

Saving money by dumping that old landline

Like most families, we are finding ways to cut costs and decrease our living expenses. When oil hit \$140 per barrel and gasoline was \$4 a gallon last summer, I parked my 13-mpg Dodge truck and bought a new Honda Civic Hybrid which tripled my gas mileage.



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With gasoline half that cost now, our fuel expenses are a fraction of what they were this time last year.

We cut our DVD rental monthly costs in half by switching from Blockbuster to Netflix.com this spring and next week I will write about that online service.

Over the past several months, I have migrated heavy data storage clients from my own DataDepositBox.com to their own accounts. This complementary service started out cheap several years ago when they only had a dozen megabytes each. Now many of them

stored up over a gigabyte which made my bill rise from \$20 to over \$100 a month for that online data storage service.

My new cost-cutting effort is now focused on ridding ourselves of the \$75 a month Verizon bill for our home landline.

The stupid copper line goes out at least twice a year after a hard rain and long distance eats me up at 10 cents a minute. Now that AT&T has activated better cellular service that delivers four and five bars of signal at the house to our iPhones we mainly use them.

I will always keep my office phone of 289-2233 which is a second Verizon landline constantly forwarded to whatever cell phone I am using. This way, my clients only have to remember one phone number that will not change no matter what cell phone or cellular carrier I use in the future. That also preserves all my business stationery with

a permanent phone number.

Saving \$75 a month on shutting down that home landline from Verizon will be a major cost-saving effort and I am almost there. Since I do not want to completely abandon our cordless phones scattered around the house I wanted to look at a VoIP (Voice over Internet Protocol) option to connect them up with.

In the past I have used VoIP services like Packet8 and Vonage, but the cost was still pretty high being at least \$25 a month. Last month I think I found a solution for my cordless phones called MagicJack.

I saw MagicJack advertised on TV and had also heard a couple of my clients talking about it. Being such a major tech head I had to try it out.

After seeing it immediately available at our Brenham Radio Shack, I swung by and bought it for \$39 instead of ordering it from MagicJack.com.

MagicJack is a very affordable VoIP phone service running just \$19.95 a year with the initial year's subscription

bundled into the initial \$39 purchase price. It is contained in a small USB drive equipped with a RJ11 phone jack all the size of your thumb. The software is embedded in the MagicJack device eliminating the need for a CDROM.

The software installation of MagicJack starts immediately upon insertion of the USB device into any PC running XP Vista or any Apple Mac running OS X. Just take all defaults and fill out the profile questions which include your physical address for emergency 911 service.

During the installation you will be prompted to choose your area code and exchange number which will comprise your new phone number for the MagicJack service. After the installation is complete you simply remove your old phone from the landline jack in the wall and plug it into the same type jack of the MagicJack USB device.

If you have a cordless phone or set of them running off a central cordless phone base like we do, then simply plug the base into

the MagicJack USB device. If that base has a digital answering machine built in to it you may want to disable it since MagicJack provides a sophisticated voice mail system included in that \$19.95 a year.

Pick up the phone and you will have dial tone. From that point you can receive and make calls with free long distance anywhere in the continental U.S. and Canada. The dial tone is coming from the MagicJack hardware working with the installed software which is communicating between the PC over the Internet to the MagicJack service.

This means that both the PC and the broadband Internet service at your house has to be always up and active. MagicJack requires high speed broadband Internet service running on DSL, cable or wireless. It will not run on a dialup connections due to the low speed nor satellite-based Internet services like WildBlue and Hughes due to latency issues.

My recommendation is to put the MagicJack device on your best performing PC equipped with a UPS battery backup. Configure the PC settings for no hibernation so the PC will stay up and running to support the MagicJack service at all times.

MagicJack provides Caller ID, voice mail, call forwarding

and call waiting along with the unlimited long distance service all for \$19.95 a year. Compare that price to the Vonage service running at \$300 a year and you see why I had to try this VoIP service out for sure.

One of the really cool things MagicJack provides is their voice mail system which can be configured to e-mail you the phone messages to your e-mail address. I have set up ours to email the digital voice mail messages that are in Wave format (.wav) to both my office Outlook and my iPhone email.

That option of having digital voice mail messages send to our email addresses alone is a major advantage over our old home phone system. Sometimes we went days without checking our messages simply because we forgot to look for the blinking light on the cordless phone base which had the phone message recorder.

Bottom line: One good way to cut costs and dump that old landline is to install MagicJack VoIP system for less than \$20 a year.

Next week's column: Netflix.

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