

A CIO's Guide:
Why it makes sense to evaluate
a cloud-based phone system



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The evolution of cloud-based phone systems has crossed the technology chasm. More and more companies are adopting voice over IP and reaping the benefits of decreased costs, increased functionality, and ease of administration.

Clearly, it is well worth an IT executive's time to evaluate cloud phone technology from sheer cost-savings alone, but reliability is also mission-critical when it comes to communications infrastructure. And making a technology change is almost always a challenge—in any company.

Why does it now make sense to evaluate traditional phone systems against cloud-based ones? Below are some factors to consider.

Cost

Cloud-based phone systems are typically more economical than traditional phone systems. One of the primary reasons is traditional phone providers have a huge infrastructure investment. Cloud phone systems take advantage of an infrastructure that is already built—the Internet. And these hosted systems come with lots of open source and open network solutions already in place. Typical customers who switch from traditional phone systems report up to 65 percent savings.

Maintaining a traditional PBX phone system usually requires internal staff or an IT contractor to ensure uptime, manage configurations, and troubleshoot issues as they arise. On the other hand, when a cloud-based or hosted system is updated, you are instantly updated. No technical work is required from your end. Since all updates and upgrades happen automatically, you are freed from having to hire staff to maintain the system.

The potential additional cost of a cloud-based system is new phone hardware. However, there are alternatives, such as an SIP trunking solution. This allows the VoIP signal to travel through the PBX into a digital gateway, which converts the signal to analog or PSDN. This enables you to keep your existing phone hardware, which makes it less expensive to switch from a traditional phone system to VoIP, if you already have significant investment in phone hardware.

Reliability

The reliability of your PBX phone system depends on its proprietary hardware, software, and subsequent upgrades. With VoIP, reliability depends on the stability of your network. If you have a solid network in place, your cloud-based phone system will also be solid. If you need to upgrade your network to ensure you are capable of supporting VoIP, you will end up creating a better network—everybody wins. The key to reliability is to manage the configuration, which is done on the front end by your VoIP provider.



If you are worried about the reliability of VoIP, ask yourself: How many times has the Internet actually gone down? In today's world, rarely or never. The Internet is no longer new technology. It is reliable, proven, and tested—every single day.

Of course, if the Internet at your office goes down, your phones are going to go down. But because the VoIP platform resides in hosted data centers in various geographies, your phone numbers don't go down. Your auto attendants don't go down. Your voicemail doesn't go down. And you can set up your system to automatically transfer calls to ring on your cell phones in the event of unexpected downtime. Even traditional PBX phone systems do not handle an outage as elegantly and effectively as VoIP.



Security is not really any different in the VoIP world than with traditional phones. Your voice over IP phones are communicating with cloud-based data centers back and forth over the Internet. All platforms are fully redundant, leveraging multiple data centers that utilize tier-1 hardware. Most companies, large and small, have already invested in securing their Internet connection. Assuming you have configured your firewalls correctly, your exposure to security threats isn't increased by using VoIP technology for phone calls.

Change Is Easier Than You Think

Finding and implementing the latest and greatest technology is challenging enough, but humans are creatures of habit.

It can be more difficult to change a larger company over to VoIP because of the possibility of more resistance to change, especially if people are comfortable with what they have. But if you demonstrate to your user base, most of whom simply need to make phone calls, that their life will not be any different, and they will actually get more features than the old system, it might help lessen their resistance.

Making a call from a traditional phone is no different than making a call from a VoIP phone. The learning curve for traditional phone advanced features is the same as VoIP advanced features with one big difference: customer support. With good VoIP providers, you simply call support if you run into a snag. Or view video training online. Or access a web portal. Historically, customer support from traditional phone providers has been very poor. Therefore, some VoIP providers have made customer support their number one priority. This makes the change from a traditional system that much easier.

Most people are already using VoIP technology—they just don't know it. If your phone service is from a cable company you are using VoIP. Because people are wary of the term, cable companies don't call it VoIP. The same goes for 4G cell phones and networks; they are primarily leveraging voice over IP as well. These facts might help make your user base more comfortable with the technology switch.

A New Look

VoIP technology has changed and improved right along with the Internet. It is a stable, reliable, and secure platform. Companies of all sizes should consider the immense economic advantages and the robust feature set found in VoIP technology.



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