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## Keeping The CLEC Faith

**This bundled voice-and-data offering makes no visible change to small-biz telephone behavior and provides reliable T1 Internet.**

By [Elen Muraskin](#)

07/05/2001, 9:42 AM ET

### The Premise:

Intermark Language Services, Atlanta

### The Problem:

As an SMB, getting a reliable broadband Internet connection and a little respect.

### The Payback:

Getting a T1 Internet connection plus voice for the price of voice alone.

### The Pieces:

[CBeyond's](#) (Atlanta, GA - 678-424-2430) metro VoIP network, consisting of:

- [Cisco's](#) (San Jose, CA - 408-526-7208) 2400 series IAD
- Cisco ESR 10K aggregation routers
- Cisco 3660 (and soon, higher-density) trunking gateway
- Cisco BTS 10200 Broadband Telephony Softswitch
- Large collection of feature and network servers
- T1s from ILEC resold at CLEC discounts

### The Plot:

Intermark Language Services, Atlanta, is a five-person shop that specializes in bi-directional translation between English and European languages. They are heavy Internet users, both between suppliers (freelance translators), and customers. The translation work they do - and hence, the

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files they exchange - includes everything from long legal contracts and annual reports to PowerPoint presentations for international road shows. They also make heavy use of browsing in the course of researching their customers' existing materials and vocabularies.

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In their old office, a DSL connection and Bell South provided separate data and voice channels. In their new, larger quarters, they bought T1 service from Urban Media, only to be left high and dry when the BLEC declared Chapter 11 a few weeks later.

Intermark was forced to make do with a dial-up connection for several weeks, and it "was pretty detrimental to our business," says president Tom West. Hefty PowerPoints with embedded Excel files were taking half an hour to download.

In the search for another broadband provider, they narrowly escaped getting burned a second time. "We had almost signed up with Winstar," - another recent casualty - when West heard about CBeyond, a VoIP-based CLEC with something that's beginning to characterize surviving CLECs: fiscal conservatism.

[CBeyond](#) is offering small businesses in Atlanta (and soon Dallas and Denver) a simple package of local and long-distance IP voice, together with Internet access, on a customer-dedicated T1. Its basic package is 2000 LD minutes per month, plus 60 minutes of calling-card calling and 60 minutes of conference calling, for \$550, or \$495 with a 36-month sign-up.

CBeyond is pitching to businesses of five to 15 lines; companies who are already used to paying that much for five lines of voice in LD volume alone, according to CBeyond's Chris Gatch, vice president of new product development. CBeyond is taking its considerable capital infusion and rolling out slowly. With over 110 signed customers, and more than ten new customers a week signing on, it's only now entering its second metro market.

As a voice provider, the company is eligible to buy an ILEC's T1 service wholesale at UNE-mandated and EEL (Enhanced Extended Loop) rates. As a later, more cautious entrant in the CLEC land-grab, CBeyond is also finding "that it's easy to pick up" vacated data center space in which to house its softswitches, trunking gateways, and other servers.

What convinced translation house Intermark that CBeyond was a keeper? Personal acquaintance. Bob Fugate, the telco's CFO, grew up with West, who calls him a "brilliant, fiscally conservative guy. Urban Media's game plan was to come in and give everyone a free T1," just to grab floor-share. "CBeyond came in and said, 'by the way, we charge for ours.'" By early 2001, this sounded like refreshing pragmatism to small businesses. It should be noted, however, that CBeyond has its free-trial users, as well.

Unlike more ambitious IP Centrex-style offerings, CBeyond's solution requires no changes in end-user behavior; Intermark uses its preexisting Lucent Partner phone system and voicemail. Behind the Partner, however, is a Cisco 2400 series IAD that converts voice traffic to data and also does internal "hairpin" switching and dial tone for the small office. It ships all IP traffic over the T1 to CBeyond's Cisco ESR 10K aggregation router, colocated in the ILEC CO. The aggregated traffic from various COs meets in the Atlanta data center, where a trunking gateway on the center's GIG E core (today, a Cisco 3660, in June, a higher-density trunking gateway, not yet GA) hands traffic back to PSTN interexchange carriers, primarily Global Crossing, for long-distance traffic.

CBeyond's data center also houses their Cisco BTS 10200 Broadband Telephony softswitch, for call control signaling. Gatch reports that CBeyond is one of two U.S. companies now beta testing Cisco's softswitch. Call signaling from IADs to the switch is MGCP; media stream is RTP, and SIP, on the back end, directs voicemail and (future) feature servers. A media server is now being trialed for IVR and announcements. The setup also includes DNS servers, UM servers, network management servers and a Radius server to authenticate network managers, load balancing, data collection for QoS and billing, and Mirapoint and Stalker Communicate Pro email servers. "Most of what we do is on general-purpose hardware, mostly Solaris," comments Gatch.

The only change these small customers typically notice (West can't tell me the name of the CPE device, whose installation took under a day) is the speed of T1 Internet connectivity. "Having a high-speed Internet connection is crucial to our business, 80% of which comes from Europe," according to West. "We can look at our clients' quarterly reports, their advertising material to see what terms they use to talk about their products. On a dial-up connection, we had to give up work; we couldn't look at things like PDFs in time."

West also likes the fact that there is one number to call and one check to write. Bills are presented via the web. Voice quality is great, he says, and 2000 minutes per month more than satisfies them for now. ("We have clients who just email us work without calling," he says, although he'd just as soon communicate with clients by phone.)

International calling is prepaid through a Deutsche Telecom card for now, except for the U.K. and Canada, which goes through CBeyond at competitive rates. West is not too happy with voice quality on the DT card, though; he often has to dial twice for a tolerable connection.

CBeyond's installer, Horizon Technology Group, is also a user. Mike Leddy, president, finds the broadband connection ideal for another aspect of his business, installing videoconferencing systems. He says he'll make a 512Kbps H.323 video call to his Tandberg,

Picturetel, and Polycom video suppliers' help desks and pay nothing before he makes an audio call, saving \$1,000 in audio-only phone charges over a few months. He expects more video CBeyond customers as video endpoints continue to come down in price.

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