

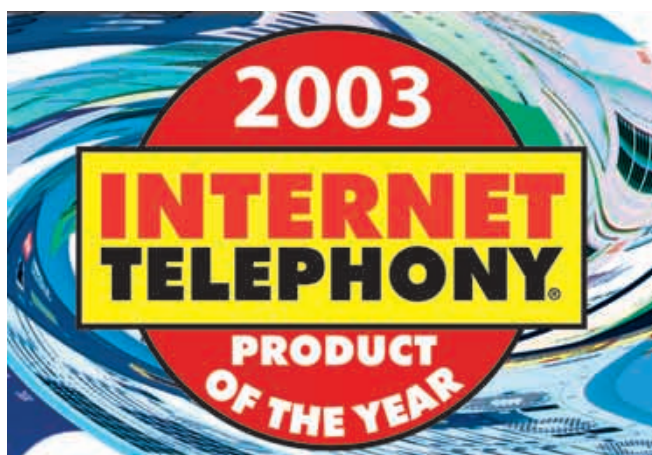


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As I write this introduction to our annual Products of the Year feature, I find myself cast in a Dickens plot, haunted by the ghosts of award winners past. Now, many of our fine readers no doubt already have pre-formed opinions on whether or not I am born to play the role of Scrooge or not, and I would respectfully urge them to keep those opinions to themselves.

The ghosts of winners past come in two forms. There are those companies that I am glad to see are still with us, continuing to create and develop new and innovative products regardless of market conditions — companies such as Audiocodes, who have appeared in this feature as winners as far back as January 1999. The reasons for their ongoing

success are many and varied, but it's in no small part due to their dedication to our industry that they continue to be on the receiving end of industry accolades. Then there are the ghosts of winners past who appear as a sobering reminder that even those companies who have great products sometimes fall prey to market forces.

Still, the end of the year is an obvious time for reflection and as such it's a time for us to reflect on those products that have caused a stir in the industry over the past 12 months. The following vendors have all shown a commitment to quality. They have demonstrated an ability to execute on their vision, in an extremely difficult economic environment. And they have emerged as winners by virtue of developing products that address real needs in the marketplace.

Much akin to last year's format, this year's list features a wide range of products in a wide range of categories. And the challenge of categorizing many of these products is no minor challenge. Just consider how many companies would prefer not to be "labeled" to begin with.

And so, we are proud to present the best of 2003. This list should be construed as a starting place for those of you looking for solutions to solve your particular needs. In parting, (and as I have done every year) I remind you — implore you — to do your homework, research these companies thoroughly, follow up, and most importantly: Check out those customer references!

- Greg Galitzine



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