



*Independence. Integrity. Insight.*

## Convergence & Next-Generation WAN Technologies

Produced by Nemertes Research Inc.  
February 2006  
Volumes 1-3 of 9

# The Right IP Telephony: Simple But Sophisticated

Based on "Convergence & Next-Generation WAN Technologies" Benchmark, Nemertes Research, February 2006

The stakes have been raised significantly since Nemertes Research produced its last benchmark of IP telephony vendor performance. Convergence projects are moving to the top of the IT priority list as enterprises move beyond the exploratory stage and seek the full benefits of widespread IP telephony deployment. Over the past year, the average organization has drastically increased the number of IT and networking staff assigned to convergence. And no wonder, since enterprises increasingly view VoIP as a launching pad for full convergence projects and seek IP telephony solutions that will carry them into the future.

One thing hasn't changed, though: ShoreTel cleared the raised bar with room to spare, beating industry behemoths Cisco, Avaya, and Nortel soundly for the third straight year, and by a bigger margin than ever.

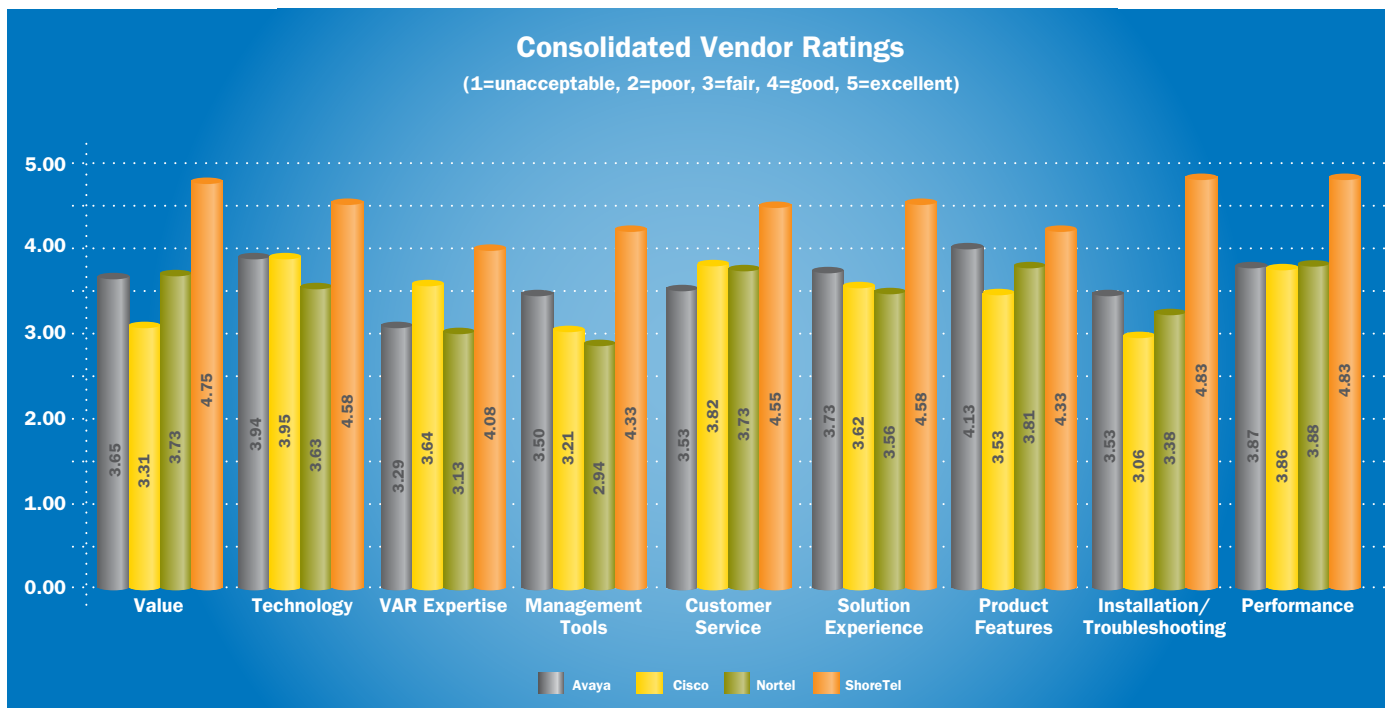
Like its predecessors, "Convergence & Next-Generation WAN Technologies" is a comprehensive study based upon exhaustive interviews with enterprise IT professionals. The report analyzes current real-world business benefits of this rapidly spreading technology, distills a variety of user experiences into best-practices recommendations, and ranks vendors on the effectiveness of their IP telephony solutions and customer service.

Nemertes Research produced "Convergence & Next-Generation WAN Technologies" independently. The study was not commissioned or sponsored by ShoreTel in any way.

## ShoreTel: Winner and Still Champion

So what is ShoreTel doing that the other IP telephony vendors aren't? Lots of things, according to study participants. They were asked to score their VoIP vendors on a scale of 1 to 5 in nine specific areas: value, technology, VAR expertise, management tools, customer service, solution experience, product features, ease of installation/troubleshooting, and performance. Once again, ShoreTel won every category, with a near-perfect score of 4.83 for both installation/troubleshooting and overall performance.

In contrast, with the exception of one vendor in one category, none of the Big Three cracked the "excellent" rating anywhere. As a result, ShoreTel's average score of 4.52 was almost a full point higher than theirs.



## Stuck in VoIP Deployment Hell? Try ShoreTel

Nemertes reports that two-thirds of enterprises have moved beyond limited IP telephony deployments, but the percentage of companies that have reached full deployment hasn't changed much in the past year: They are finding that rollouts are taking longer than expected.

Complicating things at the outset, evaluations are involving more candidates; the average number of vendors assessed increased to 4.25 in 2005, up from 2.5 the previous year. And to further complicate matters, VoIP has been around long enough that M&A activity is producing companies with two or more VoIP platforms already in place.

So it's not surprising that, across the whole study, participants had the most gripes about the installation and troubleshooting category. Or that scores for the Big Three—Cisco, Avaya, and Nortel—continue to slide year over year. In stark contrast is ShoreTel, which won the category with a near-perfect mark of 4.83. ShoreTel's installations are "quick and painless," reports one IT director. Another says he was just about to roll out Cisco company-wide when he was introduced to ShoreTel and saw its easy implementation, disaster recovery and redundancy, and intuitive user interface. "That turned everything upside down."

---

"We had a couple of hours of training on ShoreTel, and that's it. With Cisco, you need a Ph.D, practically"

---



## "Solid Value, Top Performance"

Asked to rank selection criteria for VoIP solutions, study participants put products and capabilities first, followed by customer service. And ShoreTel shines in these areas.

ShoreTel's repeat win in product features reflects straight-forward features augmented with some innovative new handsets, wireless integration, and easy-to-use conferencing capabilities. For the technology rating, participants were asked to look beyond just the features to the macro-design of the solution's underlying platform. Basics like extension-only dialing and call transfer across locations are still important, but so is a vendor's ability to integrate with contact center tools, wireless devices, and collaborative applications.

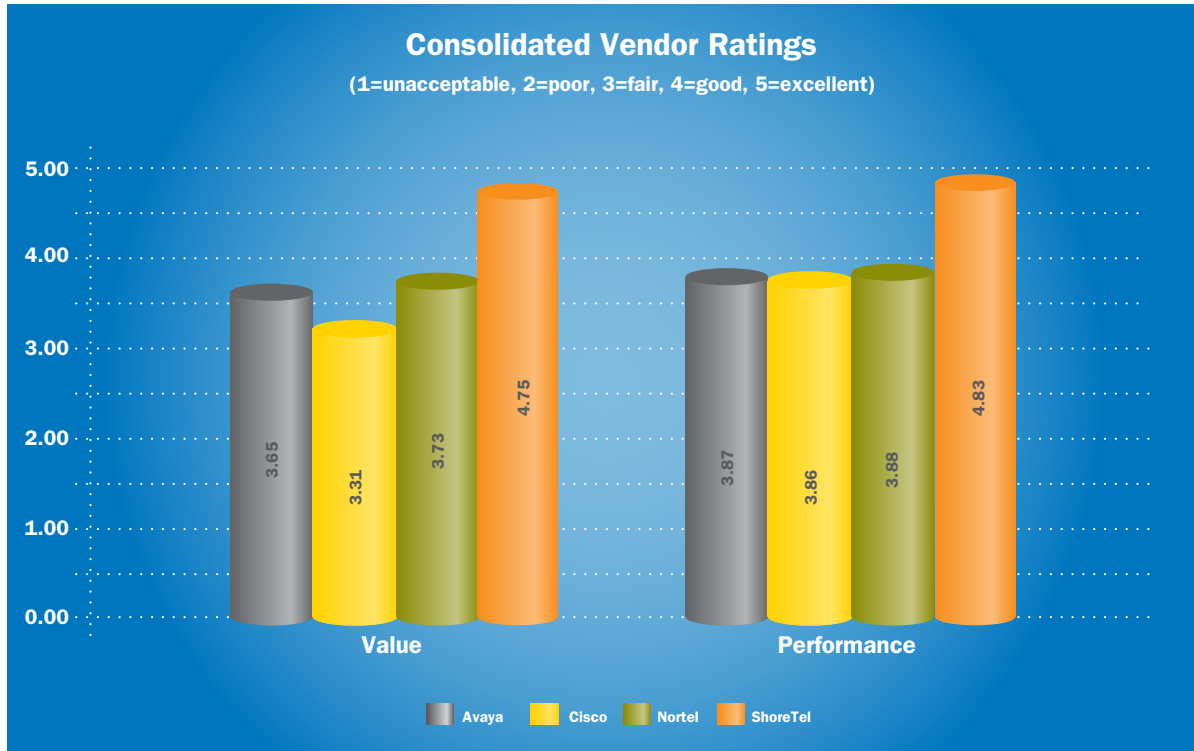
ShoreTel consistently gets high marks for its simple yet sophisticated technology, which is fronted by an extremely intuitive user interface and backed up with built-in redundancy and disaster recovery. ShoreTel also coexists easily with legacy technology and fits right in within multi-vendor environments.

---

“The solution was very easy to use and didn’t take much training.”

— IT director, professional-services firm

---



ShoreTel’s value—bang for the buck—was already top of the pack last year, but it still managed to increase “drastically” since then, reports Nemertes. “We wanted the ability to do things like record calls and add voicemail, and with competitors, every time you wanted to add a feature, it was another \$50,000,” says one customer. With ShoreTel, such capabilities are included in the basic product.

Regular improvements to product features assure customers that ShoreTel is continuing to invest—and listen to its customers, who provide most of the input for each new feature upgrade. One study participant replaced Avaya’s contact center with ShoreTel’s, saying, “It has all the workgroup functionality we needed and more.”

### Business Drivers: Cost Matters

Not surprisingly, IT professionals considers reducing costs as “very important” for VoIP implementations. ShoreTel again excelled in terms of operational costs. Participants collectively spent the most operational startup time on Cisco implementations, followed by Nortel, Avaya, and ShoreTel. For implementations of up to 1,000 units, ShoreTel costs the least per user at \$105, further validating its high scores for ease of installation and value.

For installations of 1,000 units or more, ShoreTel again comes out on top at \$31 per user, followed closely by Avaya at \$50. Cisco is the most costly at \$165 per user, followed by Nortel at \$132 per user. The figures aren’t dependent on what the vendors charge, but rather how much time organizations spend on planning, installation, and troubleshooting.

When assessing all capital costs associated with a VoIP deployment, Cisco and Nortel pick up another high-cost ratings, and Avaya and ShoreTel round out the low costs. ShoreTel remains the lowest cost per user. Overall, ShoreTel is competitively priced for any implementation, although Avaya posts the lowest cost per user at \$308 when all capital costs are considered.

Maintenance is a key factor in TCO, with both Nortel and ShoreTel's overall maintenance costs lower than Cisco's and Avaya's, primarily because their rollouts are smaller. However, in ShoreTel's case, customers say the system is simply easy to manage.

## Customer Satisfaction: A ShoreTel Maxim

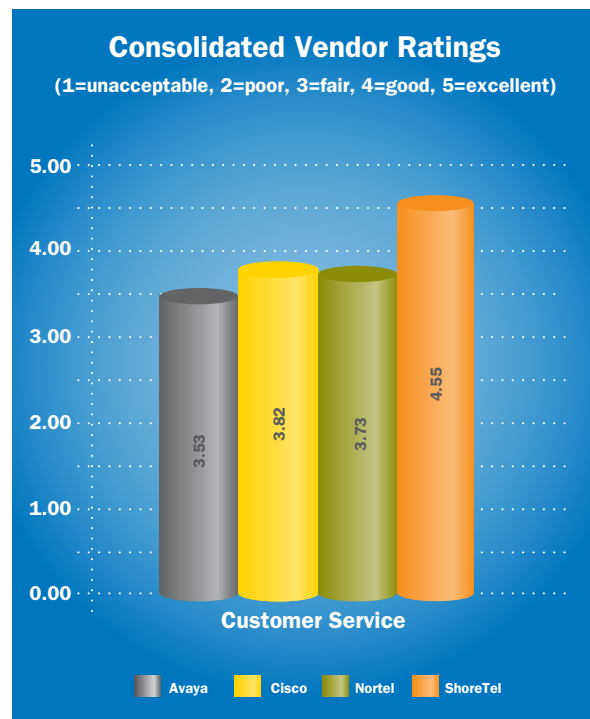
While ShoreTel sells through channel partners, study participants didn't complain about a lack of direct access to ShoreTel the way they did with regard to the other vendors. Customers say they get individual attention from ShoreTel, and the company's follow-up to make sure they are satisfied surpasses its competitors' efforts, states Nemertes.

The result is an IP telephony solution the study participants describe as straight-forward and developed with the network administrator in mind. Thanks to ShoreTel's intuitive graphical user interface, "the skill level of the person it takes to do daily administration is a junior person," says one IT manager. "It's a very different experience with Cisco." That's very important, because when it comes to high-level IP telephony skills, it is very much a seller's market.

---

"ShoreTel's follow-up to make sure customers are satisfied surpasses its competitors' efforts."

---



Nemertes Research finds that convergence projects are running strong in the vast majority of organizations, with IT executives exploring a variety of new tools and applications. By reading the full report in "Convergence & Next-Generation WAN Technologies," you can learn from the experiences of your peers and get a best-practices guide for your continued IP telephony deployments and enhancements. For a copy of the report, contact Nemertes Research at (888) 241-2685 or [research@nemertes.com](mailto:research@nemertes.com).

For more information about ShoreTel, visit [www.ShoreTel.com](http://www.ShoreTel.com) or call (877) 80SHORE.