

Philips VoIP321 Skype phone

Is this the device to make Skype easier to use away from the computer?

by Stuart Miles published on 18 August 2006

Don't get us wrong we like Skype as much as the next person, it's just we never want to sit in front of our PC to use it. Skype perhaps realising the same thing has teamed up with Philips to create the Philips VoIP321 Skype phone that is both a standard DECT handset and a Skype handset in one. The idea is that you connect the phone's base station to your PC and as long as you are connected to the Internet and have Skype running you can access your contacts list on the fly away from your computer. The system comes in two parts; the aforementioned base unit, and a handset. Luckily the only connection between the two is via a wireless connection meaning that you can have the base station tucked away by your computer and the handset where you are most likely to use it without having to show your geek credentials. On the surface the VoIP321 phone looks no different from the company's regular DECT handsets apart from the addition of button with a big red "S" on it. Press this and you can access your contacts list and therefore make Skype calls to other Skype users or to via the company's SkypeOut service. Like a standard phone the Skype element is very easy to use. Pressing that red "S" button opens a simple to navigate menu and whatever contacts you've got stored on your Skype profile are automatically displayed. The phone does support conferencing, but our Skype contacts book is so small we weren't able to test it with any great strength. As a standard DECT phone the Philips seems to have it all, Caller ID, Call waiting, Call on hold, Message Waiting, Call Transfer Handset keys: Line, Dialling keypad, Phonebook, Call log, Redial, Skype and a Loudspeaker for those handsfree moments. In addition to all that there is call log entries that let you see the calls you've missed and received (just like a mobile phone) and you can choose from the last 10 numbers when it comes to using the redial button. There is even a phone book option to store the up to 50



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contacts, however unlike other handsets available (albeit without Skype) you can't just load up your mobile phone sim and transfer them across. While you can use the phone on its own, or connected with other Philips DECT phones, to use the Skype functionality, you not only have to have the base station permanently connected via USB to a computer (a pain, as it uses up yet another USB socket) but that computer must be on and running Skype. This solution might be okay if you've got a office with a desktop where you can shut the door to cut out the noise, but laptop users who like to stow their computer on a regular basis will have to factor this in. As we've said, luckily you can still use the phone as a regular phone, even when the Skype function isn't turned on.

VERDICT

Anything that makes Skype easier to use has got to be a godsend when it comes to using the service and while we've had this phone on test, we found that we've used the Voice over IP application more than without it. The fact that you can access the whole thing by a press of the button and then walk away from your computer is also very much welcomed - we might be geeks, but we don't like showing it. However as we've said, this is not without its catches. Currently, although Skype is compatible with a number of different operating systems other than Windows, Philips has chosen only to support Windows with the drivers. The other major annoyance is that you will have to leave your computer on and running Skype to get the benefit here. If those catches don't bother you and you want to make using Skype easier, this is a very solid way of doing it.

At a glance

What is it?

Skype DECT dual phone

Good

Allows you to easily switch between Skype and landline calls, easy to use and install, phone and basestation don't have to sit next to each other

Bad

Need to have the computer turned on and connected to Skype, doesn't work on any other OS

Verdict

If you want to make using Skype easier, this is a very solid way of doing it

Price £69.99

Our score

8/10

Your score

8/10