



INSIGHTS FROM THE PRESIDENT'S DESK

By Ken Peters

Free Internet Telephony - VoIP– Using Skype

Skype is a free software program that allows you to make voice calls over the internet (VoIP) to anywhere in the world, for free. All you need is an internet connection, a sound card, microphone, speaker or headset or USB phone and the software. The person you are calling has to have the same setup and Skype.

Skype was developed by the same people who brought you Kazaa, the file sharing program. The Kazaa technology is used to send the voice calls over the internet. This is a true peer to peer network (P2P). This means that the Skype connected PCs route the calls with no need for a central server. It's the reason the calls can be free. There's no charge to send the data packets over the internet. Since there are usually 3-4 million Skype users online at any one time, it makes for a large P2P network.

Try it now since Ebay purchased Skype and no one knows how long the service will be free.

The software is very easy to install and set up. It can be downloaded at <http://www.skype.com/>. It works with Windows, Mac, Linux and Pocket PC. Most talk programs work only with Windows.

The voice quality is excellent, as good as or better than your cell phone. You can conference call with up to four people plus yourself. It runs full duplex so all can talk at once. You can transfer files while you're talking and can text message at the same time. Comes in handy if you want to tell someone about a web site. Just text them the URL or address while conversing. If you want them to see a picture you took, send it to them. Or a file you want them to have, just transfer it while you're describing the content.

The transmission is secure with encryption when you transmit and decryption on the receiving end.

For a small fee you can:

Skypeout: Call a cell or landline phone from your PC. Lets you forward Skype calls to a traditional or cell phone. Approximately 2 – 3 cents a minute or €0.017 Euro Cent or £0.012.

Skypein: You get a phone number for your PC so anyone can call your PC from a landline or cell phone. This includes voicemail at no extra charge.

Voicemail: People can leave a message so that you know who called and what the individual wanted. (All current fees are listed on the Skype website.)

Requirements for Windows are:

- PC running Windows 2000 or XP Internet connection (broadband is best)
- Speakers and microphone (built-in or separate)
- At least 400 MHz processor, 128 MB RAM and 15 MB free disk space on your hard drive.

For the Mac:

- Macintosh computer with G3, G4 or G5 processor
- Mac OS X v10.3 (Panther) or newer
- 128 MB RAM
- 20 MB free disk space on your hard drive
- Microphone
- Internet connection (either dial-up: minimum 33.6 Kbps, or any broadband: cable, DSL, etc.)
Broadband is best.

For Linux and Pocket PC requirements see the web site.

With broadband it took about 5 minutes to download, install and make the first call to my grandson in Michigan. (It was our 13 yr old grandson who introduced me to Skype.) A wizard will guide you through the setup. The only thing that took a little time was the microphone set up for my computer. The Skype Help section shows you how to do the setup quite easily. The best sound quality I found was using a headset with a microphone attached. You can purchase a headset with microphone at any electronic store for 10 – 20 dollars. You can use a free standing microphone and the computer speakers but we had some problems with feed back. There are headsets and USB phones both of which can be wireless. With wireless you are not tethered to the computer but they do cost considerably more, approximately 300 dollars.

Installation is similar to other instant messaging programs. Follow the wizard and then create a username and password.

Fill in your Profile. All fields are optional. The more information you enter the easier it will be for people to search for you on Skype. Only put in the profile what you want the world to see. (Only other Skype users can search for your profile.)

Next you need to add contacts.

Just use the  button.

The contact has to be a Skype user. You can't add a contact who doesn't have a Skype name.

To call another user you need authorization from that contact. Simply right click on the contacts name and request authorization. Then fill out the form and click OK. The request will be sent to the contact. You can request to be seen or not seen online by the contact. If you want, you can block any contact from calling you, like a block sender list.



Next test your installation by clicking the Skype Test Call



Then click the call button . You'll hear the test voice and it will ask you to record your 20 second test message. Then it will play it back to you. If you hear all of the above, then you're in business. Call away!!! If not check the Help section for correct setup of the sound and microphone.



To end a call click the button.

This program is simple to use. The Help and FAQ and Getting Started sections are very good. You have to use the program to really get to know all of it. You can call up the Call List to see who you talked with and for how long, you can make yourself unavailable or invisible to others online, etc.

It's simple and it's fun!

There are several other free voice calling programs, Google Talk - <http://www.google.com/talk/> , AIM with Talk - http://www.aim.com/get_aim/win/win_beta.adp , Trillian- <http://www.ceruleanstudios.com/> , Yahoo Messenger with Talk - <http://messenger.yahoo.com/> . Check their websites for more details. They are all more difficult to use and only work with Windows. My grandson has a Mac so Skype was the only one we could use. Some have difficulty being used behind a firewall. Skype doesn't.

The one with the most bells and whistles is Yahoo. All with no extra charge. It has voice mail which I could not get to work. The neatest feature is the picture viewing. You can drag and drop pictures from anywhere on your computer to Yahoo's program and both parties can see the picture almost instantly. There is a pointer you can drag around the picture with your mouse to emphasize areas you think your contact should see. All of this while you're still conversing. You can also do conference calling with Yahoo. Voice quality with Yahoo is not as good as Skype.

These are good programs to try, especially with the holidays coming. You could conference call with the family wherever they are in the world, for as long as you want and for free!!

If you have trouble reading the graphics use the Zoom In button.

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