



HOSTED VOIP BUYER'S GUIDE

*Why more companies are moving to VoIP –
and what you should be looking for*

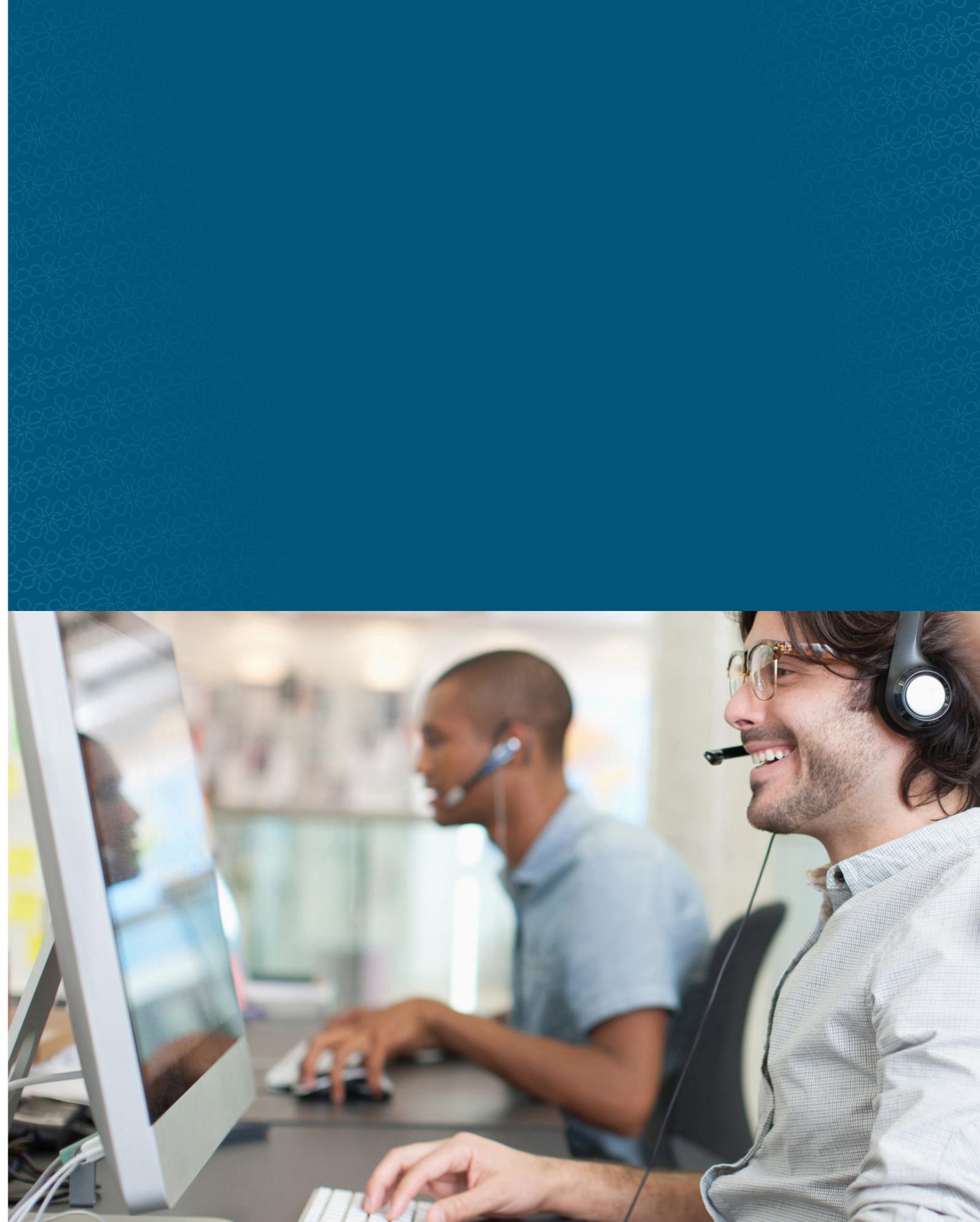


BEFORE YOU BUY A BUSINESS PHONE SYSTEM



Your organization needs a phone system that not only matches your current business requirements but grows alongside your ambitions.

Successful businesses are constantly on the move: growing, adding locations, hiring new employees. Because your phone system has such an impact on your day-to-day – from budgets to employee productivity to customer care – it should scale with your company. Don't invest your time, budget and energy into deploying one system only to have to upgrade to another later. Choosing the right system from the start saves resources and multiplies opportunities for greater collaboration and productivity.



WHAT A BUSINESS PHONE SYSTEM LOOKS LIKE

The market offers many phone system models designed for the workplace. But most companies require a modern phone system that functions more as an asset than a utility. These phone systems are:

Professional

Advanced voice features help deliver positive customer experience over the phone.

Mobile

Run your business from anywhere and empower your employees to be productive no matter where they are.

Reliable

With the right system, you never miss a call.

Scalable

Nothing should stifle your company's growth – especially not your phone system.



THAT MODERN PHONE SYSTEM YOU'RE LOOKING FOR IS HOSTED VOIP

This buyer's guide takes you step by step through the process of looking for a business-grade phone system and explores why Hosted VoIP is a good fit.



LET'S GET INTO IT

Here's a quick preview of the steps we recommend you take as you shop for a system that fits your business needs.



1. Know your current situation

First consider your existing infrastructure and needs.



2. Learn how Hosted VoIP works

Why are more and more businesses selecting Hosted VoIP?



3. Assess available business systems

See which system has what it takes.



4. Evaluate potential providers

There are a lot of providers out there. Learn how to narrow them down.



#1 KNOW YOUR CURRENT SITUATION



Start with the phone system you already have in place and ask yourself how it's serving your needs. A few questions you could ask as you evaluate your existing system include:

- What's it getting right?
- Where does it fall down on the job?
- What could be better? (Ask around for suggestions from other employees.)
- Does the system meet your current objectives?
- Is it helping your company meet its goals?
- What needs would a new system have to fill?
- What requirements must a new system meet?
- Are you only looking for a phone system? Or are you after a comprehensive solution? (Like video, contact center, conferencing, chat, text/SMS, desktop integration, etc.)
- How important is mobility to your company? Is it must-have or like-to-have?



#2 LEARN HOW VOIP WORKS



After taking stock of your current phone system, it's time to look at the different systems available. Options you'll usually encounter in the telecom market include:

On premises

For decades, on-premises solutions served as the default option for business phone systems. An on-premises (or “legacy”) system is one where your company purchases the system hardware – including servers, switches, etc. – and hosts it at your office location. You are then responsible for its upkeep, as well as any maintenance or updates.

VoIP

VoIP stands for Voice over Internet Protocol. It's a technology that transmits calls through data networks rather than through traditional phone lines. Businesses can purchase on-premises VoIP phone systems or cloud-based VoIP services, also known as Hosted VoIP.

Hosted VoIP

A Hosted VoIP phone system foregoes most on-site equipment. The provider “hosts” – or maintains and updates – the necessary hardware and software off-site, delivering voice connectivity remotely.

Hybrid

Many companies, to maintain their investment in an on-premises system while capitalizing on the advantages of a cloud-based one, combine their on-site system with a cloud-based VoIP service.



SYSTEM COMPARISON

Here's a quick rundown of how the different types of phone systems compare so you can see what makes sense for your business.

	On-Premises	On-Premises VoIP	Hosted VoIP	Hybrid Cloud
Cost	Heavy upfront capex investment. Licensing fees and support and maintenance contracts.	High upfront capex expenditure with lower monthly rate.	Opex; low or no upfront expenditure. Predictable monthly subscription fee.	Capex AND opex; company owns and maintains on-site hardware and pays monthly subscription to cloud service.
Flexibility	Certifications and technical training required to make changes.	Easier to customize, but still requires technical expertise and hardware configuration.	Real-time changes made in online portal. No technical expertise necessary.	Changes implemented via online portal.
Security	You handle your own security.	You own the system, so security is up to you.	The provider is responsible for security.	The provider handles security in the cloud.
Access to Features	Obsolescence leads to increasing incompatibility with modern features.	Requires hardware and software updates, which you purchase and implement.	The provider updates the system off-site, giving you automatic access to new voice features.	The state and age of your on-site system limits access to the latest features.
Scalability	Scaling requires additional hardware and time-consuming system configuration.	On-site growth is easy, but adding locations requires another system.	Simple to scale. One system easily accommodates adding locations.	Easy to scale on location. Multiple locations require an additional on-site system.
Business Continuity	Inaccessible or damaged office cuts you off from business communications.	Inability to access the office cuts you off from essential business communications.	Remote access to communications is built in. Automatic failover to off-site numbers.	Some remote access to phone functionality. If the on-site system is damaged, your phone service goes with it.



WHY BUSINESSES CHOOSE HOSTED VOIP

Today's typical IT department maintains less than half its platforms on site. The rest are in the cloud, including their communication platforms.

In the past, traditional on-premises platforms were seen as mere utilities, a check box businesses had to mark off. These systems also presented a host of challenges. At the beginning, they required heavy investments in hardware and took time to deploy and configure. Once they were in place, it didn't take long before they became obsolete, isolating enterprises from recent updates and features. As they reached their end of life, these systems increasingly monopolized IT resources to keep them functional.

On-site VoIP offers similar risks, as does hybrid cloud. Only Hosted VoIP offloads the inherent risk of tech investment onto the provider while delivering greater agility, more advanced features, seamlessly scalability and resilience to outages and natural disasters. With less risk, greater flexibility, no end-of-life for the technology and access to advanced reporting, automation and mobility, enterprises are free to funnel their resources away from maintaining their technology and toward outperforming competitors.



#3 ASSESS AVAILABLE BUSINESS PHONE SYSTEMS



Once you've decided on a Hosted VoIP system, you should start researching providers. Throw a wide net and keep an open mind as you weigh your options.

Reviews

- Search for the top names on Hosted VoIP review sites.

Retention

- Once you've narrowed it down, look at retention levels. This indicates how happy customers are with their decision.

Pricing

- How affordable are the providers you've picked?
- How often do they change their rates?
- Do they lock you into a contract, or do they offer month-to-month service?

Features

- Are there startup or activation fees, or are features all-inclusive?
- Do they offer basics like auto-attendants, conference bridges, voicemail to email, Find Me/Follow Me and call recording?
- How easy is it to manage and set them up?
- Do you receive new features as they become available?
- Are updates free or part of a service charge?



Security

- How secure are their communications?
- Do they use encryption and other security measures?

Quality of service and call quality

- What do customers consistently say about the providers' call quality and the level of service they offer?

Onboarding and training

- What will it take to get started with this provider?
- Do they offer training?
- Do they provide training materials like manuals and videos?

Support and customer care

- Is support included in the price, or is that extra?
- Do they offer tools to help determine if your network can handle their solution?
- What kind of support can you expect during setup?
- Once you're up and running, who will take care of you?

Redundancy

- What level of redundancy do they provide?
- How many datacenters host the solution?

Mobility

- Do they offer a mobility app?
- If yes, what voice features are available through it?
- Can you make calls on your mobile device using your business number?
- Does the mobile app cost extra?
- Is it available on iOS and Android?

Scalability

- Does the provider have experience with large deployments?
- How distributed is their customer base?
- How easy is it to add users and locations?

Reliability

- Do the providers publish their status and uptime?
- Is there a formal service level agreement (SLA) guaranteeing uptime?

Analytics

- Does the provider offer any kind of call analytics and usage reports that could yield insight into staffing and service decisions?

#4 EVALUATE POTENTIAL PROVIDERS



With all the information you've gathered, hopefully a few specific providers will stand out as good fits for your enterprise. At this point, we recommend you visit their websites, call their sales reps, request quotes and eventually schedule a demo or pilot with them.

Pricing quote

Request a detailed “no surprises” quote that includes all upfront charges, add-ons, third-party costs, etc.

TCO or ROI analysis

Using the price quote, don't just look at initial or month-to-month charges. Assemble a comprehensive total cost of ownership (TCO) estimate, or a return on investment (ROI) analysis. A fair evaluation of the different providers won't give the most credit to whoever quotes the lowest price but to whoever provides the most value – including features, support, security, etc.





INVITE VENDORS TO DEMONSTRATE THEIR PRODUCT

Before the demo:

Review your current needs

- Identify any pain points introduced by your current phone system. Ask employees what they'd like to see in a new phone solution.

Grade the incoming vendors before the demo

- Base your grade on the features and services that are important to you. Grade them uniformly, such as scoring them on a scale of 1-10.

During the demo:

Ask questions

- Don't be shy about pointing out any areas where the system falls short. Perhaps the provider has a solution in the works that'll be available by your go-live date.
- Has the vendor shared references with you?
- How long did it take the vendor to deploy similarly sized accounts?
- Do they offer integrations for your third party platforms?
- Is training included in the price, or does it cost extra?

Observe how simple the solution is

- How much training will it take to get your employees up to speed on it?

Identify any problems you may have with the solution

- Give the vendor the chance to address them.

After the demo:

Grade the vendor again on the same criteria you used for the first grade

- This time base it entirely on the impression you received from the demo.

Average your initial grade with the post-demo grade

- This should help you arrive at a solid overall score for the providers.



IMPLEMENTATION

Before you make your final pick, press your possible vendors on deployment-phase challenges. Hosted VoIP providers should be more than happy to answer these questions.

Trial

- Is there a trial period so you can sample the system without commitment?

Timelines

- How long will deployment take?
- When is the go-live date?

Project management

- Will you get your own project or account manager to oversee installation?
- If not, who should you contact with questions or concerns?

Training

- How is training handled?
- Is it remote or on-site?
- What resources, training videos and documentation are available?

Number porting

- How long does it take?
- Are there extra charges?
- What happens in the meantime while the numbers are switched over?

Provisioning

- How difficult is it to program hardware like phones to function with the phone system?
- Does the vendor offer plug-and-play hardware or zero-touch provisioning tools?

UNIFY YOUR COMMUNICATIONS WITH GOTO

GoToConnect leads the hosted business phone industry in customer support and reliability. With over 100 all-inclusive features across voice, video, and messaging, and eleven datacenters distributed worldwide providing redundant service, GoToConnect sets the pace for the Hosted VoIP and Unified Communications industry.

Easily communicate internally and externally via your web browser, a downloadable desktop app, a desk phone or your mobile device. GoToConnect keeps everyone in your business connected – wherever they might be.



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