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The Small Business Guide to VoIP

How to Choose the Right IP
Telephone Solution for Your Business.

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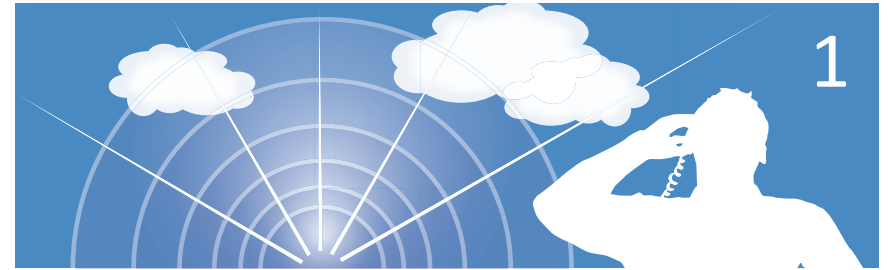
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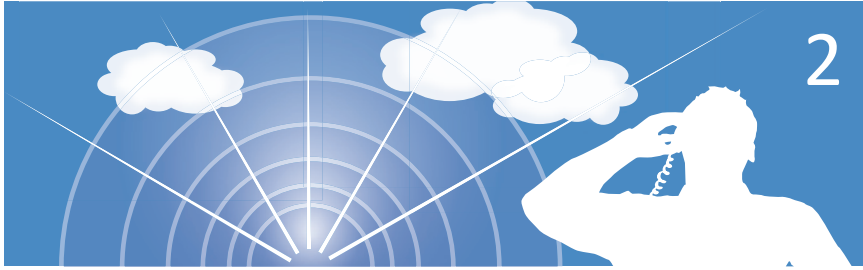
◀ ● What is VoIP?

VoIP stands for ‘Voice Over Internet Protocol’, which means that all calls go over the Internet, drastically reducing costs, especially on long distance calls, and adding many features unavailable with traditional landlines.

Searching for a business phone system can be a daunting task. There are so many choices, and so many options, that it can be difficult to understand which type of system will work best for your business.

One of the most versatile options available is VoIP Telephony.

Of course, VoIP does not just mean calls anymore. The technology allows people to send text messages and instant messages, conference calls and video calls. The technology continues to evolve, providing an ever more complicated array of options. However, voice calls are still the core function that this technology provides, and can be a truly cost-effective system for small and medium businesses.



Why choose VoIP?

1) COST SAVINGS

Since VoIP telephony uses your existing internet connection, it saves the often large costs associated with a traditional telephone line. Your monthly phone bill will be greatly reduced.

2) SIMPLE BILLING

Traditional phone billing includes different charges for different calls, long itemized bills and complicated rate plans. VoIP allows for Flat Rate Billing, with one monthly charge covering all your phone costs. Switching to a hosted VoIP solution can save a small or medium business up to 80% of current billing.

3) MULTIPLE LOCATIONS

Businesses with employees across multiple locations using traditional phone systems require a different system for each location, the costs of which add up. With VoIP, the phone only requires an internet connection, so it is cost-effective and efficient for employees and contractors across the country, or across the world.

4) SOFTWARE INTEGRATION

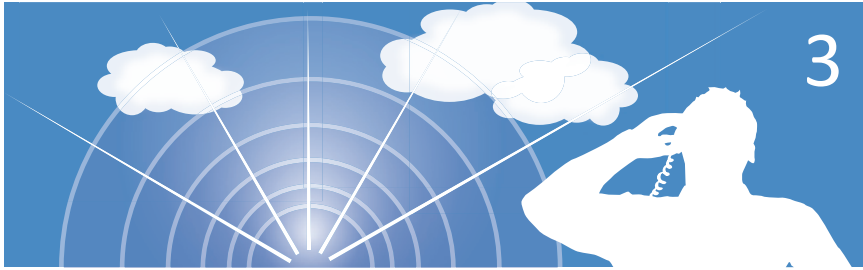
Traditional phone systems are closed loops, and they do not allow you to bring together all your modes of communication. Internet-based VoIP boosts productivity by letting you integrate

Compared to other systems, VoIP telephony offers many unique features that can have a powerful impact on the Return On Investment (ROI) for your business.

your phone system with software like Microsoft Outlook. So you can, for example, call numbers directly from email, and receive voicemails as email.

5) AUTOMATIC UPGRADES

Traditional phone systems require a lot of maintenance, and upgrading can be a large task. With a VoIP system, you always have access to the latest functions and features because the system is continuously, automatically upgraded online through software updates.



☛ ● How do you choose a VoIP provider?

VoIP telephony provides obvious advantages over traditional phone systems. But as with any service, the range of VoIP providers varies greatly. Some providers reduce costs by connecting your system to the public internet. While others own and operate the internet links, or lease dedicated links from other companies. In selecting a VoIP provider, you must balance two factors: *your requirements, and your budget.*

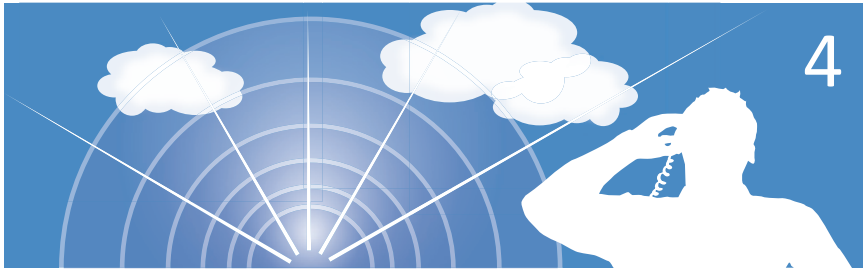
You must also look at other parts of the offer beyond the VoIP telephony service itself. For example, does a provider

offer a free trial period? This will help you and those in your business to understand how the system works, and to become comfortable with its operation before you purchase. Technical support is also a key element, and one you must ensure is above par so that you can avoid costly technical issues.

Each provider is different, so you must determine which best addresses the specific needs of your business.

In the current business environment, small and medium businesses have to perform at a level higher than ever before. You need reliable partners and systems that support your business vision. That includes the VoIP partner you choose, and the system you use.





(((● How do you choose the VoIP phone that is best for your business?

There are many considerations to take into account where this is concerned:

1) THE USER

Who will be using the phone? What is their job function? Answering these questions is crucial to selecting a phone that has the optimal functions and features that will allow that person to operate at peak efficiency.

2) CALL VOLUME

The type of phone should also be determined by the expected number of calls to be handled. A phone for an executive, for example, would be different from the phone for a receptionist.

3) BUDGET

Many decisions are driven by budgetary issues. While this should not be the only factor in selecting a phone, you must definitely consider what your budget can bear where phones and functionality are concerned.

4) LIFETIME VALUE

Another determining factor is how often the phone will be used. Constant use will shorten the lifespan of a phone, so if this is the case in your business, it would be worth investing in a costlier, but higher quality phone.

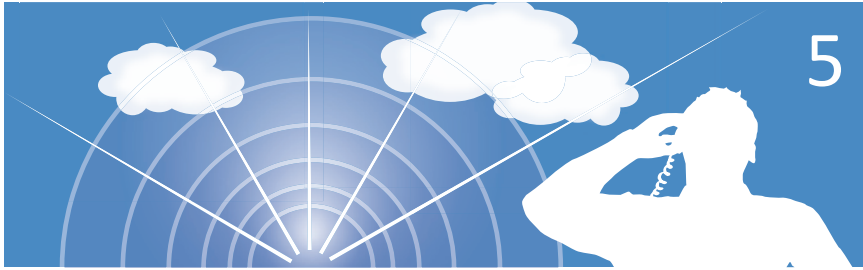
Once you have selected a VoIP provider, you will need to select the actual VoIP phone or phones for your business.

5) TECHNICAL REQUIREMENTS

Depending on your office, your technical requirements may dictate a specific type of phone. For instance, if there is only one Ethernet line for

each desk, then you will require phones with dual Ethernet capabilities. Likewise, if you plan to use Power over Ethernet, you must consider phones that support this.





Answers to VoIP Misconceptions

Here are answers to three of the main issues that are most often raised in regards to VoIP:

1) **POOR VOICE QUALITY** and **UNRELIABLE SYSTEMS**, as compared with traditional phones.

The quality of VoIP is based on the quality and reliability of the internet connection.

In order to operate properly, a VoIP system requires at least a broadband connection, whether Ethernet, Cable, DSL or Wireless). The better the internet connection, the better the voice quality. In fact, with a high speed connection, the voice quality will be better

than that on traditional phone lines. Most reliable VoIP providers also offer service guarantees ensuring virtually no downtime.

2) Switching to **VoIP REQUIRES A LARGE INVESTMENT**

Moving to VoIP is actually economical, especially for small to medium businesses.

Even if you have to purchase new equipment and handsets, the cost is still well below that of installing or even upgrading a traditional phone system. Plus, the savings you will accrue, from low call rates to line rental, a VoIP will generally pay for itself within three months.

As with any advanced technology, there are many misconceptions about VoIP, its capabilities and its benefits.

3) **EXPENSIVE UPGRADES**
VoIP systems are flexible and scalable. Everything is hosted online, which means that upgrading or making changes is generally easier than with traditional systems.

Many upgrades and updates are done automatically, and the only expense involved is the additional service costs of a revised plan and any additional handsets or equipment as required.

