



agenda BY TY YOUNG

TECHNOPOLIS

Say 'Hello' to Valley-Based Internet Phone Service

THE VOICE-COMMUNICATION world is quickly moving in a new direction, and Scottsdale-based Telesphere wants you to know it. Of course, it wants you to remember its name, too.

As part of its recently launched expansion plan, Telesphere has saturated the local community with its name and logo. From free monogrammed towels at Arizona State University football games to candy jars and Frisbees, the company has ratcheted up its exposure in a way unseen by an Internet telephone company.

Telesphere specializes in "Voice over Internet Protocol" communication, or VoIP, targeting the small- and midsize-business community.

"Internet voice communication is already here, but many people don't know much about it," CEO Clark Peterson says.

"Of course, we want people to think of us

first when they think of IP communication."

Telesphere has its work cut out. Those who do know about the technology often associate it with companies such as Skype and Vonage.

So Peterson's on a mission to educate the public, prove his product is superior and bring in more customers.

The rub? Explaining VoIP isn't as easy as sponsoring the rush-hour traffic report or handing out candy jars.

In a nutshell, VoIP is a phone service over the Internet.

Unlike Skype and Vonage, Telesphere uses a private Internet backbone instead of the public Internet. This dramatically increases the service quality because there's less competition for space on the connection, Peterson says.

Internet-based telephone service also removes many of the typical telephone

limitations, including area codes. And because Telesphere's technology is hosted in the Valley (where it's relatively free of natural disasters), businesses elsewhere can keep connected during catastrophic events such as fires, tornadoes and hurricanes.

Companies also can set up "virtual offices," allowing them to create local telephone numbers in states where they don't have offices. Other features include voice mail to e-mail, fax to e-mail, Web click to dial and simultaneous cell ring, where both your office line and cellphone will ring.

Demand is fueling growth at Telesphere, which has business customers in 44 states.

Peterson says the company expects to triple its workforce this year from the current 40 employees and triple its space when it moves into a new Scottsdale location this spring. ❖