

Open Source

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Open Source Efforts No Longer an “Obscure Sideshow of Geeks” Marketing Tenth Anniversary, Asterisk ([News](#) - [Alert](#)) is Firmly Planted in the Mainstream

By Paula Bernier ([News](#) - [Alert](#))

It's been 10 years since Asterisk's release as an open source project, and in just a decade it's moved into the mainstream in a major way.

“Long gone are the days when open source efforts were regarded as an obscure sideshow of geeks, open source software was viewed with suspicion by general public and corporate IT departments, and entrepreneurs struggled to commercialize open source efforts,” says Fakhri Karray, primary founder, president and CEO of Vestec. “Asterisk, of course, has in many ways led these changes in perception about open source telephony software and deserves to be acknowledged as a classic open source success story.”



Vestec's Dr. Fakhri Karray

Today, not only are a large number of small and medium businesses using Asterisk-based systems, but the technology is becoming more prevalent in large enterprise and government installations as well.

“The big news hasn't really been so much of a splash as a wave,” says John Todd ([News](#) - [Alert](#)), Asterisk Community Director and the chairman for Astricon 2009, which was held last month in the Phoenix area. “The wave has been large-scale use, and enterprise use, of Asterisk now in some fairly serious installations.”

Mike Storella ([News](#) - [Alert](#)), director of business development at open source phone provider snom, agrees.

“I see a lot of maturing of the open source where deals are less about ‘let's go try this and see if we can build something that can work,’” says Storella. Solutions now have been proven and “perfected,” he says, and there are now customers of reference.

As a result, AstriCon received a flurry of session proposals relating to large-scale deployments, Todd says, so rather than just doing a session or two, it created an entire track around this theme.

“We're seeing so many large-production systems in the enterprise and in government that are multi-hundred, multi-thousand seat platforms and we had ... so many great submissions this year” that it made sense, he says.

Among the speakers slated to speak at AstriCon last month (this issue went to press prior to the event) were Jeronimo Romero, CTO for EUS Networks, who was expected to offer a synopsis on the requirements and benefits of running Asterisk on a trading room floor.

Todd adds that entire cities including Amsterdam and some locations in the Phillipines now are moving their networks to Asterisk as well. Arno Jolink, CEO of IsraPunt ICT, at AstriCon was scheduled to talk about some of the world's largest Asterisk implementations, which are in the Netherlands. Kelvin Chua, CTO of Nextix Inc., meanwhile, was on the lineup to make a presentation on things to consider in citywide applications of Asterisk.

"It's no longer just for the SMB market," Todd continues. "We're seeing Asterisk really starting to [get] a lot of traction in the large-scale environments -- both service provider, but especially enterprise."

The past year has also seen the rise of Asterisk in cloud-based applications, continues Todd, and not just for PBX ([News - Alert](#)) offers.

For example, Nir Simionovich, CEO of Greenfield Tech, leveraged Asterisk running on EC2 for "a huge election campaign in Israeli," says Todd.

"We were so interested in what he is doing that we actually sponsored him to give a cloud computing training day" on how to do Asterisk on EC2 to scale, Todd adds.

Twilio, which leverages cloud-based computing to help developers create inbound or outbound phone applications using Asterisk over EC2, is another company in this vein, says Todd.

"We expect to see the push toward software as a service and cloud-based computing continue," says Gerd Graumann, director of business development at LumenVox. "Asterisk's low cost and flexibility make it an ideal product to build SaaS ([News - Alert](#)) applications around. The great developer community that exists around open source projects like Asterisk ensure there are a lot of people always building experimental applications that really benefit from the low cost of entry offered by SaaS and cloud computing."

To that end, the big announcement LumenVox ([News - Alert](#)) made to coincide with Astricon was the availability of its subscription-based software, effectively making speech recognition available as a service. For just \$7.99 per month, Asterisk users can have access to the full set of features offered by the LumenVox Speech Engine, including support for several languages/dialects and its advanced noise reduction technology. That price includes all the software, and is available with no contracts or commitments.

Bill Miller ([News - Alert](#)), vice president of product management for Digium, the creator of Asterisk, adds that there's "huge movement in the speech area" within the Asterisk space. In addition to LumenVox, he says Loquendo and Vestec are among the important companies in the speech-to-text and text-to-speech space.

"We have become a Digium ([News - Alert](#)) Software Partner recently, and we want to make our speech technology (ASR, TTS, Speaker Verification) available in this market as well," says Paolo Coppo, vice president of marketing and business development at Loquendo ([News - Alert](#)), which this year attended AstriCon for the first time. "With a portfolio of 27 languages and more than 65 voices, we help companies worldwide, with the best quality at the right price."

Speech recognition can significantly enhance the caller experience as well as generate new revenue streams for Asterisk-based product and service providers, says Vestec's Karry.

"Vestec intends to demystify, commoditize, and standardize sophisticated speech recognition with robust, low-cost speech products and turnkey speech applications," he adds, noting that speech recognition has become a part of daily life for many individuals as a result of 411 services and speech-based auto-attendants for directory assistance.

At AstriCon Vestec planned to announce a speech recognition engine "that significantly lowers the cost barrier for enabling sophisticated speech recognition with Asterisk," says Karray.

"Our speech recognition engine delivers among the highest recognition accuracy in the industry, allows developers to build sophisticated speech applications without reliance on external professional services, and costs a fraction of competing speech recognition products for Asterisk," he says, adding the Vestec speech engine costs only \$99 per port compared to a leading competitor's price of \$245 per port.

"In addition, maintenance (covering patches and upgrades) can be purchased on an optional bases for our speech engine for \$15 per port per year compared to a leading competitor's price of \$40 per port per year," Karray adds. "Finally, there is absolutely no minimum ports purchase requirement to take advantage of low price of the Vestec speech recognition engine."

Graumann says at AstriCon his company planned to continue its effort to get out the message that the LumenVox Speech Engine is "the most trusted and successful automatic speech recognizer on Asterisk."

Thousands of Asterisk developers use LumenVox Speech Engine, which supports the Speech Recognition Grammar Specification, the Semantic Interpretation for Speech Recognition specification, and the Media Resource Control Protocol specification, Graumann says.

"Recently a competitor of ours has been touting its speech offering on Asterisk as being comparable to LumenVox's, and it simply is not," he adds. "Without support for all of those standards, a speech recognizer really cannot be thought of as being mature or complete. It's sort of like using a Web browser that supports the HTML specification from 1997. Will it work for some pages? Sure. Is it a mature or modern application? Absolutely not."

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