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Siemens Gigaset S685 IP telephone

Want a landline phone with VoIP?

by Chris Hall published on 7 October 2008

Whilst people change their mobile phone approximately every 18 months, landline phones tend to last the life of the product, over 5 years, and in some cases, more than 10. But with mobile phones being so dominant, is there really a place for the landline phone and can additional features appeal? We look at the Siemens Gigaset S685 IP to find out.

The big shout of the S685 IP is that it covers both landline and VoIP functions as well as featuring a whole host of other technologies, which makes it closer to a mobile phone than other regular landline telephones. Out of the box you have the handset itself, a charging base and a base station. The separation of charging and the base is a good move, because it means you no longer have to site the phone near your phone point - it can live in the kitchen, whilst the base station is in the office.

The base station gives you access to the other features on offer through the inclusion of an Ethernet port on the side, so it is not only connected to your phone line, but also your home network, so most likely it is going to live alongside your router.

The handset itself is a fairly standard silver and black design and houses the two rechargeable (supplied) AAA batteries. Besides the regular number pad you have keys more like a mobile - a four-way controller to access various options as well as mail and loudspeaker buttons and two buttons under the screen to select on-screen options. The buttons themselves are reasonable, perhaps a little too rocky, and the four-way controller seems set slightly too high so you can see underneath, which perhaps lets down the otherwise solid construction.

Connection as a standard landline is simple - connect the various cables, plug in to the wall and



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away you go. We found that the handset was set to use VoIP out of the box, so a dive into the settings was needed to return it to landline. It also comes with its own answering machine so is very much a complete home phone solution. But what of the other features?

Plugging a network cable into the side of the base station was rewarded with a blue light to indicate connectivity and the handset prompted for a firmware update, which is always a satisfying feeling. We used a Homeplug network for simplicity and encountered no problems with this arrangement. (The blue light is also a pager button.)

To use the VoIP functions you have to be registered with a VoIP service and a simple configuration wizard will help you set-up your connection, based on the details you already have. It is worth bearing in mind that this doesn't just give you free internet calls out of the box - it uses a service you already have, or plan to have, and pay a subscription for online (except for Gigaset.net, but more on that later). Unfortunately there didn't appear to be any Skype support before you ask. You can set-up a number of services too, to if you want a particular service for a particular place, or one side of the family uses one service and the other another, then this is no problem.

On buying the phone you become part of the Gigaset.net community which ties this range of Siemens phones together. The idea is that the Gigaset users have their own VoIP service, meaning that after connection of the phone you can call other Gigaset users for free. We can see this appealing to those who can encourage their wider family or friends to dive in for the same range of telephones - unfortunately, we don't currently know anyone on the service.

But the Gigaset.net service takes you a step further. You can login to your phone through your computer (by typing its IP address into a browser)

At a glance

What is it?

Landline telephone with VoIP

Good

Plenty of features, VoIP and landline in tandem, initial setup easy

Bad

Poor interface, additional features get too complicated, handset feels a little cheap

Verdict

As a landline phone it works perfectly well, VoIP is also perfectly easy to use in tandem, but dive under the skin and things just get too complicated

Price £69.99

Our score

8/10

Your score

?/10

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and access a whole range of settings. You can set up RSS feeds and have the weather for your local area displayed as a screensaver. It all seems to be about taking your phone and giving you something a little extra.

But perhaps it offers too much extra: there is also SMS, E-mail, Messenger support, you have an appointments calendar, you can transfer vCard data to fill the address book, you can use the onboard Bluetooth with a headset for handsfree calling, use it as a room/baby monitor, the list goes on and on. The S685 IP wants to be a mobile phone in every sense of the word.

VERDICT

But there is a small problem with this. The interface is very clunky compared to a mobile phone, so you'll spend a lot of your time trying to figure out exactly what you are doing - we certainly did in testing the phone. That means it is not as user-friendly as it could be and the 186 pages of manual are perhaps testament to this.

For a phone like the Gigaset S685 IP it is a case of thinking about what features you want from landline phone and how you are going to use them. The chances are that if you are a complete information addict who wants some of the features you'll find here, then you'll have a mobile phone with an unlimited data package anyway.

Of course, as a landline phone it works perfectly well, the calls are clear, the default ringtone is a little iffy, but is easily changed, and it's easy enough to use. VoIP is also perfectly easy to use in tandem, but dive under the skin and things just get a little complicated. You get the sense that the Gigaset S685 IP is going to appeal to those who have the time and inclination to really get to grips with their phone, or have no option but to use a landline for these additional services.