

SUN LIFE

DID YOU KNOW: Mobile takeover

There's no data yet on how many people in Canada use cellphones as their primary phone number, but consider this — at the end of last year, there were over 24 million mobile subscribers — in a country of just over 34 million people!



Terrestrial talking

Landlines get a welcome online upgrade with new NetTalk Duo

I know very few people under the age of 35 who have a traditional landline telephone. What was once a staple of virtually every Canadian home is now seen by some as an unnecessary and expensive throwback in the age of ubiquitous cellphones.

But there's something to be said for having a physical telephone in your home. For people with home offices, it's helpful to have a separate line, and I know from experience that it's often easier to talk on a traditional phone handset, rather than moving around to find the spot with the best cellphone signal strength.

Enter voice over Internet protocol, or VoIP. This technology allows you to use your Internet connection as a phone line, and it's been around for years — VoIP actually forms the backbone of the so-called digital home phone services offered by many telcos and cable providers.

But there are now inexpensive, all-inclusive products that allow consumers to basically buy a phone service in a box without shelling out a monthly fee. The NetTalk Duo (\$79.95) is one such gizmo. It connects any standard telephone to the Internet, transforming the phone into what for all intents and purposes is a traditional landline.

Unlike other options, the NetTalk Duo doesn't need to



Gadgets

steve.tilley@sunmedia.ca

@stevetilley

blogs.canoe.ca/loadthis

be plugged into your computer (although that is an option, and is especially useful for travelling). Instead, it connects directly into your broadband Internet connection, which for most people means plugging it into a port on their cable modem or router.

The tiny device includes a year of free local and North American long distance calling, with additional years costing \$39.95 each. Setting up the NetTalk Duo is done via the www.nettalk.ca website and takes only a few moments, at which time you choose the area code you want for your phone number. It doesn't even need to be a local area code — you can live in St. John's and have a Vancouver phone number, if that's somehow beneficial to you.

Once the device is activated, plug any standard telephone into the Duo's phone

jack, and off you go. Pick up the phone, hear a dial tone, press buttons, talk to Mom.

The main perk is of having your phone mated with your Internet connection is price — for \$40 per year, you get the same services that cost \$40 per month through traditional telcos, including call display, call forwarding and voicemail. One great feature is that when someone leaves you a message, you receive an email with it attached as an audio file. You can also review and download call history and messages online.

The downside of a plug-and-play Internet phone gizmo is relying on the stability of your connection. If your Internet goes down, the phone does too. If your connection is slow or otherwise poor, it can affect call quality.

And even with a robust connection, the normally clear calls on the NetTalk Duo can waver. But it's a small price to pay, literally, for having a desktop phone in my home office that I can use to call anywhere in the U.S. or Canada. I won't be ditching my cellphone, but I will be giving it a bit of a rest.

NetTalk Duo

Price: \$79.95, with a year of local and North American long distance calls; additional years are \$39.95. Available at Sears, Zellers and most major retailers. **Verdict:** While call quality will depend on your connection, the NetTalk Duo offers a suite of attractive features and solid customer support for an affordable price.



OTHER PLUG AND PHONE OPTIONS



Retro handsets — If you don't want an Internet-connected phone thingamajig but still crave the physical sensation of talking on a phone, handsets such as the Yubz Retro Handset (\$49.95, available at Roots stores) can be connected to most mobile phones to give you an old-school telephone sensation.



If you want a more traditional telephone experience at home but don't want to shell out big bucks for a landline, here are some other options to look at.

Vonage — Like NetTalk, Vonage (www.vonage.ca) plugs directly into your broadband connection. The service costs \$20 to \$30 per month, but plans offer more features, with the top-tier including free calls to dozens of different countries.

MagicJack — The darling of infomercials, the MagicJack (www.magicjack.com) is an easy-to-use Internet telephone device with a key limitation — it must plug into your powered-on computer to work.

