



The

Broadcasters' Desktop Resource

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... edited by Barry Mishkind – the Eclectic Engineer

Checking It Out

Ooma - The Almost Free Phone System



By Dana Puopolo

[December 2011] Today, we have more choices than ever before for phone service – from landline to cell to VoIP. A number of folks have chosen the Ooma VoIP system. Dana Puopolo talks about his experience.

Would you like to have unlimited USA incoming and outgoing phone calls for under four dollars a month (once you pay a \$199.99 one-time fee)? At first, it seemed too good to be true. Yet it is true – with VoIP from Ooma.

I was an early adopter of VOIP. I have had Vonage for over 11 years and have generally been very satisfied with the service. However, over that time Vonage's monthly charges kept slowly increasing – to over 50 dollars a month recently. Yes, I had two vanity numbers, but the biggest increases have been the imposition of charges like the six dollar a month "Intellectual property" charge I pay. Intellectual property, yours or mine Vonage?

With that in mind, when offered the chance to review an Ooma unit I jumped at the opportunity.

OOMA VOIP

Until recently, Ooma VoIP service in the US was 100% free, after you bought the unit. (Calls to Canada and other international destinations are also quite reasonable using Ooma; usually only a penny or three per minute.)

While the Ooma service is no longer entirely free – they now pass on about \$3.50 a month for various taxes and fees (the amount varies a few pennies by state) – if Ooma was as good as Vonage has been, I figured I could drop Vonage and save over \$550 a year.



The Ooma Telo adapter

However, the main measure of whether Ooma would stay in our house was the Wife Acceptance Factor.

THE WIFE ACCEPTANCE FACTOR

Men love new tech. Most women hate it.

For example, one of the big things that keeps my wife from using services like Skype or Google Voice is the fact that they are complicated. Most of them require you to sit at the computer to control things, and possibly wear a headset.

Most women want things simple. They want to pick up the cordless phone, make or answer a call and have it work. Period.

This is what I call the Wife Acceptance Factor (WAF) and it is essential for a serene domestic life. Vonage traditionally has a high WAF – would Ooma be able to measure up?

INSTALLATION

The Ooma Telo, which is needed to establish service (and costs the \$199.99), came with step-by-step illustrated instructions that were very easy to follow.

The first step is to go to the Ooma web site (www.ooma.com) and register the Telo unit. This simply involves filling out an online form with your name, address, etc., the registration number on the bottom of the Telo and payment information for the monthly fee.

The next step is to pick out your incoming phone number. Using the overlay area code 484 I found numbers for my town were readily available. Actually, you can use any area you desire for your local number – it would have been just as easy to get a Seattle or Boston incoming number for example.

Once these two things are done, you hook your Telo unit up to your broadband Internet connection. There are several ways to do this, all easy and illustrated in their hookup instructions. They also provide all necessary cables.

Then you plug in your telephone to the unit's standard RJ-11 phone jack and power up the

Telo, which then goes through its power up sequence (which might include automatically doing a firmware update). When all the lights on it turn blue, you pick up the phone and are rewarded by a dial tone. It was literally that simple to get the unit working, and took under 10 minutes from unpacking to dial tone.

A NICE OPTION



Although you can easily connect any corded or cordless phone directly to the Telo unit, I was able to test their (optional, \$49.99) cordless phone which transparently interfaces to the Telo unit.

The illustrated instructions for hooking up the Ooma cordless phone were also straightforward. First you have to install the battery and charge it for about 30 minutes. Finally you press a few buttons on the Telo unit, and then the phone configures itself. You can use up to four of these units with the Telo,).

Build quality on their cordless is a step above my Uniden cordless – it has the feel of an old AT&T phone.

FEATURES

Ooma comes with basic voicemail, accessible from both the Telo unit itself and the cordless phone. Advanced calling services and enhanced voicemail are available for an additional monthly (or discounted annual) charge.

Ooma also offers number porting where your existing number can be ported to your Ooma phone for a one-time \$39.99 charge (however it is free with an annual Advanced Calling Services Plan). In this case the number you chose while registering is temporary. Porting can take

up to three weeks – common for this procedure with some phone companies. (However, if you choose to do so, it is imperative that you keep your old phone account active until the number is ported.)

ABOUT THAT WAF

Enough background stuff – you are here to find out two things: the call quality and the WAF. I am happy to tell you that both are very high.

Voice quality is as good or better than Vonage. After using Ooma for several weeks, we have not experienced a single dropped call.

I also have noticed that my wife seeks out the Ooma cordless over the Vonage phone to make calls – and has her mother calling her on the Ooma now. She says that not only is the sound quality of Ooma better than Vonage, but their cordless phone “feels” more solid to her.

MAKING THE CHANGE

All in all, I find that I can give Ooma my high recommendation: I will be dropping Vonage once my number is ported.

Frankly, I do not think I will miss Vonage much at all – Ooma will fill my needs for a basic home phone service quite well. And saving over \$550.00 a year is a no brainer to me. Look at it this way: would you rather pay that \$550.00 to Vonage or to Amazon for a new flat screen TV?

Speaking of Amazon, as I write this they have the Ooma Telo unit for \$191.00, shipped free. Ooma is also available at “brick and mortar” stores like Best Buy, Target, and many others.

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Return to The BDR Menu