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## Texas Bank's Web Phones Cut Costs, Add Cohesion

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By [Steve Bills](#)

West Texas National Bank has cut its costs and improved customer service by switching to an Internet telephone system, but the bigger benefit, an executive said, was making employees feel connected to each other.

The \$475 million-asset bank, the main operating unit of First West Texas Bancshares Inc. in Midland, was the product of a rollup of several independent banks in 2000. But as recently as 2004 its nine branches, spread across 250 miles of thinly populated country, operated largely on their own, with eight private branch exchange units, all requiring maintenance, serving 184 analog telephone lines, said Jerry Rogers, an executive vice president at the bank.

The setup was inconvenient for customers, raised expenses for the bank, and discouraged employees in remote offices from interacting with one another, he said in an interview last week. "There was no feeling of being one bank."

West Texas National switched in 2005 to a single phone system using voice over Internet protocol, he said, choosing a server-based system from the vendor Interactive Intelligence Inc. of Indianapolis.

The Internet telephone technology also helped the bank centralize operations and save money while maintaining customer service, Mr. Rogers said. About 85% of calls are routed through a central call center, though customers still dial local access numbers.

And because all employees are just one extension away, internal communication has improved, he said. "There's a huge number of calls between branches that we didn't have before. People have gotten to know each other."

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