

## VOIP

Seeing as the option of cheap or free phone calls is quite important to many of you when choosing your broadband supplier, here is a second look at VOIP and how you can save a few Euros. VOIP = Voice over IP. What is it? Very simply, it means that you use your internet connection to make phone calls, for which you will need a broadband connection to the internet and a PC with speakers and microphone as a minimum to get started.

Why is it so cheap? With a traditional phone call, you have an analogue link between the two phones, while VOIP is a process by which a piece of software encodes your voice into a data packet that is then sent to your correspondent via the internet, at which stage the data is decoded back into your voice. As the data is going down an internet connection, there is no traditional call charge, unless you are calling someone on a land line (i.e. a BT customer in the UK) at which point you are charged for the last part of the communication, where the VOIP signal is converted to an analogue call down the BT line to someone's home.

There are a variety of companies offering VOIP services, typically the internet service providers such as Orange, Free, SFR, etc, and companies specialised in VOIP services, one of better know ones being Skype.

How does it work?

- The internet service providers such as Orange, SFR, etc provide you with their "Box", such as the Livebox, on which there is an adaptor into which you plug a standard phone. This is now your VOIP phone and it can be used immediately to make cheap or free calls for which you will be given an additional phone number typically starting with "09". Effectively this give you an additional phone line as you also retain your analogue France Telecom line (if you had one!). There are other deals where you give up you FT line and everything goes via the internet, though I usually advise against this, as should your broadband line go down during a storm (as many of you know they often do) then you would also loose your phone line at the same time – not good in an emergency.

- The second option is to use software on your PC - taking Skype as an example, it really is pretty straight forward to get started. Visit the Skype website [www.skype.com](http://www.skype.com), download the Skype software, install it on your PC (Windows 2000, XP, Vista and Mac), and register as a Skype user. If you are not too keen on the idea of using your computer, but want to use Skype then you can get yourself a USB Skype phone that plugs into your PC (€30) or a Skype DualPhone that plugs into the router (€129) and does away with the need for a PC. It allows you to both make and answer Skype calls as well as FT line calls with the comfort of a cordless phone

What do the calls cost?

- SFR allows you to call France plus a multitude of other countries for free, see here: <http://adsl.sfr.fr/tarifs-conditions-neufbox/appels-telephoniques/#1> , though you will be charged for calls to mobile.

- Orange allows you to call France for free, but there is a €7 per month fee for the international option allowing you to call northern Europe, USA etc for free, see here: <http://assistance.orange.fr/1869.php?dub=2&> plus one hour of calls to mobiles
- Skype has a dual system, where you essentially either pay as you go and buy credit online on your credit card and slowly call your way through it, or pay a monthly fee to have unlimited calls. On the pay as you go, calls cost are pretty low, with for example, the USA, UK, France, Australia, Germany and many more being at €0.017 per minute, for full rates, see here : <http://www.skype.com/intl/fr/prices/callrates/> . The monthly all inclusive rates are: 1 Country at €3.95 per month, Europe at €4.95 per month and the World at €8.95 per month. OF course the biggest advantage of Skype is if you are going to call another Skype user, then the call will be 100% free, and if you want to use the video calling feature, then you'll just need a webcam.

For computer problems and advice, please contact: Edward on 06 26 98 03 12 or by email on [ed@emarshall.fr](mailto:ed@emarshall.fr) All previous VVV Computer articles can be found at [www.emarshall.fr](http://www.emarshall.fr)