

## MAGICJACK - A NEW TELEPHONY ALTERNATIVE

**Joseph G. Wible**

Harold A. Miller Library  
Hopkins Marine Station  
Pacific Grove, CA 93950-3094  
wible@stanford.edu

**Abstract:** Long gone are the days when voice communication was the exclusive domain of land based telephones. Today, especially with the younger generation, cell phones are the dominant form of voice communication. A small but growing market for voice communication is voice-over-internet-protocol (VoIP) represented by services such as Skype and Vontage. A new entry into this market is a product called MagicJack. This is a cigarette lighter sized USB piece of hardware that for \$20 a year allows one to make unlimited long-distant phone calls from anywhere in the world to United States and Canada phone numbers.

**Keywords:** MagicJack, telephony, long-distance phone calls, Skype, VoIP

MagicJack is an amazingly small and easy to use device. It can be ordered over the Internet from the MagicJack web page at:

<http://www.magicjack.com/>

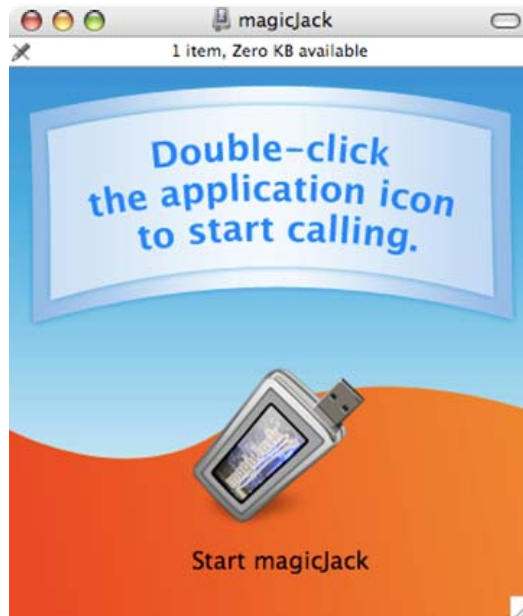
By ordering it directly from the above URL, there is a 30-day free trial. If you choose to keep the item, the cost is \$40 which includes one year of free long distance service. At the end of the first year you will receive a \$20 charge to your credit card annually to maintain the service. The package you receive in the mail is about the size of a DVD box that includes the MagicJack device as pictured below and a short USB extension cable to allow one to connect the device even if your computer's USB ports are difficult to access. There is no CD or DVD containing software to install, and there is no printed documentation. Everything you need is contained within the MagicJack hardware itself. Help is either built into the software, available through an extensive FAQ/Knowledgebase found on the web page, or through online chat. There is no phone number you can call or email address provided for technical support. If there are any software updates, they are automatically installed when one plugs the MagicJack into the USB port of your computer.



6 cm x 3.5 cm x 1.5 cm

When you first plug in the device there is a relatively painless setup and registration procedure. It is during this procedure that you choose your area code and the first three digits of your phone number. You are then supplied with the remaining four digits to complete a standard ten-digit phone number. You must then plug in a phone. This can be any phone that you would plug into the wall for a landline service (RJ-11 jack). The phone itself can be a corded phone or a cordless phone, it just can't be a cell phone. So instead of plugging the phone into the wall, you are plugging it into the MagicJack which is plugged into your computer. Your computer will also need to have a high speed network connection (Ethernet or wireless). Your computer can not be connected to the network via a modem.

MagicJack can be used on both Mac and PCs. For the Mac, you will be presented with the following window on your computer desktop when you plug in MagicJack. You need to double click on the icon to start the program.



After double clicking on the icon you will get a screen like this:



For the PC, there is no intermediate screen to double click. It goes straight to the above screen.

Once here you can use your phone just like you would if it was plugged into the wall. You do not have to use the keypad on the computer screen unless you wish to. The only difference is you do not put in a "1" before the area code of the number you want to dial.

There are many other bells and whistles that come with the service. Your MagicJack automatically compiles a "Calls" log of your recently made phone calls. You also can click on the "Contacts" button and instead of seeing a list of your most recent phone calls you will pull up a phone directory you can create for numbers you want to remember. You can automatically dial a phone number by double clicking on entries from either the "Calls" or the "Contacts" lists.

For your \$20 a year, you get caller ID, directory assistance, call waiting, and 3-way conference calls. You also have voicemail which is important since you are not always going to have your computer connected to the network and MagicJack plugged in to the USB port. A nice feature of voicemail is that you will automatically receive an email message letting you know that a message has been received. In the email it tells you the number of the person who called, how long the message is, and when the message was received. The email also has an attached .wav file that allows you to listen to the voicemail message on your computer without having to launch MagicJack.

This device works from anywhere in the world, but you can only make calls to US and Canada phone numbers. Its size makes it very easy to carry with you when traveling abroad. I was able to use MagicJack from my hotel room in Fiji to phone back to my family in Georgia with no problems. I was not able to get it to work from the conference podium computer, probably because of security firewalls the university has in place. Given enough time I probably could have resolved the problem. The quality of the connection can vary. Sometimes it can be as good as landline phones. Usually it is better than cell phone connections and Skype connections.

In addition to the support provided on the MagicJack web site, there is an unofficial forum for MagicJack users at:

<http://www.magicjacksupport.com/>