

Fixed Mobile Convergence: Bridging the Cellular Landline Divide

As more and more consumers opt out of traditional telephone services in favor of cellular phones, the undeniable trend in the telecommunications industry is the development of fixed to mobile convergence, or FMC, to allow cell phones to seamlessly switch from the cellular network to a landline network infrastructure, and back again.

The dwindling revenues and loss of market share by the traditional telephone companies, along with the growing use of IP networks to carry data and voice, are spurring a business model that is transitioning from distance calling, to a model based on calling a person. For the consumer this means, for one thing, the inevitable extinction of long distance charges as we know them.

In an FMC environment, users would have the advantage of utilizing the cellular networks outside, never having to sacrifice connectivity for mobility. As the caller enters an indoor environment, a place where many cell calls get dropped, the converged handset would detect the presence of a wireless network and automatically switch to the lower frequency, preserving call quality throughout the transition.

The result of this would be the emergence of one caller, one phone, and one phone number for the transmission of data and voice. In a business environment, the transition could be made wirelessly through the corporate LANs PBX, whereas in a residential situation, the phone would detect wireless access points that connect directly to a broadband Internet connection, or the PSTN.

The key to the success of FMC is the hand set. While there are many models available today that are capable of switching from cellular to WiFi networks, widespread acceptance is presumed to be contingent on the dropping prices of the handsets, and the types of plans offered by the carriers.

With the release of the Apple iPhone, it was announced that Cingular Communications (now at&t wireless) would be the carrier responsible for cellular communication, and presumably, the implementer of cell to WiFi calling plans.

One current example of fixed to mobile convergence is the new at&t unity plan. With the acquisition of the Cingular wireless network and all its subscribers, at&t is offering a community calling plan that allows users to call nationwide to any of at&ts wireless or wireline numbers free of charge.

As voice over IP telephony gains more widespread acceptance, it is widely expected that by the year 2010 the idea of fixed to mobile convergence will be well entrenched in the telecommunications industry.

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About the Author

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