



10 Questions to Ask Before Buying a Phone System

Before you decide to invest in a phone system, you should ask the person you're buying from the following 10 questions. By doing so, you can save yourself thousands of dollars and countless hours of headache. Hosted PBX eliminates the need for costly long distance bills for all your internal company calling.

1. WHAT START-UP COSTS ARE THERE BEYOND SETUP AND EQUIPMENT FEES?

Many companies make a purchase decision based off of the quote that they receive, but often there are hidden costs that aren't included that could add thousands of dollars over the length of a contract. You should find out exactly what you will need to purchase or supply in order to use the service, including; phones, servers, switches, interface cards, power adaptors, and the voice or IP access connection. What is expected of your team to install and setup the new phone system? Will the provider also be your single point of contact for the access portion or will you have to source that separately?

2. WHAT USAGE-BASED COSTS ARE NOT INCLUDED IN YOUR MONTHLY PLAN?

Not all providers are created equal and that is no more evident than on usage-based costs like long distance calling and features outside of the monthly plan. It's important that you fully understand what your domestic and international long distance rates are upfront. Are the advanced features the sales rep told you about included or extra? We've found that many service providers and hardware companies talk about advanced features, however, what they don't tell you is that you have to pay extra for them. These usage-based features or additional licences can add up quickly, especially when every user in your company takes advantage of them.

3. WILL YOU BE ABLE TO SEND AND RECEIVE FAXES?

One of the biggest challenges with a VoIP phone system is the handling of fax calls. Many companies will state that they support fax calling, but when you finally start using it you may discover it's not what you expected. Fax on VoIP requires T.38 support, not only on the phone system, but throughout your VoIP provider's network to fully make and receive fax calls. Without it, you may only send or receive partial faxes or have frequent failures. It's important to find out if you can plug your fax machine directly into your phone system or if you will require additional equipment. In some cases, you'll need to buy a traditional phone line.

4. CAN YOU CONNECT ANALOG PHONES OR HAVE REMOTE LOCATIONS WITH DIFFERENT EQUIPMENT?

Many companies have multiple locations, often with different equipment from the main office. It is important to check if the service and equipment you're buying can support analog phones at other locations and if there is an additional cost. Is long distance between these locations included, or is that extra? Knowing your options before you buy can save your company money and also ensure that you are providing all of the locations across your entire business with the same functionality.



5. HOW DO MOBILE OR TELECOMMUTERS CONNECT TO THE SYSTEM?

Often, a decision is based on the needs of the head office leaving mobile workers and telecommuters to figure out workaround solutions in order to stay connected. This will typically lead to higher costs for long distance, poor voice calling quality, and worker frustration. Knowing how the phone system can handle mobile or telecommuter workers is important to understand before you buy. You should find out how you can connect someone who is on the road for business. Are soft-phones or conference bridges included? Can a telecommuter have the same phone as the employee in the head office?

6. CAN THE PHONE SYSTEM EXPAND IF YOUR COMPANY GROWS?

Many phone systems are designed for a specific number of users and it can be quite surprising to learn that the phone system you bought last year is no longer able to support your business because you have added employees and exceeded its capacity. This can be a very costly mistake for many businesses. Finding out in advance the process for adding more phones, increasing access, or adding more locations is important. Not all phone systems are created equal and the last thing you want to hear is that you're going to have to spend thousands to replace or upgrade your phone system because it can't scale quickly and easily. Even worse, many times the immediate impact to a business when its phone system reaches its capacity is a fast busy signal because someone cannot connect – resulting in a poor corporate appearance, bad customer experiences and, quite possibly, lost business.

7. HOW DO THEY GUARANTEE YOUR QUALITY OF SERVICE (QOS)?

Quality of Service varies dramatically from provider to provider. VoIP has many advantages over traditional voice phone lines, but without a QoS guarantee you'll find many disadvantages and a lot of frustration. Some providers offer monitoring of their equipment, but if your voice packets travel over the open internet you may be exposing your business to a loss in quality and potential security risks. Without QoS guarantees you could experience jitter, latency, and interference which could impact your revenue and customer experience. Further to this, what happens if there is an outage in the IP connection or to the power in your office? Take the time to understand how QoS will be handled, who will be responsible, and what the implications will be to your contract terms if you're not happy with the Quality of Service that you receive.

8. DO THEY PROVIDE 911 OR E911?

In an emergency situation at your office, what will happen if someone dials 911 on the new phone system? Will the 911 dispatchers know where you are or will you be required to provide address details? It's important to know this in advance so you can make an informed decision on what is the best solution for your business. Understanding the differences between 911 and E911 could mean the difference in saving someone's life – maybe even your own. Ensuring your provider is in full compliance of regulatory guidelines on 911 management will also save you from costly litigation as a result of not meeting the basic needs of your employees in the event of an emergency.

9. WHAT HAPPENS IF THEIR BUSINESS IS NO LONGER AROUND IN A COUPLE OF YEARS?

Like any new technology industry, there are many options for service providers for the hardware, software, and access. But what happens if your service provider is suddenly out of business or bought out by a competitor? Many service contracts don't guarantee that your contract will be honoured in a buyout or bankruptcy situation. With so many smaller companies offering advanced services, you have a lot to choose from but these companies may not be around as your business grows.

10. WHAT IS THEIR CONTRACT TERMINATION POLICY?

Finally, you've reviewed the questions above and you feel confident that you're making a sound decision on your new phone system, but what happens if your business changes and you need to cancel your contract early? What if the service provider doesn't meet your quality expectations and you want to find a new supplier? If you bought your phone system are you stuck with it? Business-class services generally also come with a contract so beware of their month-to-month offers, as you are likely sacrificing something from 1-9.

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