

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The Internet desktop is here in the form of the inexpensive, low-power ASUS Eee Top 1602.

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Apple has redesigned, shrunken, and added more features to the least-inspiring member of the iPod family.

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What's the idea behind [Microsoft's](#) new Live Communications [Server](#) client—"Istanbul"—at the recent [Voice on the Net](#) show? An IP-based, enterprise software end point that knows which of your friends and colleagues are available at any given time, and on which devices. This upgrade of the Windows Messenger instant messaging client also improves its voice and video delivery and offers APIs to vendors that want to add their endpoints, conferencing bridges, media servers and application servers.

It also allows a geographically dispersed work force to all huddle over the same Microsoft Office documents and applications as they speak into microphones or IP phones or as they [chat](#) into boxes.

This sounds familiar to anyone who's kept up with the IP PBX market.

In terms of its goals, Microsoft is offering what all the major PBX vendors have come out with over the past 18 months. All have worked presence and instant messaging into their VOIP (voice-over-IP) and hybrid phone systems, for anyone who wants to buy the extra server. They all let you scale from chat to voice to video. What I haven't seen these vendors do, of course, is imbed the IM interface so that it can be launched from within applications. But this appears, to me, to be a relatively small advantage. Within [Avaya](#), Nortel, Mitel or Alcatel systems, for example, document and app sharing is a matter of a few more clicks. And insofar as their systems are SIP (Session Initiation Protocol), these voice switches should also be able to communicate with the world of Windows XP users, whether using enterprise Windows Messenger or consumer MSN Messenger.

The Istanbul and LCS announcements also sound somewhat familiar to anyone with sufficient Windows and telecom memory. Since Harry Newton first coined (or borrowed) the name "computer telephony" and promoted an industry in which standard computers could direct the making and taking of [phone calls](#), Windows has wanted a big piece of that action.

[Microsoft has opened Live Communication Server up to AOL and Yahoo. Read more here.](#)

Many open-system PBXs were built to run on Windows NT 4. Many still run on Windows 2003. Windows drivers were written for the telephony boards from Dialogic (now part of Intel) and NMS and Brooktrout that performed the actual call singling and media functions in the PC-based PBX platforms.

TAPI, Microsoft's Telephony API, provided the middleware between the telephony [hardware](#) and the applications. Using TAPI, application developers could let users dial contacts with a click or forward an incoming call to voice mail. The nearest I ever came to death by PowerPoint was a 9-hour marathon session in one room on Microsoft's campus one December day in 1998, where nine successive product managers told me what the latest version of TAPI, the TAPI server, and its integrations with Active Directory and SQL Server would do for telephony.



eWEEK.com Special Report: VOIP in the Enterprise

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