

6

IMPORTANT
CONSIDERATIONS
WHEN LOOKING FOR
BUSINESS PHONE SERVICE



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6 IMPORTANT CONSIDERATIONS WHEN LOOKING FOR BUSINESS PHONE SERVICE

Business phone systems may not attract the same attention or achieve the same acclaim that computers, smart phones and tablets regularly receive — you won't hear of too many publicized conferences or Twitter trends — but that doesn't negate their importance.

Phone systems in some ways are the silent heroes of the office. When they are doing their job correctly, few people think twice about them, but when a business phone system is down or not functioning properly, it's a major hit to productivity. And that's a direct reflection of their overall importance. Business phone systems are a direct connection to a brand's consumers and still a main source of communication between coworkers in an office.

In our era of booming technology and evolving features there are a number of phone system options that offer different advantages and disadvantages. There's so much more to it than simply categorizing your company as a small business or mega corporation. As an important and sometimes expensive business investment, there are a number of variables to take into consideration when shopping for a new phone platform. Six of them to be exact.



1. Price

An expected concern for even the largest conglomerates, pricing is a major factor when it comes to business phones and varies widely depending on the type of system you'll ultimately choose. A standard analog phone system will be significantly less than a hosted PBX equipped with all of the



available bells and whistles, but the levels of functionality will greatly differ as well.

Take the time to write out a budget for a new phone system that includes details such as:

- How many phones will be needed
- How many new phones you think might be added over the next few years
- If your business plans on expanding tremendously
- How many employees, if any, telecommute

- The cost of repairs, lease agreements and service contracts for your current system

Once you have a better idea of the number of phones you'll need, it's easier to estimate how much you're comfortable spending on each individual phone and how that compares to your present costs.

Beyond the initial rate of the phones themselves, be sure to take into consideration the cost of hardware, installation, platform charges, ISDN/SIP trunking charges and regular service charges that may come with an upgraded system.

Some companies may also find that leasing phones from a provider and paying a steady fee instead of a lump sum up front provides greater flexibility and is a more favorable alternative.

Most importantly, remember that a proper phone system for your business is an investment in your company's future. Align your budget with the increased productivity you anticipate as a result of the new system and its life expectancy.

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2. Usage

Once you are comfortable with a preliminary budget, the next step would be to determine which types of phones each employee within the office really needs. Many providers will work with you to build a network of phones that offer functions based on necessity. Subdivide the workforce in your company by job type and responsibilities along with the calling habits of each role. For example, a customer service representative at a large company will probably need access to multiple phone lines, speaker phone, hands-free options and hold and transfer capabilities. On the other hand, an intern who will be making or receiving very few calls might only need a simple, single line phone system with few functions beyond a keypad and voicemail.

In addition to employees who spend their days in the office, you should also consider those who are frequently working offsite and who would then benefit from the “follow-me” services some providers’ offer. This feature would reroute incoming calls to alternate phone numbers. The quantity of international calls being made from your company’s lines will also ultimately have an impact on pricing, and you may find that VoIP offers better international rates than analog services.

Mixing and matching the quality of phones has added value for companies who anticipate large growth or with departments and roles whose needs and responsibilities might eventually change.



3. Flexibility

As previously mentioned, fight the urge to buy a phone system for the *now*. Even during these uncertain economic times, it's important to consider what your company will look like in a few years and if the phone system you're currently considering will be able to keep up. For instance, if you foresee rapid growth in the coming months or years you'll need a phone system that is equipped to handle the additional lines. Many companies may choose to buy a mid-level system that can grow with them. Right now your company may only really need the capabilities of a standard service, but with time could come the need for conference calls, extensive calling features and numerous extensions. It's better to have the option to add on features and equipment in small steps rather than starting from scratch again.

In addition to growth within your current location, keep in mind any additional offices you have or might soon acquire. A company with a traditional analog phone system, but multiple offices, might be facing exorbitant costs associated with connecting private line connections at the main office with additional locations. On the other hand, newer systems that connect via IP connections will likely make the process of creating an expansive network easier and more affordable.

4. How Others Connect With You

Don't just think of a new phone system in terms of how you and your employees will use it. It's vital that you consider the experience of those calling you, mainly your clients. In this regard, three options to consider for your incoming calls are:

- If you'd like them to hear a dial by name or department directory.
- If you'd like some client calls to take priority over others.
- If you need to be able to instantly reroute incoming calls from anywhere to provide customer service even if the office is closed or an employee is unavailable.

Call your own company and experience the process clients go through to ensure you're happy with it. Also keep in mind attributes of prompts and automated systems you have heard when making calls to other companies. What did you love? What did you loathe? This will help to quickly generate a list of what you'd like for your own system and, more importantly, what you want to avoid.

Again, beyond making things easier on internal operations, a new phone service should benefit anyone trying to communicate with your company. Since many times your phone system will be one of the first interactions current and potential clients have with your brand, you need to make sure it's a quick, easy to navigate and pleasant experience. Once a client moves beyond the initial messaging, it's equally important to have adequate transfer options, voicemails and conference call capabilities to ensure a seamless experience throughout.

5. Functionality

The previous sections have touched upon some different phone options and how they might impact business, but you'd be remiss not to create a thorough list

for consideration. First, think of the non-negotiable must-haves for your business. Break down the various procedures that regularly take place within your organization, both internally and from the client-side, and then map out what features are most used and what options would streamline or simplify processes.

Once you have those items decided upon, you can move on to a wish-list of features you'd like to include, but could potentially live without based on other factors, like price.



“CALL YOUR OWN COMPANY AND EXPERIENCE THE PROCESS CLIENTS GO THROUGH TO ENSURE YOU'RE HAPPY WITH IT. WHAT DID YOU LOVE? WHAT DID YOU LOATHE?”

Common features to keep in mind are:

- Automated directory services
- Caller ID
- Call blocking
- Call forwarding
- Call logging
- Central office line ringing
- Custom greetings
- Distinctive rings
- Do not disturb
- Express conferencing
- Extensions
- Hands-free alternatives
- Hold options
- Multiple lines
- Multiple voicemail recordings
- Music on hold
- Public address voice paging
- Shared message boxes
- Speed dialing
- Speakerphone
- Splicing
- Transfer capabilities
- Voicemail
- Voicemail-to-email
- Welcome message



you grew up using. While these structures have an abundance of redeeming attributes, you can't forget that they will become a weight on your network. If you're not currently using a VoIP system, your network may not have the bandwidth to sustain a new phone system on top of the web browsing, email, SaaS and any other Web-based applications your company already has in place.

With details gathered on the number of physical phones you will need, their related capabilities and how much time is actually spent on the phone, a reputable service provider will be able to offer you an estimate of the bandwidth you'll need and any possible alterations — such as upgrading to a fiber connection or Ethernet — that may need to be made to the current system.

6. Your Current Network

An increasingly popular business phone system option operates over the Internet rather than the traditional analog system

Some hosting providers also have the ability to offer Internet access as to not burden your current connections. This service helps to ensure that the necessary bandwidth capabilities are properly in place and offers quick service repairs if call quality suddenly diminishes.

As you educate yourself further about the options readily available to you, questions may arise. While doing your research and exploring some of the selections on the market are great first steps in the process, don't be afraid to shop around. Speak with experts at various phone providers to learn how certain features will directly impact your company. Let them know your needs, concerns and wishes, and work with them to build a system that meets your price point and business goals.



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