



BUSINESS PHONE SOLUTION
Buyers Guide

10

Questions Every Business Should Ask





Introduction

BOLD OPTIONS AND NEW POSSIBILITIES

Today's business owners have extensive options for selecting a business phone system, particularly as hosted VoIP (Voice over Internet Protocol) solutions gain major prominence in the marketplace. On the surface, the shopping experience may seem complicated. But especially now, businesses can upgrade to a far more capable system for considerably less money – so some smart shopping is absolutely worth the effort.

This Buyers Guide helps business owners select the right phone system for their business by asking important and revealing questions, including:

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1. Traditional Service or Business VoIP Service?
 2. Which Calling Features are Most Important?
 3. Does the System Support Mobility?
 4. How Much Should I Expect to Pay?
 5. How Will My Phone System Grow with My Business?
 6. What If I Need Customer or Technical Support?
 7. What Makes a System Reliable?
 8. Is My Information Secure?
 9. How Long Does it Take to Set Up a New Phone System?
 10. What About Onboarding and Training?
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Read on to learn more about the business phone solution marketplace and how to successfully compare options.

A Foundational First Choice

1.

TRADITIONAL SERVICE OR BUSINESS VOIP¹ SERVICE?

For many businesses, the first decision usually hinges on the choice between: (1) a traditional copper-wire phone system, and (2) a hosted business VoIP phone system. Clearly, the technology between these solutions differs greatly and shoppers should be prepared to make this fundamental choice.

Copper-wire Connection vs. High-speed Internet.

Traditional copper-wire service has been in place for decades – the legacy technology that runs over telephone wires in nearly every community. Business VoIP phone systems connect over high-speed Internet and are rapidly gaining popularity among small to mid-sized businesses (SMBs).

Cloud-hosted vs. On-premise.

Business VoIP providers like Vonage host the business phone system's nerve center – the feature-enabling PBX² – in the cloud. Traditional providers build and maintain their PBX on premise³ at each customer's office. (Note: Some VoIP providers do provide on-premise hosting, but this model is becoming less popular due to hardware/maintenance costs.)

Over the last decade, the convergence of VoIP technology and the cloud-hosted PBX⁴ has revolutionized the business phone landscape. Hosted VoIP systems now provide SMBs the advantage of new and more-capable calling features, full mobile access, and dramatically reduced pricing.

This revolution means that any company can easily leverage what are normally considered “big business” phone features – and do business however and wherever they choose. A few examples:

- Using an IVR (interactive voice response) to answer and route inbound calls to a specific employee or department.
- Placing customers into a call queue as they wait for a customer service representative, or automatically request a return call when the next representative becomes available.
- Maintaining communications through natural disasters or other catastrophic events by simply plugging their phones into a different high-speed access point or through mobile applications.

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¹VoIP (Voice over Internet Protocol) In its most simple definition, VoIP refers to the technology enabling voice communications over IP (Internet Protocol) networks. “Business VoIP” refers to applying VoIP technology to a feature-oriented office phone system.

²PBX (Private Branch Exchange) A PBX is a telephone switching system that interconnects telephone extensions to each other in-house as well as to the outside telephone network.









³On-Premise PBX This term refers to physical telephony hardware that resides at the customer's business location, enabling multiple handsets to share phone lines along with a common set of features and functionality.

⁴Hosted PBX An Internet-based telephony solution that follows the Software as a Solution (SaaS) model by hosting and managing phone system equipment in remote data centers, accessible through high-speed Internet connections.

So what is the difference that makes all of this possible? A hosted VoIP solution is in essence a software system running on highly redundant servers in a professionally managed data center, assessable via the Internet – as opposed to a hardware and software system operating in a company's server closet. By simply making changes to the software that sits in the cloud, hosted VoIP provides meaningful new features to all customers without requiring hardware upgrades or software for every single business phone or location.

Vonage Business offers a business VoIP phone system that is hosted in the cloud. In deciding to go with a hosted VoIP system like ours, we recommend business owners talk to their peers who use business VoIP phone systems and learn how they compare to premise-based copper-wire solutions.

COMPARISON AT A GLANCE

Business VoIP (Cloud-hosted PBX)	Traditional Copperwire (On-premise PBX)
No PBX equipment	Purchased PBX equipment + maintenance contract
 Cost of Ownership	
Monitored 24/7 by service provider	Customer assumes risk
 Security / Safety	
Unlimited	Limited
 Scalability	
Automatic updates (virtual)	Added at each customer location
 Features / Updates	
Web-based user portal	On location by appointment
 System Management	
Multiple calls per extension	Limited to number of shared lines
 Call Capacity	
Dependent on in-house network and platform	Dependent on physical hardware
 Reliability	
Quick and simple	Complex and time intensive
 Implementation	

Calling Features

2.

WHICH CALLING FEATURES ARE MOST IMPORTANT?

This is a question each business owner must answer. The key is learning what features are offered within each phone system and then considering the possibilities! All systems have a basic feature set that includes call forwarding, call hold, voicemail, etc. But hosted VoIP systems include additional features that traditional premise-based solutions do not include without costly add-ons and/or integration services – such as mobility features, call-recording features for training and compliance, and computer desktop integration with tools like Salesforce.com and LinkedIn.

Even among hosted VoIP providers, features like those mentioned above vary. And some providers offer unique features, such as Vonage's Call Continuity emergency call rerouting feature. Many hosted VoIP solutions also provide powerful system call reporting capabilities that help employers evaluate trends and employee activity, and identify new opportunities.

The Vonage business phone system comes preloaded with 40+ calling features including mobile apps, desktop plugins, voicemail to email, and more. Additional features can be easily added to the account for an additional fee.

DOES THE SYSTEM SUPPORT MOBILITY?

As modern businesses increasingly support teleworking and/or have sales teams on the go, the capability of having all employees tied to the same business phone system – wherever they are, on whatever device – is more important than ever.

The trend toward “bring your own device” (BYOD) for business is also increasing, and business phone features such as mobile apps give on-the-go employees access to the full business phone system, even from their personal cell phone. Employers also appreciate that business mobile apps allow employees to maintain their business identity when connecting with customers and business peers. Caller ID indicates a business number, instead of the employee's personal number, and employees using the mobile app aren't required to use their personal minutes to communicate for business.

Of course, without mobile capabilities, once the employee leaves the office, access to the business phone system is lost. Mobile solutions are among the most robust and attractive amenities of hosted VoIP systems, enabled by Internet connectivity and cloud hosting. Traditional providers often support mobility, too, enabled by add-ons and/or integrations that can sometimes be costly to the customer.

Mobility features vary from one provider to the next, some offering them in their core feature set and others requiring add-on fees. Shoppers should compare offerings like mobile apps and evaluate cost, utility and integration with major devices.

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4.

Hosted VoIP providers maintain and refine their PBX in the cloud and manage it virtually – so there's no expensive equipment to maintain or technician visits to schedule.

*Savings claim is based on the average monthly recurring charge for unlimited nationwide business calling plans from leading wireline service providers. Comparison excludes promotional pricing, fees, surcharges or taxes and assumes a customer already has broadband internet service. Check your phone bill to determine the savings that would apply to you.

Vonage Business Mobile features include free mobile apps for iOS® and Android®, which give employees access to the full phone system wherever they are. Also, with the Work from Anywhere feature, employees can take their desk phone with them, plug them into high-speed Internet at home or elsewhere, and have the same phone system access they had back at the main office.

Pricing & Savings

HOW MUCH SHOULD I EXPECT TO PAY?

It's true that a quality business phone system is an investment in the company, but few businesses have the luxury of overpaying. Many business owners are shocked to learn about the considerably lower price point of hosted VoIP systems versus a traditional systems. But pricing has a great deal to do with the technology itself.

Traditional premise-based providers build their feature-enabling PBX in a server room in each customer's office, which represents hardware costs, labor expenses and maintenance costs over time. Hosted VoIP providers maintain and refine their PBX in the cloud and manage it virtually – so there's no expensive equipment to maintain or technician visits to schedule. The result is that hosted VoIP solutions are almost always priced considerably lower.

Every provider has a somewhat different pricing structure. Most offer a base plan price and an additional fee for each line (or extension) and each add-on feature not available in the core feature set. Pricing-related questions to ask:

- Does the provider require setup fees?
- Beyond the agreed-to monthly fee, will there be other recurring monthly charges?
- Which features are included in the plan and which require an additional fee?
- If I call internationally, what calling rates should I expect?
- Does the provider require contracts? And if not, is there a fee to cancel?

While traditional providers most often require contracts, most hosted VoIP providers do not require term contracts for basic plans. The business phone system shopper should always consider value alongside price. While the lowest price may be most attractive, a quality system that's priced slightly higher and provides better features, service, and return on investment may be worth more to the business in the long run.

Vonage Business offers several business plan options, with pricing that is at least 30% less than traditional providers and no annual contracts or cancellation fees required.* Also, with the system's robust built-in feature set, its consistent reliability, and its on-call customer and tech support teams, many customers find our system to be the best value in the industry.

5.

The ability of a phone system to scale as the business grows should be a consideration for any aspiring business, so ask about it up front.

HOW WILL MY PHONE SYSTEM GROW WITH MY BUSINESS?

Successful businesses expect to grow and their business phone system must easily expand with it. Sometimes businesses simply need new business phone features to support new initiatives or service offerings. In either case, it's good to know up front how well your phone system will scale to meet ongoing needs.

Traditional on-premise systems are notoriously inflexible, often requiring a billable technician visit just to add a new feature or phone line. Most hosted VoIP providers, on the other hand, can add features and business lines virtually since their PBX is hosted in the cloud and not on premise at the business – and this certainly saves time and money. The ability of a phone system to scale as the business grows should be a consideration for any aspiring business, so ask about it up front.

The Vonage system scales easily with business needs. In fact, since the system can be easily managed through an online Admin Portal, many customers choose to add new business lines or features themselves. Or, they can always contact a Customer Care representative directly for assistance.

Customer and System Support

6.

Business owners should certainly look closely at the level of service offered by each provider and factor it into the purchase decision.

WHAT IF I NEED CUSTOMER OR TECHNICAL SUPPORT?

Most small to mid-sized businesses don't have an IT staff, and even if they do, maintaining the phone system is usually not a staff function. SMBs usually lean on their phone provider for this, and the fact is that customer and technical support can differ greatly from provider to provider. First, remember that traditional providers most often build their PBX in the customer's office, so there is a great deal of equipment to maintain over time (and troubleshoot onsite as needed). Customers may call, for example, if service is down – or if they wish to add a new calling feature – and a technician visit is scheduled to complete the work on location. Billing for these visits will vary from carrier to carrier.

Hosted VoIP providers, on the other hand, manage their systems virtually. Their feature-enabling PBX is hosted in the cloud, so service calls are managed without the need for a technician visit. And generally, service issues can be resolved much more quickly and efficiently. Many hosted VoIP solutions are easily self-managed, too, giving customers the option of accessing or requesting new features directly from an online Admin Portal.

Some providers also offer support websites and training tools to help customers self-manage and become more fluent with their system. Still, many customers prefer to interact directly with a representative, so some providers commit to staffing live, on-call customer and tech support teams. Business owners should certainly look closely at the level of service offered by each provider and factor it into the purchase decision.



Vonage Business offers in-house customer support from its Atlanta headquarters.

7.

Hosted systems operate in data centers with redundant power and cooling, and remain in operation even when the customer's location is out of commission.

8.

It is now quite common for small and mid-sized businesses to migrate all their business systems to the cloud, including their business phone system.

Vonage Business staffs a large and knowledgeable in-house team of customer care and technical professionals, available every workday as well as after hours and weekends for emergency service. Also, customers can always consult our robust support website for best practice advice and videos, and troubleshooting tips. New customer orientation and Admin Portal training are also recommended for new customers.

System Reliability

WHAT MAKES A SYSTEM RELIABLE?

In the simplest terms, reliability refers to customers having continuous access to their phone system. In today's marketplace, most providers have dramatically improved their overall reliability, particularly hosted VoIP providers.

With traditional premise-based solutions, situations like downed telephone lines, fire, flood, theft or technical glitches can all compromise reliability.

Hosted systems operate in data centers with redundant power and cooling, and remain in operation even when the customer's location is out of commission. Also, many hosted VoIP providers have solutions in place to guard against local events such as Internet or power outages.

Vonage Business runs multiple, redundant call-handling clusters in data centers across the country with systems and protocols that consistently produce 99.999% uptime. Additionally, in the event of power outages or loss of Internet, our patent-pending Call Continuity feature enables the phone system to automatically re-route calls to a cell phone or other number.

IS MY INFORMATION SECURE?

Whether system communications flow over traditional copper wires through an on-premise PBX – or over the Internet through a cloud-hosted PBX – businesses are advised to be conscious of system security. Fortunately, today's top business phone providers are invested in ongoing efforts to maintain superior security and deliver solutions that customers use with confidence.

It wasn't long ago, for example, that businesses considered "the cloud" an emerging technology with the need to prove its viability. Cloud security has always been a priority, but today's businesses maintain an unprecedented level of confidence in the cloud due to ongoing advancements and a more involved and educated business community. It is now quite common for small and mid-sized businesses to migrate all their business systems to the cloud, including their business phone system.

Top hosted VoIP providers, especially, go to great lengths to ensure that their offerings are well protected. While no solution may be 100 percent secure, hosted VoIP systems with the proper encryption and protocols can actually be more secure than traditional wire-based systems. As a part of the commitment to security, some providers also insist on developing and maintaining their own technology, instead of accessing it from a third party.

Ask providers about their approach to security and what protocols they have in place to ensure an efficient and secure experience.

Vonage Business actively develops its own technology and maintains a proprietary cloud platform that is considered among the most secure in the industry.

GETTING STARTED

9.

HOW LONG DOES IT TAKE TO SET UP A NEW PHONE SYSTEM?

As one might guess, equipment-heavy copper-wire systems take longer to install because most providers build their system PBX on premise at the customer business (the familiar “closetful of wires”). Most often, these traditional providers first require a contract be put in place, followed by a scheduled installation and service setup. The process can take weeks.

With hosted VoIP solutions, there is really no installation involved, so it is actually possible for service to be set up the same day.

- Customers must have a high-speed Internet connection and IP phones to allow service.
- Phones are most often purchased from the provider and preconfigured before shipping to work on the system. (If the customer already has IP phones, the provider can reconfigure them to work on the new system.)
- Once phones arrive – or existing phones are reconfigured – the customer notifies the provider when ready to initiate service and simply plugs the phones into the Internet connection to activate the system.

With efficient hosted VoIP systems, the customer is in control of when service is initiated, so there is seldom any downtime required when leaving an old system and transitioning to a new one.

It is common for new customers to request service as soon as possible, and the Vonage team is trained to consult and recommend an appropriate plan, assist with ordering phones and porting phone numbers as needed, and set up the customer account – all within the course of a phone call.

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Making the Easy Switch

Adopting our business phone system is as easy as 1-2-3

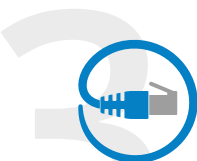


Consult with a Vonage VoIP specialist

Size up our solution for your business and get a quote.



Order your VoIP phones (or we'll reconfigure your current VoIP phones)



Plug into high-speed Internet and enjoy a boost of business efficiency and savings.

WHAT ABOUT ONBOARDING AND TRAINING?

There's nothing like starting strong. When shopping for a new phone system, ask providers about their onboarding process and how your team can become familiar with the system quickly. A few issues worth inquiry:

- **Number Porting.** New customers wishing to transfer an existing phone number(s) to a new system should expect their new provider to handle this "porting" task for them. Porting is completed with the customer's signed approval and requires the new provider to work directly with the former provider. It usually takes anywhere from one to four weeks to complete, so some VoIP providers will issue temporary phone number(s) to their new customer until the old number is ported successfully.
- **Account and Billing Setup.** Providers should be able to accomplish this setup immediately and most will also provide online access to all billing and account details.
- **Training.** Ask about the materials customers should expect when signing on, and whether any virtual training is available.
- **Online Support.** Many providers will offer online support resources that customers can access at any time. Resources may range from system and feature details, to how-to and feature-installation videos. VoIP providers tend to offer particularly good online resources, since their systems are more easily self-managed by the customer.

Vonage Business assigns an Onboarding Team to each new customer account, charged with making the transition as smooth as possible. A Welcome Kit and User Guide is delivered upon signup, new customer orientation and Admin Portal training are offered right away, and a comprehensive support website and Knowledgebase library are available at all times.

READY FOR A BETTER BUSINESS PHONE SOLUTION?

The business phone landscape has changed forever, so it's a particularly good time for business owners to shop around and learn about the solutions available. In many cases, they'll discover new features that truly help organizations compete – and pricing that is more efficient than ever. It pays to ask questions, to carefully compare offerings, and ultimately, to discover the solution and the provider that best fits the business.

We trust this Buyers Guide is useful in your journey to find a business phone solution that best fits your organization. If you wish to explore the Vonage business further, we encourage you to contact a representative:

877-862-2562 | business.vonage.com