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Your Guide to Finding a New Business Phone System

Navigate the options and make the **right choice** for your business

Thinking about updating your phone system? The options can be overwhelming, especially since businesses frequently wait up to 10 years between system upgrades.

But the communications landscape is changing. Many phone systems are becoming obsolete as manufacturers no longer support legacy equipment. And with the growing need for collaboration and unified communications, a basic phone system just isn't enough.

These days, a phone system is much more than a phone. It provides unified messaging, mobility, chat, conferencing and collaboration. But business leaders face a number of challenges:

- Should you stay with an on-premises system or move to the cloud?
- Should you manage the solution yourself or work with a trusted third-party provider?
- Should you consider a hybrid approach that blends your legacy equipment with cloud-based services?

Fortunately, other businesses face the same challenges and there is help ahead. Finding a phone system isn't just about meeting your hardware needs, but also about finding a system that will improve the overall experience and boost employee productivity.

This guide will help you find those answers.

Follow these **six steps** to determine the right phone system for your business needs.

Step 1

Who will use the phone system?

It may seem straightforward, but it's important to take a step back and determine how your organization communicates. Who will be using the phone system and where are they located? Do employees share desks? Are there multiple office locations and remote workers on payroll? Are there users who primarily work on their mobile devices and alternate their time between the office and working remotely?

In most cases, your user base will fall into two camps: internal users (your employees), and external users (your customers and contractors).

Internal users

Solicit feedback from the people who interact with your phone system most frequently. Get input from staff, both technical and nontechnical. Ask them what's working with the current system and what's not. Consider remote workers, power users and occassional users.

External users

Ask your customers, partners and vendors about their experience contacting your business. Are they able to reach your staff easily? Are dropped calls an issue? Are customers looking for other ways to contact you beyond voice? Also, assess what your competitors are doing.

Size and flexibility

You don't want to invest in a system that you'll quickly outgrow, nor do you want to pay for more users than currently exist. The key is finding balance with a system that can grow in lock-step with the business. You'll want to understand how each potential supplier accommodates upsizing requirements.

Customization is possible. With so many features available on advanced phone systems, it's important to determine your specific needs. What are your mobility and team collaboration needs? Do you want audio, web and video conferencing? While you don't need to pay for options you won't use, it's better to grow into a system's features than regret their absence.

Step 2

Select options to elevate the user experience

Based on the needs of your internal and external users, consider some of these capabilities for your new phone system:

Hot desking

If employees are sharing desks, it may be more convenient to have a pool of phones shared by multiple employees. Hot desking allows users to enter an access code into any phone on the system and automatically access personalized phone settings and voicemail.

Contact center

This directs callers to the right person the first time they call. System administrators can build queues to help distribute calls and messages including voice calls, emails, chat and SMS. These can be routed and reported on to allow customers to communicate in the manner of their choosing. Recording calls and using screen capture can assist in coaching, compliance, and quality management.

Remote teleworking

For businesses with teleworkers, the same in-office experience can be provided at a remote location using a desk phone, softphone or mobile device.

Twinning

This allows a user to apply their phone number and features to their desk phone and their mobile device at the same time, allowing for seamless handoffs between the two devices — ensuring call continuity whether in the office or on the go.

Audio and Web conferencing

Most phone systems include an audio conferencing feature, which allows users to join more than two phone lines on a call. But users are looking for better ways to collaborate that go beyond audio conferencing. Advanced phone systems include the capability for video and web conferencing.

Unified messaging

Voicemail, email and text messages are accessible from a single interface with unified messaging. They can be accessed via an application on a user's mobile device, desk phone or computer. Taking it a step further, collaboration tools can provide internal and external communications streams to store and share information and correspondence.

Team collaboration

This is the next evolution in chat and conferencing, with voice, instant messaging, screen sharing, file sharing and audio/video conferencing in a single cloud application that integrates with business applications.

Presence

This is a status indicator for each employee in the system, displaying which communication method is available for a particular user at any given moment. For instance, if a user sees that the person she needs to speak with is on the phone, she may choose to message him instead.

Leverage existing applications

With an open integration gateway, you can seamlessly connect with third-party apps or customer relationship management (CRM) systems such as Salesforce.com, Google, and many others. This gateway provides a simple user interface and screen pops, providing faster, more effective communications to employees, customers and partners.

Step 3

Improving Business Impact

When making the decision to upgrade your phone system, consider your overall business goals. Why are you looking to replace your existing phone system? Is your legacy system in danger of being discontinued? Or do you want to leverage new capabilities and advanced technologies as part of a digital transformation initiative?

Consider how a new phone system will help you achieve those goals and provide meaningful business impact.

- How can I improve the customer experience?
- How can I make staff more efficient?
- How can I make better use of existing IT resources?
- How can I improve collaboration?
- How am I moving toward digital transformation, artificial intelligence and the Internet of Things?
- How can I use technology to increase top-line revenue, improve the bottom line and increase yield?

Once you've listed your goals, you can assess how a new phone system can help you achieve them. An upgrade can positively impact each of these categories:

Budget

Your budget will play a role in the choice you make. But even with a limited budget, consider working with a partner who can help transition your infrastructure over time (rather than investing immediately in a new system or doing a full system migration). Hybrid solutions can help you phase in a new system while you phase out the old one, minimizing downtime and reducing budgetary issues.

Capital expenditure vs. operating expense

On-premises solutions are capital heavy, require a high up-front cost, and often require frequent hardware maintenance and software license and update fees. In contrast, Cloud solutions have minimal initial investment in assets, with a predictable monthly cost model that can scale as needed. A cloud model is more flexible than an on-premises solution. Flexibility is an especially attractive feature for growing businesses.

Customer experience

Customers want to interact with businesses and brands in a number of ways — not just voice. And they expect an immediate response. Consider how your new phone system could better serve customers using different channels of communication, such as email, chat, SMS, and AI.

Technical support

Many telecom equipment manufacturers are no longer supporting their legacy phone systems. If products have reached their end-of-life, support can be spotty or non-existent. How much longer will you be able to support your legacy system?

Interoperability

If you're considering upgrading a portion of your network or moving to a hybrid cloud solution, consider whether your on-premises components will work well with the newer technology.

Integration

Many organizations have disparate systems across multiple locations or branch offices that don't communicate with each other, which slows communication and impairs collaboration. Consider if it makes sense to integrate these systems with a central hub that can seamlessly manage your telecommunications traffic — without compromising quality or productivity.

Mobility

If you have multiple offices, employees who travel regularly or staffers who work remotely, your phone system requires flexibility. Consider looking for a phone system that integrates with the mobile devices your employees are already using. Some desk phones have the ability to twin with a mobile phone, right from the base.

Business continuity

No organization can afford unplanned downtime due to severe weather or other unexpected events. Consider how a cloud solution can provide business continuity and disaster recovery, where your data is remotely backed up in secure third-party data centers.

Evolving business needs

More employees are using their personal mobile devices instead of their desk phone, particularly teleworkers, remote employees and field technicians. Consider whether your current system supports mobility, as well as features such as presence, unified messaging and team collaboration.

Step 4

Choose a deployment model

Once you've determine your business pain points, the essential features and your budget, it's time to determine the infrastructure and deployment model that best suits your needs.

There are three basic types of infrastructure for your phone system: on-premises, cloud-based and hybrid. Each has its benefits and challenges.

On-premises phone systems

With an on-premises solution, your entire phone system is housed on your organization's premises and your staff maintains the network. Some organizations prefer this model because they want to maintain control over all their voice and data. A full system purchase is also a one-time investment, but also requires frequent hardware and software maintenance charges.

To maintain this network, however, you need to plan ahead to allow for future growth. You'll also need to have the right IT staff in place who are capable of maintaining the network. Some organizations have a complete in-house IT team, while others will rely on their communications service providers to help throughout the process.

Since payroll is costly and staff turnover can lead to knowledge leaving the company from time to time, it can be beneficial to leverage both your existing staff and trusted outsourced support.

Also consider that many manufacturers are taking this option off the table, discontinuing products and support.

Cloud-based phone systems

Business communications needs have changed — and so has the way we buy. Cloud-based phone systems use a dedicated or shared Internet connection for one or more locations, reducing telecommunications costs by delivering calls over the Internet. You pay only for extensions being used, while reducing the need for technical support staff and eliminating long-distance contracts.

With cloud, you can buy a basic phone system and add extensions — for new users, remote workers and contract employees — as well as new features and capabilities as your organization grows. It's also secure, since the equipment sits in a secure third-party data center, maintaining privacy and uptime. And you don't have to worry about capital expenditures or system upgrades; it's a monthly subscription fee with ongoing support.

Public vs Private: With public cloud, your cloud provider manages all hardware and software, and offers flexibility, scalability and minimal capital expenditures. For businesses with strict data regulations, such as healthcare and financial services, private cloud uses dedicated hardware and software for an added layer of security.

Hybrid phone systems

Hybrid phone systems combine the benefits of on-premises and cloud phone systems. With a hybrid system, critical hardware remains on-site to support analog devices, to act as a fail over point for IP devices, and to offer an alternate voice route to a second carrier in the event of an outage. Your main applications, call control, and SIP trunks remain in the cloud. A hybrid system can offer flexibility, scalability, and cost savings since it continues to use your existing infrastructure. A solutions engineer can help you design and implement a hybrid system that works for your business.

Step 5

Choose a solution

When choosing the partner and solution to move forward with, keep in mind a few points that will steer you in the right direction:

1. Setup and support

Find out who will install the system and provide support for technical issues, and if your vendor offers training and support. Get an itemized list of maintenance and service fees and find out if the phone manufacturer offers support for the hardware.

2. Aesthetics and ergonomics

The design of the user interface is important. Will employees (and customers) find them easy to use? Do they come with cordless headsets, touchscreens or full-color displays?

3. Mobility

Look for a phone system that integrates with the mobile devices your employees are already using. You'll also need the right flexibility to handle requirements of multiple offices and remote workers.

4. Reputation and reliability

Get the best product from a reputable manufacturer. Seek out user references from businesses like yours to ask about warranties, service agreements and costs, and read reports from third parties like Gartner and Forrester.

5. Evolution and innovation

Digital transformation is affecting all parts of business. Find a vendor who can keep up with innovations in cloud communications, collaboration and mobile so they'll be a reliable long-term partner.

Finding the right solution with Zayo

At Zayo, there are **many solutions available for businesses of all sizes**. Your Zayo representative will **review your business needs, objectives and technical setup**. They can then explore the right solution options to fit your business.

Collaboration

With the right collaboration tools, employees spend less time trying to connect and more time engaged in productive communications. Teams can keep up with projects, stay connected with colleagues and share ideas across business silos — and extend that capability to clients and partners.

Unified communications tools can provide employees with a single application for voice, video, messaging, presence, audio conferencing, mobility and team collaboration, with a communications experience that's consistent across all devices.

On-premises solutions

Get support for five to tens of thousands of users, with ultimate flexibility for growing businesses and specific deployment needs — whether distributed, centralized or public cloud. Get collaboration, contact center or workgroup solutions for multiple agents with easy monitoring, managing and routing of calls.

Cloud solutions

Get support for your entire business or enterprise team along with flexibility and support to add new users and features as your business grows. Integrating the platform with your contact center can deliver a superior customer experience by linking customers and data in real time. You may also integrate with a number of business applications such as Salesforce.

Private unified communications cloud solutions can also reduce the costs, people power and complication of managing your communications on site with a service that manages it all — phones, voice, collaboration, installation and ongoing support — in the cloud. Receive high availability with a distinct dedicated unified communications instance isolated from other customers, along with proactive monitoring in an environmentally controlled data center. Business continuity is built in, with the ability to redirect calls to mobile devices during an outage so you never miss important calls.

Step 6

Implement

Now that you've considered all your options, it's time to make a selection and get your new system in place. Take the time to follow a proper implementation process that will avoid costly mistakes, get employees on board and gain positive attention from executive management.

Follow these implementation steps:

1. Notify staff

Tell employees in advance that a new phone system is on its way and that they'll receive training and support. With proper advanced communications, they'll be better prepared for the change.

2. Take inventory of the delivery

Go through all of the equipment, including cables and peripherals, to make sure you received the full order and have everything you need to get started. Depending upon the service ordered, Zayo will be on-site to assist with this step.

3. Ensure internal adoption

Depending upon the scope of the implementation, select a small group of internal evangelists to advocate for the new system and answer users' questions. Depending upon the service ordered, Zayo will be available to assist with internal adoption as well.

4. Train users

Once your vendor installs the system, provide staff with professional training. Group training can provide an overview of the system and basic features, while individual training can get more granular. Give everyone a cheat sheet with instructions for common actions and settings.

5. Celebrate success

Give yourself a pat on the back and then set up a gathering with your team to pat everyone on the back. Then start planning your next major project.

The Zayo Difference

Even if you have the best phone system money can buy, it won't deliver business value if it's not installed properly or users aren't trained properly. Whether dealing with legacy on-premises equipment or moving data into the cloud, today's advanced phone systems can be complicated to design and deploy.

At Zayo, we don't limit our assessment of your business needs to a quick phone call, and just ship you product. Instead, we can offer a high-touch, personalized installation and support model, where we consult with you on business strategy and improving the bottom line.

Depending upon the service ordered, Zayo provides on-site project coordination, installation, and testing. We can also provide on-site user training and support for a seamless transition — and near-instant productivity improvements.

Zayo will customize a solution to fit your specific business needs. We provide ongoing support, and we can even manage the cloud voice solution for you.

About Zayo

For more than 15 years, Zayo has empowered some of the world's largest and most innovative companies to connect what's next for their business. Zayo's future-ready network spans over 16.5 million fiber miles and 141,000 route miles. Zayo's tailored connectivity and edge solutions enable carriers, cloud providers, data centers, schools, and enterprises to deliver exceptional experiences, from core to cloud to edge.

Connect what's next for your business.

Learn more at zayo.com
Contact us with questions