



TALK JUST GOT CHEAPER

There have never been using Voip technology.

so many ways to make low-cost and even free calls over the internet
Guy Clapperton puts five of the best services through their paces

JARGON BUSTER

Voip The routing of a voice call over the internet to a landline or mobile. Voip software encodes your voice as data to send either over wi-fi or your mobile network. Services offering "free" calls may incur charges from your mobile provider, unless you're on an unlimited data plan
Instant messaging Allows messages to be sent between individuals on same network
For full price details, see relevant websites



BEST FOR THE IPHONE TRUPHONE ON THE APPLE IPHONE

Call costs: landlines from 1p/min; mobiles 15p/min

Truphone Voip software works on Nokias but comes into its own on Apple's wi-fi beastie — where the free download and installation is simply a matter of clicking the application in the iTunes store. Open the software with a touch and the screen looks just like the one you're already using, except it's green with Truphone written on it. There's nothing new to learn, there are no snags and it's a very clear tone. You top up your account via the web — look out for a £7.49 deal that buys 1,000 call minutes to the US and Canada at 1p per minute.

Verdict: Easy to install and great call quality. Choose this if you have an iPhone
★★★★★
www.truphone.com



BEST FOR SOCIAL NETWORKING NIMBUZZ ON THE SONY ERICSSON W950i

Call costs: free but wi-fi and mobile network data charges may apply

Nimbuzz, a new service, offers free calls but includes much more than Voip, with instant messaging and group chat from various providers, plus 23 bookmarked social networking sites. But if a mobile network connection rather than wi-fi is used with Nimbuzz you will rack up big bills, unless you're on an unlimited data plan. Nimbuzz is versatile and works with numerous handsets, the best having a big, bright screen (like the Sony Ericsson W950i) for viewing sites such as MySpace.

Verdict: You'll either welcome all the extra bundled bits or greet them with a shudder — this is for the hardcore networker
★★★★☆
www.nimbuzz.com



BEST FOR WI-FI ONLY COMS.NET ON THE NOKIA E90

Call costs: UK landlines from 1p/min; UK mobiles from 10p/min

This is a business-targeted application with no extras such as chat or social networking, no 3G, and only phones in the Nokia E-series (such as the E90 Communicator) are officially recommended. Call quality is good (you're confined to using high-speed wi-fi), and there's an easy download option available using text messaging. In fact this Voip service will work with most Windows Mobile handsets once you've set up and paid into a Coms.net account online.

Verdict: A neat application that helps you keep track of your calls and spending, but a very basic service compared with more consumer-friendly rivals
★★★☆☆
www.coms.com



BEST FOR EASY INSTALLATION SKYPE ON THE S2 SKYPEPHONE

Call costs: from free; subscriptions from £2.24/month

If you don't want the hassle of downloading and setting up a Voip service, the S2 Skypephone, exclusive to the 3 mobile network, comes with Skype software pre-installed. Free with a contract on 3 and with Facebook, Windows Live Messenger and Bebo software also in place, it worked straight from the box. The handset had a clear sound over 3's high-speed HSDPA network (available in most major cities), but wasn't so good over 3G. Skype offers many monthly plans that include free calls to UK landlines, and to UK mobiles at about 16p a minute.

Verdict: The simplest way to get Voip
★★★★★
www.skype.co.uk



BEST FOR INSTANT MESSAGING FRING FOR THE NOKIA N95

Call costs: free but wi-fi and mobile network data charges may apply

Fring uses the Nimbuzz model of free calls. However, it is more limited than Nimbuzz, with a focus on instant messaging: Twitter, MSN Messenger, ICQ... they're all there, but if you use more than one, you'll rue the lack of separate folders for each service's contacts. The Fring software works on Nokia and Windows Mobile phones, and it automatically logs on to wi-fi hotspots where detected.

Verdict: Easy to use and a genuine money-saver — even on a pay-as-you-go mobile data plan the cost of sending an instant message is minimal.
★★★☆☆
www.fring.com

Plain Picture

NEWSPAPERS SUPPORT RECYCLING
Recycled paper made up 79% of the raw material for UK newspapers in 2007
Source: Pulp & Paper Information Centre

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Copies of The Sunday Times, whether you require very recent or very old, are available from Historic Newspapers.
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HISTORIC NEWSPAPERS

E-MAIL FROM AMERICA

Mark Harris
IN SEATTLE — NEW TECH CITY

The Surface is Microsoft's answer to the iPhone. Its gloriously detailed colour display, intuitive touch-sensitive controls and clever applications had me gasping when I tried one of the first commercial units here in Seattle. The only problem is that instead of being a pocket-sized handset, the Surface is about as large and heavy as a coffee table. To be fair, though, it actually is a coffee table. Forget miniaturisation, forget

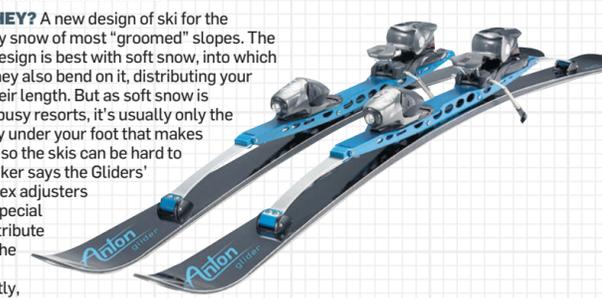
portability — Microsoft has reinvented the home computer as a piece of "smart furniture". This 2ft-high techno table has no keyboard or mouse, just a 30in touch-sensitive display that can be controlled by prods and pokes. Underneath the acrylic top lurks a Windows Vista PC in a powder-coated steel cage, using wi-fi to access the web. Built-in speakers and a subwoofer add an audiophile sheen to music and video. Unfortunately, you won't find the Surface in Ikea: it's currently priced at around \$15,000 (£8,400). I tried it in the Seattle Sheraton, where three units run a virtual concierge service recommending shops, restaurants and sights, complete with phone numbers and directions on a pin-sharp digital map. With the flick of a finger, you can switch to a satellite-image view, spin Microsoft's Virtual Earth globe and explore cities around the world — the ultimate digital "staycation" for financially bruised Yanks. Something tells me that Seattle would love the Surface whatever the exchange rate. A computerised coffee table is the ideal product for this tech-savvy, caffeine-mad city, and the tough Surface

is fully cappuccino-proof. Microsoft is promising an affordable consumer version in three years, pitching it as a family-friendly device ideal for managing digital photos, videos and music. But three years is a long time in technology, especially when Apple already offers most of the Surface's features and ease of use in a relatively affordable mobile phone. Controlling computers through gestures alone may well be the future, but Microsoft's marvel looks like it's surfacing a touch too late.



GADGETS OF THE WEEK

Anton Gliders skis
From \$1,850 (£1,038) www.antongliders.com
WHAT ARE THEY? A new design of ski for the hard-packed, icy snow of most "groomed" slopes. The traditional ski design is best with soft snow, into which the skis sink. They also bend on it, distributing your weight along their length. But as soft snow is rarely found at busy resorts, it's usually only the bit of ski directly under your foot that makes proper contact, so the skis can be hard to control. The maker says the Gliders' front and rear flex adjusters and the use of special materials redistribute your weight to the skis' ends, the result, apparently, being perfection for tight turns and racing.
SHOULD I BUY SOME? Not if you ski off-piste, where snow is better suited to regular skis. Because they are custom-made in Colorado, you'll need patience when placing an order, as well as a healthy bank balance.



Plextor PX-MPM320U media drive
£133 www.plextor-europe.com
WHAT IS IT? A portable 320GB hard drive with the ability to copy and play back movies, photos and music over all manner of hardware. To that end, it comes not only with the expected PC USB connectivity, but also with audiovisual outputs and a Scart adaptor, making it compatible with standard televisions and hi-fi sets. Waiting on the disk is software able to handle just about any audio or video format imaginable, and capable of upscaling the latter to 720p HD if you choose. The software is accessed via dedicated playback keys or the supplied remote control. Particularly noteworthy is the unit's ability to cope with DVDs, though only as long as they're copyright-free. Transfer a film to the Plextor using your computer, and the drive will store not just the video, but all the associated extras, such as menus and chapters — previously only possible if you manually converted each audio or video format.
SHOULD I BUY ONE? It is expensive for a hard disk of this capacity — a computer expert could assemble suitable equipment and download similar freeware for perhaps half the price. But for those among us who aren't propellerheads, the Plextor is definitely a useful and very usable addition to the multimedia home.



Matthew Bingham