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## Sigma by Tellumat, the sum of all communications?

The all-in-one Small Office-Home Office business telephony-and-broadband solution has just been launched in South Africa. Steven Ambrose takes it for an extended call, with our Gadget 5 point test, and sees if it delivers.



The Sigma is made by Ireland's Lake Communications, Sigma has been designed largely with British Telecom in mind, which BT has used to spearhead its single-line broadband push against fierce competition in the United Kingdom.

"What's been good for BT's customers will be hugely enabling in South Africa's vibrant small, medium and micro-enterprise market," says Bennie Langenhoven, GM of Tellumat Telecoms. "We expect to see a lot of delighted faces when our customers hear where the Sigma's all-in-one platform will take them."

Part of this delight will come from the fact that the Sigma replaces a large amount of equipment in the average small office. In our case it replaced an answering machine, portable phone, ADSL Router, Wireless Wi-Fi gateway, Caller Line ID unit, VOIP adaptor and lots and lots of cables.

Standing up in a compact black and metal-grey case, the Sigma has a deceptively small form factor of 20cm (wide) by 19cm (high) by 8cm (deep). For its modest desk footprint, it packs the following features:

- ADSL modem
- Wi-Fi access point with WEP and WPA support for encrypted security
- Four-port network hub (allowing four PCs to be linked up and connected with the outside world via ADSL, or other broadband connection such as WIMAX)
- Mini-PBX (two standard Telkom exchange lines)
- DECT (cordless phone) base station with support for four handsets
- The Sigma can accept all GAP compatible phones, so you can connect your GAP compatible Siemens or Panasonic portable phones directly.

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- Four wired telephone extensions, supporting old-school analogue or digital phones with LCD displays and hands free capabilities
- Built-in firewall
- Built-in voicemail
- Voice over IP support (two SIP 2.0 trunks which work with many VOIP Providers)
- Least-cost routing (international calls automatically redirect via your VOIP service provider), and
- Full remote management capability, via a Web interface
- It even has door-phone functionality, whereby a door mechanism can be wired to the Sigma to remotely lock or un-lock the front door or gate from any phone.

## Is it ready to use?

The test unit arrived in a well marked and presented box, with printed and full electronic documentation on a disc. The instructions are clear and fairly simple. Getting the unit plugged in and basically working was simple, and all basic setup via the web interface was also relatively simple. Setting up the ADSL modem as well as the other more advanced options, such as VOIP, was a bit of a challenge, and it did take us a while to get all the functions working as advertised.

In short, the unit is not really ready to use out of the box. The Web interface lacks a set up Wizard, and requires a good working knowledge of routers, SIP and VOIP servers, as well as ADSL setup, and other fairly technical issues, in order to get the unit working optimally. We however recommend a competent installer, or expert. If you are not entirely comfortable with all the above jargon, you should leave it to an expert. Tellumat have a wide and established installer base in South Africa, so the setup issues may not be a problem.

## Is it easy to use?

Once up and running with all features configured, the Sigma is really simple to use. The switchboard operates from the digital handset or portable phone with real ease, and makes your small office or home, really feel and sound professional. The feature phone supplied, allows access to most of the features of the switchboard, including retrieving and setting up the voicemail system, which I must note is really useful, as the system has a voicemail box for all incoming calls, and each extension also has its own voicemail. The large LCD screen and well marked buttons and controls on the feature phone are easy and intuitive to use.

After careful set up, the MWEB VOIP extension line, which we use at Gadget, worked exactly like a normal Telkom line, and we were able to route all overseas, as well as long distance and cellular calls, exclusively via this line. We were also able to route all local calls exclusively via the one Telkom line, which has a Telkom closer package with 1000 free call minutes, in order to maximise our savings.

## Does it deliver on its promise?

The Sigma is a full featured switchboard, and with the other features mentioned above, worked exactly as advertised. Once properly set up and configured, the Sigma is indistinguishable from any switchboard you would find at a large company. The Sigma will make your small company feel big, and increase your efficiencies in the office.

## Is it innovative?

The Sigma is a collection of mature and well represented technologies found in most small offices, and increasingly in up-market homes. Each of these technologies, such as ADSL routers, are not innovative in themselves, but what does make the Sigma stand out, is that it combines all of these technologies in a small, compact, and most of all affordable package.

The average user will be hard pressed to find all the above functionality in a single device and then keep all of them running seamlessly. Despite my reservations on ease of setup, setting up all the Sigmas functionality in separate and individual units, would be far more challenging.

## Is it value for money?

On this front the Sigma is a real winner, the recommended retail price in South Africa is in the region of R6000-00, with one feature Phone and one DECT Portable Phone. In most cases this could include the installation and setup. If you had to buy each of the features in separate units, you could spend more, and get lots of setup and operating headaches into the bargain. After some research we could not presently find any unit in South Africa with the same features and functionality for close to this price.

In conclusion, we don't often get a review item that really delivers and adds real value to the office, the Sigma is a really useful, and really simple, compact unit with extensive functionality that we are still exploring. If you need a full function switchboard, and have ADSL or any other broadband connection such as WIMAX or iBurst, this unit fits the bill. The Sigma integrates all your home, and small office communication needs, into one small box. The Sigma is truly the sum of all your communication needs in your small office and at home.

**-Steven Ambrose (2)**



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