

TAPI: What's Old is New Again

You may remember TAPI (Telephony Application Programming Interface). It was developed in the mid 1990's as a way for software applications and PBX phone platforms to communicate. At the time, the concept generated some buzz, but never really got off the ground. Now, TAPI is back (it never really went away), with a whole host of new applications that are TAPI-compliant from vendors such as ADP®, Sage Software® and Microsoft®. With TAPI, any applications that contain customer information, such as a CRM system, can interface directly with your PBX to integrate call functionality right into the application.

How does it Work?

TAPI is an interface standard that lets Windows applications and telephony devices make and answer telephone calls, and can be configured for a single user or multiple users. In the case of multiple users, TAPI resides on the server farm and connects to an Ethernet port on a company's PBX. The Ethernet port provides a steady stream of information out to a services package, which puts the information into a TAPI format that other applications can write to and communication with. The result is multiple TAPI applications that can run in conjunction with the PBX.

What does it Enable Businesses to do?


Think of it this way: a conventional PBX phone platform and CRM system are normally two distinct units. When a call comes in, a call center representative takes the customer's name and account number, and then has to pull up their record on a separate system. With a TAPI-compliant PBX platform and TAPI-enabled CRM application, the customer's profile, account information and records will appear as a screen pop on the representative's monitor the moment the call comes in. This will save anywhere from 15-30 seconds per call. Now multiply that by calls per day, per week and per year, and you begin to see what makes TAPI such a revolutionary productivity enhancement.

But the benefits of TAPI do not stop with CRM. Developed by Microsoft® and Intel®, TAPI is a well-established protocol with many TAPI-compliant applications in existence today.

TAPI can deliver enhanced functionality to any program that contains customer profile information, such as a project management or billing system. Just imagine pulling up a customer record for review, clicking a button on screen, and your computer automatically dials the customer without an employee even reaching for the handset.

TAPI Challenges

TAPI is a low cost, low-footprint application. But you should always beware of a telephony vendor who claims their platform is "plug and play" with all TAPI products. TAPI is sophisticated technology with



many nuances. There needs to be a validation process to ensure that every TAPI application you wish to use will work seamlessly with your phone system. Any TAPI-compliant phone network vendor should be willing to validate and test your TAPI applications in a lab environment to make sure everything works smoothly. And they should be willing to make adjustments to their system if needed (you may also need to go back to the application vendor in certain cases).

TAPI Rewards

TAPI is now refined and can offer businesses an unprecedented level of productivity by integrating common applications such as ACT!® and Outlook® directly into your phone platform. Future development should see TAPI integrating Unified Messaging and Presence Management technologies (such as Find Me/Follow Me) with the common customer/vendor/partner information systems you use every day. As long as you have a vendor who is capable of working through any integration issues that arise, TAPI can drastically enhance productivity. That makes TAPI well worth the effort.