

## NetworkIP to roll out Pre-Paid Conferencing cards with long distance carrier partner at rates between \$.05 and \$.10 a minute, toll free!

### Here's what I think

Picture this—you're at Kinkos looking for cheap notepads, a deal on a low-cost laptop computer, and maybe a low-cost speakerphone. On the same aisle is a box that says, "Pre-paid conference calls, \$.05–\$.10 a minute toll-free!" Now tell me, wouldn't you look at the box? Wouldn't you buy a box with a deck of five conference calling cards and hand them to your product managers and say, "Hey, just expense this on your next report to me...and oh, by the way, stop using that conference call provider we have a contract with."

Yeah, your company can get conference calls for under a nickel a minute with toll, but what about the cost of monitoring their use, and billing back, and.... just get 'em to buy a pre-paid calling card. Oh, and the calls go over the PSTN, and are not VoIP!

That's the strategy of [NetworkIP](#) and its new [e.Conferencing](#), being rolled out with a to-be-named carrier on Monday, November 3. While e.Conference's pre-paid cards target small to medium sized businesses, I think we're going to see some inroads into large customers and into the business of traditional conference call providers, just like we saw with [FreeConference.Com](#), when it rolled out free conference calls a couple of years ago. FreeConference's first service required that you pay for the phone call. After a few customers pushed back, FreeConference.com then rolled out toll-free conferencing at a dime a minute. FreeConference.com recorded 14 million minutes in conference calls in August, when customers were still paying their own toll, and 84,000 minutes in conference calls under the toll-free, ten-cent plan. (See *Electronic TeleSpan*, September 8, 2003, pp 9-10.)

### Who is NetworkIP?

I first described NetworkIP in the April 15, 2002 *Electronic TeleSpan* (pp. 1-2), when I interviewed founder Pete Pattullo. Remember? I titled the story

"Everybody's doin' 'it' now, and they're even doing it in a three-way position!" Pete's primary business is pre-paid international calling cards. His company does between 800,000 and 1.1 million calls a day in domestic and global long distance, has issued calling cards for over 400 million PINS, and has revenues of \$150 million just from the pre-paid calling cards already.

Pete is the fellow who used to work for Nortel when it was still Northern Telecom, and watched as Northern rolled out the DMS 250 bridges to the RBOCs to support residential three-way calling. Pete, I told you, figured out a way to modify the software so that he could bridge up to 30-way calls. Pete tried to roll out e.Conferencing last June at the aborted TeleCon East show, learning it was better to go hire some folks who knew the conferencing field who could go after partners.

Enter Scott Walters, Director, e.Conferencing Sales & Product Development for NetworkIP. Scott spent time at Mshow and InterCall after [InterCall](#) acquired Mshow (and he happens also to be a graduate of MSU, Class of 1992—**Go Green!**). While at Mshow playing with what later became Webconferencing, he learned that folks didn't want complicated Web interfaces or, worse, complicated phone meetings. While at InterCall he learned about plain ol' voice conference calls.

"The service we're rolling out has no 'collaboration,' just the lowest cost toll-free conference calls you can find," said Scott. "I spent so many years at Mshow trying to 'make it more or better,' and got to the point where I realized I was thinking the wrong way up the ladder. We want to go down the ladder, and make it as simple as possible. I think there's a gigantic market for people who just want to do a conference call."

For those who want extra features, there is a Web interface that allows dial-out, putting folks on hold, taking brief notes, and other simple stuff like that. And the calls can be international. If you want to use your PIN to do more complicated things, you can get all the call accounting, down to the call, the leg, and the minute, if you want it.

e.Conference has DMS 250s with a total of 76,000 ports, located in Longview, TX, Dallas, TX, and in Los Angeles. Scott told me they can quickly expand to 80,000 ports.



Initial card packs, which will be on shelves Monday November 3, are expected to sell for around \$50 for a pack of five cards.

For an earlier story on Mshow, see the January 29, 2001 edition of *Electronic TeleSpan*.

*Long live audio conferencing!*

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