

WARM UP

**1** What does VoIP stand for? Have you ever used VoIP services to make a phone call?

## VoIP – Voice over IP

Voice over Internet Protocol (VoIP) is a type of technology that, by converting voice communications into digital data, allows you to have a telephone conversation over the Internet instead of using a traditional analogue phone line. It is becoming more and more popular with consumers because of the possibility to make calls at a much lower cost than those offered by traditional telephone service providers and, in some cases, make completely free calls anywhere in the world.

There are two basic ways of using VoIP services: with a computer or with a standard phone and an adapter, called an ATA (Analogue Telephone Adapter). This is the device which converts your voice into digital data so it can be transmitted over the Internet. When using VoIP with a computer or mobile device, you also need a headset and microphone (or the built-in speakers and microphone on your device) or a USB phone which connects to the computer. For both systems, it is obviously necessary to have a broadband internet connection.

With VoIP services it is possible to make calls to any telephone number or to another computer. The companies offering VoIP services usually provide very competitive packages which can include, for example, unlimited calls within the same country or a certain amount of free minutes.

When you make computer-to-computer calls, the disadvantage is that both the caller and receiver must be online at the same time. However, this drawback is certainly outweighed by the fact that these calls are completely free, wherever you are calling in the world, as long as you are using the same service. The other main advantage is video calls. With a separate or built-in webcam on your computer or mobile device, it is possible to make free video calls. This is great for keeping in touch with and seeing friends and relatives around the world.

Two final things to remember are that it is not possible to make emergency phone calls using this kind of VoIP service, so it cannot completely replace a traditional phone or mobile phone, and it will not work during a power blackout.

### Skype

One of the most well-known VoIP services providers for consumers is Skype, so much so that the company name is used as a verb – as in ‘Let me know when it’s a good time to skype you’ – and is actually included in the Oxford English Dictionary. The company, now owned by Microsoft, offers free computer-to-computer video and voice calls all over the world, while calls to mobiles and landlines and text messages are at a charge. Other services include group video calls, instant messaging and file sharing. Skype can be used with a PC, mobile device and home phone.

ACTIVITIES

#### READING COMPREHENSION

**2** **BEC** Read the text and decide if these sentences are true (T) or false (F). If there is not enough information, choose ‘doesn’t say’ (DS).

- 1 VoIP providers often offer cheaper services than traditional phone companies.
- 2 You must have a computer to be able to use VoIP services.
- 3 You need to have a broadband internet connection to use VoIP services.
- 4 Computer-to-computer calls have more disadvantages than advantages.
- 5 Video calls are the most popular service offered by VoIP providers.
- 6 In certain situations, you might have problems if you do not have a landline or mobile phone.
- 7 The word ‘skype’ has entered into everyday English language.
- 8 All Skype calls are free of charge.

	T	F	DS
1	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
2	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
3	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
4	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
5	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
6	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
7	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
8	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

#### INTERNET RESEARCH

**3** Find out about two VoIP service providers that operate in your country. Prepare a short oral presentation comparing the two companies. Include the following information:

- company foundation and headquarters;
- the main features and services;
- any particular advantages and disadvantages;
- the popularity/number of users.