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## Internet and Land-Line Calls on One Phone

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At one point, the biggest selling point in Internet phone services was price.

Companies such as Vonage Holdings Corp. and 8x8 Inc. enticed customers with calling plans that offered local and long-distance services over a high-speed Internet connection for as little as \$15 a month.

Then, Skype, an instant messaging program that offered free PC-to-PC voice calling, extended its "free calling" plan to traditional phones within North America, not just Internet phones, for the rest of the year.

Still, Vonage and the others had an advantage over Skype because their services allowed customers to free themselves from computer headsets and microphones and use traditional phones to place Internet calls.

Now, Skype Technologies SA is back in the game with a dual-line cordless phone that works with both the Skype service line and the regular phone line.

The USB Cordless Dualphone (\$140, [www.dualphone-us.com](http://www.dualphone-us.com)) looks just like a land-line cordless phone, with a small handset and a recharging base station.

But when you place a call using this phone, there's a choice between two green buttons -- one that will place the call over the Skype network and another that places the call over a traditional land line. It even comes with different ringtones to differentiate between Skype calls and land-line calls.

The phone has a small screen that shows a scrolling list of Skype contacts who are online and available.

In tests, Dualphone voice quality was consistently strong and clear. In most cases, the audio was virtually indistinguishable from that of a land-line phone. Skype calls over the Dualphone didn't suffer even as the computer performed other functions.

We ran tests of the Skype cordless phone over both wired and wireless Internet connections and placed calls from different locations, including overseas countries. The calls were consistently clear and offered no noticeable delay, whether the call went to a land-line phone, cellphone or another Skype user.

Like other cordless phones, the Skype cordless phone could be taken outside the house or to a floor other than the one where the base station was plugged in without distorting the sound.

There was also no interference with wireless Internet equipment. Setup was trouble-free, and the program even went online to make sure it had the latest software before installing.

Dualphone users can add up to three extension cordless phones with charging cradles (\$70 each).

To get incoming calls on the Dualphone (and Skype), users must purchase a SkypeIn phone number for about \$38 a year, or about \$13 for three months. SkypeIn also adds voice mail.

The combination of Dualphone with SkypeOut -- the service that allows calls to be placed from a Skype line to a non-Skype line -- and SkypeIn feels as convenient as a conventional cordless phone on a land line.

And Skype still comes with a lot of extras, such as video calling, conference calls and text messaging.

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