

Clear Value: Putting a Fax Server to Work for Your Business

A fax server, or Internet Protocol (IP) fax, is the ability to send faxes over the Internet, most commonly as an email attachment. Simply put, a fax sent from a traditional fax machine can go straight to a recipient's email inbox and a sender can send an email attachment straight through to a traditional fax machine. But that is just the first tip of the comprehensive value that this technology can offer.

Through a fax server, you are eliminating a bottleneck known as a traditional fax machine. This means:

- No fax machine which equals no maintenance, no paper, toner expenditure, possible repairs, etc.
- No extra telephone line required for the fax
- No installation of software or hardware required since all communication is handled through a Web interface
- Paperless communication, integrated with email
- A business can send and receive multiple faxes simultaneously
- A company can reduce phone costs, and eliminate long distance fax charges
- Faxes can be received and sent from any location that has Internet access
- Several faxes can be sent or received simultaneously

Internet Fax achieves a dramatic reduction in communication costs by eliminating the telephone connection charge. The cost of sending faxes is covered entirely by the Internet connection fee.

Through a fax server, confidential documents are no longer misplaced or viewed by the wrong person. Employees can receive faxes on their own personal devices, including desktops, laptops and even cell phones. Storage challenges are eliminated, with electronic documents that can be kept indefinitely.

When this functionality is combined with Unified Communications, you have a platform that can dramatically improve the productivity of mobile employees. Employees on the road can receive a fax on their laptop, and use a hotel printer or other local device to output the document. Employees can even set up their preferences so that they can read a fax right on their cell phone (assuming their phone has the capability of accessing the employee's desktop).

How it works

A fax server works this way: A PC, laptop or handheld device sends an email attachment across the Internet. Through the fax server gateway, this document goes over a phone line to be received and printed by a traditional fax machine. If a fax is sent from the fax machine, the reverse process occurs to deliver the fax into the recipient's inbox, with hardcopy converted to TIFF or PDF data and attached to an e-mail in MIME format.



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How to deploy a fax server

When deploying a fax server, make sure that it is a true IP technology solution. If you try to gain the capabilities listed above, but do it through a traditional hardware-centric system, you will need:

- An independent fax server with phone trunks to route the fax to the right printer, device or employee
- An individual fax extension set up for each employee to protect confidential communications
- An auto attendant to send calls to the fax server when the inbound call produces the fax tone

With an IP solution, you can eliminate all of this hardware and the expense and hassle that go along with it. A fax server is similar to centralized voicemail in that it can exist anywhere on your network. You only need a PC connected to your LAN and PBX to host the software. Remember, faxes are transmitted as data and there is no reason that you need dedicated phone lines to handle the traffic. Taking advantage of an established LAN / WAN infrastructure, a fax server eliminates costly connection and transmission fees. *One note: If a traditional fax machine is receiving the fax, you must ensure that it is compatible with Internet faxes.*

When you take this approach to fax communications, you reduce the maintenance required and can free up IT staff to focus on other tasks. And instead of paying for fax machines, dedicated phone extensions and reams of paper — all you're paying for is a software license.

Why use fax at all?

A traditional fax has no advantage over sending electronic files over the Internet. But it is easy to simply put documents in a hopper, dial a phone number, and press a button. That's why fax continues to be used over the telephone network at locations without Internet access. Additionally, a fax of a document with a person's handwritten signature can fulfill a legal requirement. Now with a fax server, this communication can occur without an actual fax machine at either or both ends of the transmission.

But the real value lies in the workflow benefits of this technology. Picture this: An employee on the road receives a message over the phone that a facsimile has been received. The employee pulls off the road and uses a cell phone to access the desktop back at the office. From there, the employee can bring up the fax and read it. If a signature is required, the employee can call the individual who sent the fax and leave a voicemail that the document will be signed and returned shortly. When the employee arrives at the hotel, he or she uses the hotel's scanner to scan a signed copy of the document and uploading it back to the desktop. The document is then faxed back to the original sender.

With this kind of mobility potential, a fax server combined with Unified Communication can really become a productivity engine for your enterprise.



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