



Selecting a Unified Communications Solution

Helpful Hints on what to look for as you consider migrating to Voice over IP Technology

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Every business has its own unique requirements. When it comes to technology, and specifically VoIP, there are a number of variables that serve as guides toward a final determination.

Product

Not all VoIP products are "created equal". Start with an evaluation of your current business communications. What functionality works well for your organization, and what areas can improve? Do you answer calls with a live person, or use an automated answering mechanism? Consider the use of messaging, forward to email, and use of mobile apps. Is there a need to improve call flow? Are your clients happy with the communication experience? Are you monitoring peak calling times, and staffing to accommodate? In general, much of this is common among various products, but some systems handle call flow, and reporting better than others. Try before you buy - have a demo and see how a vendor's technology fits with your requirements.

The Cloud

This is where products vary widely. Request a detailed explanation of a vendor's hosting environment. Is your system in a single datacenter, and subject to potential failure? Has the vendor invested in redundancy and how does failover occur in the event of datacenter issue? How long does it take to failover to an alternate "server"? Are you reliant on a single carrier, or are backup options available? Seek out solutions that provide the sort of reliability your business requires.

Flexible Plans

We all like to have options. What sort of plans are available? Some people prefer to buy phone devices, others like the simplicity of a monthly rental. What terms are available for length of commitment? What type of installation costs apply? Am I able to bring my own devices, rather than using those recommended by the vendor? These are all important questions when considering a hosted VoIP solution.

Value-Added



Take a close look at what the vendor is including in their plan. Many plans provide features in their base program that may be options with another vendor's plan. Popular items like mobile softphone, auto attendants, voice mailboxes, PC app, or speech transcription can be difference-makers when comparing competing packages, and analyzing your total cost of ownership.

Full Service or Niche

Some vendors are content to provide a business phone system solution, while others offer additional services. Since a cloud based unified communications solution relies on your wide area network, it is recommended to identify vendors with carrier/network experience. Given your system resides on an internal data network, you may also find it advantageous to work with a company with IT expertise. Is a more well-rounded vendor better for your business?

Local Support

In today's age, many businesses are entering the VoIP space, including both local and national firms. We strongly advise that you work with a vendor with a local presence if possible. Many "local" firms are merely sales agents for another organization. In that case, who do you contact for service? Are you dealing with 1st-level support from WNY, or is it provided by an out of town organization? Understanding the relationships is important as it will help you decide what sort of situation you desire.



Dollars & Sense

When it comes time to review the economics of a vendor's proposal, we urge you to consider ALL of the costs to be expected. Many vendors tack on exorbitant fees and surcharges, while others may not. These charges can amount to an extra 20% or more on top of your base VoIP system costs.

In Summary

There are many criteria to consider when moving to a unified communications solution. From the vendor and experience level, to the product and its potential fit with your needs, to reliability, value-added opportunities, and the financial impacts, it can be a daunting experience. AIS Buffalo has a team of professionals who are able to answer questions, and provide intelligent recommendations on business phone service.



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