

WHITE PAPER

Moving to a New Business Phone System



Introduction

Phone systems have been installed in offices of all different sizes for more than 40 years, providing a vital service to the business. Since then, telephone call handling has matured to become intertwined with the day-to-day process of running the business. Practices vary by country or region, and are predicated on a traditional office culture and user expectations of how to manage office communications between customers, workers and managers.

The average business phone system lasts anywhere between six and eight years, after which the system is either out of maintenance or is lagging in features, often to the extent that it is hurting the performance of the business. Businesses that need to upgrade their existing phone system will find a huge array of new solutions available compared to seven or eight years ago.

For starters, new software-based communications solutions don't need dedicated hardware in the storeroom or data closet anymore, because the entire system runs in the cloud. In many instances, "hard phones" such as your desk phone are not even required. New phone solutions often include a "soft phone" or "client" that runs on many different devices, such as your PC, tablet or smartphone.

And modern phone solutions no longer offer just "voice". They have transformed to offer a range of Unified Communications (UC) capabilities such as instant messaging, presence, video calling, collaboration tools and mobility solutions – all designed to keep your business at maximum productivity.

This paper will provide a quick and easy guide to common questions that arise when you're looking for a new business phone system.

Ask yourself: What do I need from my next system?

It's easy to simply go out and buy a like for like replacement for your phone system, but doing so would mean you are missing a golden opportunity to bring a range of powerful new capabilities into your business. Before you start looking at different phone system options, think carefully about what you need in your next phone system.

Here are a few questions to think about:

Missed calls

- How many phone calls does your business miss because the call either goes to someone who is out of office or all the lines are busy?

Disparate systems

- Do you have different systems in different offices resulting in features that don't work the same, causing staff confusion?

Infrastructure maintenance

- Is your phone system a vital organ in your business, and if it goes down, so do you?
- Have you suffered a network or equipment failure that has stopped inbound and outbound calls?
- Do you worry about having to find elements of the phone system yourself if something goes wrong?

Fluctuating/fraudulent expenses

- Are you worried about unexpected bills with domestic tiered minutes pricing or high International calling costs?
- When you bought your last phone system, do you think you got a good deal? Or did you find out a lot of hidden costs after you bought the basic system?
- Do you want to avoid hidden costs with maintenance of the system this time around?

Enterprise usage

- Do your remote workers struggle with calling people in the business simply because they are remote?
- Does staff struggle with those endless set of buttons on the handset and end up dropping customer calls?
- Do your mobile workers feel detached from the business when they are out of the office?
- Does your younger staff use their own mobiles so you are never sure if they are working or not whilst in the office.
- Does the phone system really deliver the professional image that you want to portray of your business?

If you've identified with some or all of these questions, you are not alone. They are some of the most common issues we see today in the business world when it comes to replacing a phone system.

Chances are you will need to prioritize these questions into the ones that are most important for your business. We'll look at that prioritization a little later on, but in the meantime let's focus on what your next phone system can do for you.

To make things easier we'll just stick to cloud-based phone systems, as they are regarded as the best solutions for companies of less than 500 people, especially when they are dispersed over a large number of sites.

How do modern phone systems help my business?

It is easy to get lost in the jargon of technology with people espousing acronyms about features that may or may not make sense to you. So let's try to narrow down your new phone system into some key areas:

Costs

We'll start with what is one of your primary concerns: costs. Will this phone system save me money? Most cloud phone services come with a fixed minutes and user plan. You pay a certain amount for the user and the minutes come with it. That's it. End of costs concerns. And many cloud systems also have very powerful fraud management capabilities that will catch a problem before you are even aware.

Flexibility

This is linked to costs. Chances are when you bought your last phone system you ended up over specifying it because you had to buy it in specific configurations. In the cloud, you just buy what you need – no more, no less. If you need more capability in the future, you just add it. You only pay for what you use today and add more users as your business grows.

Disasters

We never like to think they happen, but they do. Suppose your electric utility manages to put their backhoe through your phone lines. What do you do? What happens if there is a fire or a flood? With a cloud-based phone system, you can work from anywhere. Everyone can decamp down to the nearest Starbucks and continue working just as normal. Your customers will never know the difference.

Consistency

You may have added offices over a number of years and inherited different phone systems that work in different

ways. With the cloud, all the systems work the same everywhere. So your offices, mobile workers and remote workers will all have access to the same powerful range of features.

Usability

Cloud systems integrate with your IT systems so you can simply click to call out of a web page or directory listing. Everything is totally intuitive to the extent that you will probably forget about pressing phone buttons within a few days of getting your new system. These systems are also integrated with major cloud-based CRM and customer support applications enabling your business to be more efficient.

Professionalism

Cloud-based phone systems have a large array of features that until recently, were only available on very expensive systems used by major corporations. Now you can deliver a highly professional image by having auto attendants, hunt groups and a range of other call routing features, so that you always look totally professional to your customers.

Productivity

Imagine getting a new employee totally for free. With cloud-based phone systems, you can implement a range of productivity features that allow your current staff to communicate and collaborate much more effectively than before, thereby improving the overall productivity of your business. Features such as room-based collaboration, conference calling and instant messaging can dramatically improve the productivity of your business.

Mobility

Chances are your workforce is getting increasingly mobile. You need to be where your customer is and so being mobile is vital. But being mobile should not mean being disconnected from the business. Yes, people have mobile phones, but do they know if a person is really in the office or not? Can they get that vital message through at 5:55 p.m. to win a major new contract? With cloud-based phone systems, the mobile worker is always connected to the central nervous system of your business. They are not remote – they are just mobile.

Maintenance

The days of calling the telecoms engineer are well and truly over. Chances are, with a cloud-based phone system you will never see that person again. Phones are easy to move around with no specialist skills involved. System management is all done via the web with lots of handy videos to step you through the more complicated tasks. Cloud systems are designed to make your life easy and just keep running 24/7 so you don't have to worry about the costs or waiting for the telecoms to come and find something.

What should I look out for when I am buying?

Key Issue	Things to ask for
Costs	Check what is included and not included in the minutes bundle. Are there any exit clauses in the service contract? Do you have to rent the phones for longer than the service contract?
Flexibility	Can you add or remove users during the service contract? Do you have to pay for devices or for users?
Disasters	Can the system divert calls to tablets or mobile phones when the access network is down? Are there restrictions in the features when people are remote?
Consistency	Are all the features available to remote workers or do some get removed? Is the quality the same? For example, some mobile systems only use a technology called VoIP when remote, which can hurt voice quality if the network is congested.
Usability	Are the features the same on the phone, PC and mobile devices or are they different? Do you still have to rely on a telephone?
Professionalism	Does the system support features such as auto attendant, music on hold, automatic call distribution, call queuing, so you never miss a call?
Productivity	Does the system have features like conferencing, room-based collaboration and instant messaging and presence?
Mobility	Does the system support iOS and Android devices? Can it support all the productivity features above when mobile?
Maintenance	Does the system have web-based user self-administration and allow you to control powerful features from a single web page? Does the service support diagnostics so the service provider can quickly identify any issues that you may run into?

Which cloud phone system should I choose?

There are many different types of cloud phone systems to choose from, but it pays to really understand the underlying technology – or platform – behind your service provider. The platform determines the provider’s ability to innovate rapidly and drive the biggest impact for your business.

Some phone system providers base their service on freeware code that has been available for many years on the Internet. It’s great for them because it is low-cost to develop and allows them to start their businesses up quickly. Unfortunately many of these freeware-based services have issues with quality, and more worryingly security that ultimately could cost you dearly with a fraud attack.

By contrast there are some highly industrialized platforms out in the market today developed by specialized vendors. They deliver superior features and functionality, reliability and a proven track record.

Today, Cisco’s platform is used by hundreds of service providers worldwide, including 19 of the top 25 global communications service providers. These leading service providers have rigorous requirements, and require a platform that is secure and powerful. With over 40% industry market share today, and more than 10M users deployed, you can see why the top service providers rely on Cisco.

If 10M people rely on Cisco's solutions, shouldn't you?



Conclusion

Buying the correct phone system has the potential to make a huge difference to the success of your business in the next 5-10 years. Choosing the right system could mean hiring less staff winning more contracts, worrying less about disasters and yes, saving you money.

If you've outgrown your current business phone system, take the time to go through the questions we've outlined above, and write out your top needs and requirements before contacting your local reseller or service provider.

And last not but not least, be sure to ask about the underlying technologies that the service provider have in place. The fanciest features or the lowest price won't do you much good if the quality, reliability and security are not core components of the service provider's platform upon which your services are offered.

For more information on Cloud Communications solutions and cloud service providers, contact:

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