How Good Are Hosted VoIP Providers at Customer Service?

3 Questions to Ask

Introduction

Before you pay for a service vital to connecting you and your customers, like Hosted VoIP, you have a right to know what to expect—the standard to which you can hold your provider. But in this day and age of complex sales processes, these important standards can get lost in the mire of technical details, scheduling, and other considerations.

Don't get stuck in a situation where you wished you'd asked more questions before buying into a service.

On the following pages, find three must-ask questions your provider should be able to field before you get to any contracts, implementation schedules, or anything else.

Hosted VoIP in a Nutshell

Voice over Internet Protocol (or VoIP) transmits calls digitally, usually along Internet connections rather than through the Public Switched Telephone Network (PSTN).

Hosted VoIP means that the hardware, servers, and services are hosted and managed at an off-site location (i.e., at the provider). While the technology is sound, a successful implementation without a hitch will require top-notch support from your provider.
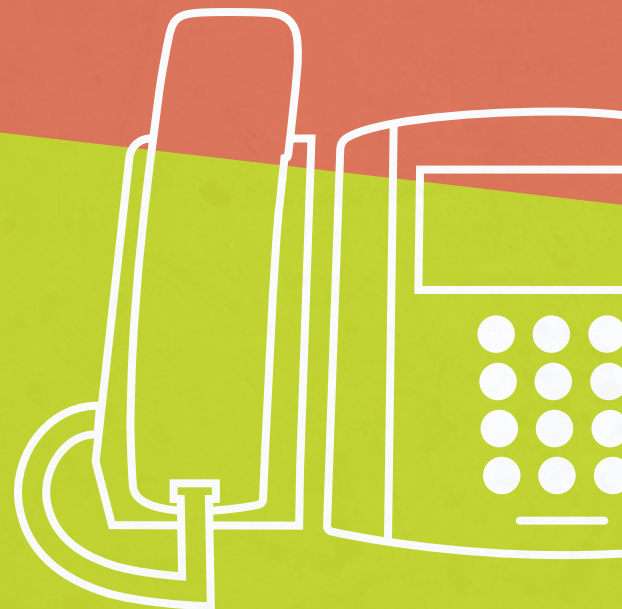
1. "What kind of support can I expect during setup?"

Some sales reps will promise you the moon when it comes to customer service. But they aren't the ones who will be delivering on those promises, so it's important to know who your go-to contact will be when you have questions or run into issues.

When talking to a Hosted VoIP provider, **ask if they provide a single point of contact.** A single point of contact is the one person who's in charge of taking care of you, not the department that "should be able to get you in touch with someone."

Having a single point of contact means not getting shuffled around from one agent to another. It means not having to figure out which of your vendor's departments to dial. Your contact takes care of that for you. This person becomes your manager, your advocate, and your lifeline.

To start with, your contact should coordinate all efforts during your migration to the new system, including:

Telephone number ordering and porting

Fax number ordering and porting

Data circuit provisioning

Hardware procurement

System specification and design

Telecom legal authorization

Approval documentation

hello?

2. "Once I'm up and running, who will take care of me as a customer?"
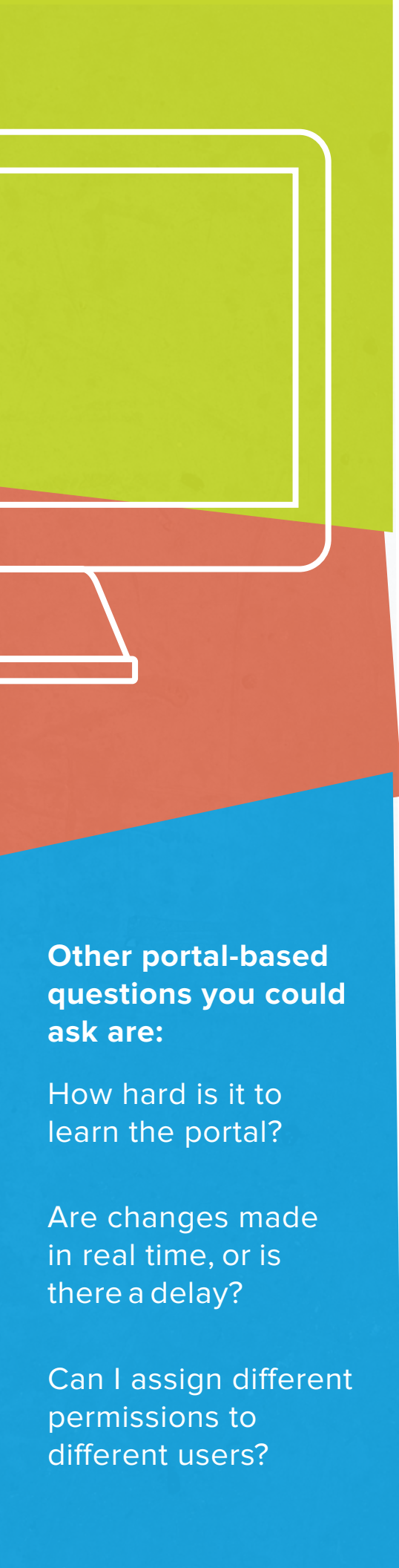
Because a Hosted VoIP solution comes loaded with powerful, customized features, you'll get more business value out of a system you learn to really leverage. For this reason, you need someone who will be there when you need help, someone who enables you to utilize the powerful tools available to you.

This person is key because the value they add through their experience with system features can save you hours and days of do-it-yourself tutorials, manual reading, and trial and error. The best business tools can't help you unless you know how to fully use them.

Ask what kind of response you'll get when you call technical support. Is it a machine? A call center employee? Or someone with a working knowledge of your Hosted VoIP service?

Look over the provider's service-level agreement. It should spell out how that provider prioritizes problems and what response times you can expect.

Ask your provider if tech support is available 24/7. Phone issues don't just pop up during typical nine-to-five hours, and when your phones are on the fritz, you can't afford to wait overnight to receive technical help. An attentive VoIP provider will offer reliable around-the-clock care and easy access to technical-support experts.

3. "Will I be dependent on the support team to make changes, or can I make them on my own?"

This question is critical because it gets right at the heart of the technology you're purchasing. Does it drain your time and resources? Or does it free you up and help propel your business goals forward?

Many phone services require the help of a customer care rep or a technician to perform any moves, adds, or changes (MACs). You can expect to spend time on the phone, filling out online request forms, and sometimes even paying extra service charges, all so you can make a routine change to your system.

The problem is, when you need to accommodate a growing business, you can't afford to wait for someone else to make necessary changes to your system. That's where your Hosted VoIP provider can help. A hosted solution removes many of the phone-system concerns you don't want (like servers, maintenance, upgrades, etc.) while granting you easy access to phone-system settings you do want. Hosted VoIP providers usually give customers these options through a web-based management portal. And the portal is often easy to master, even if you're not that technically skilled.

When you demo a provider's management portal, pay attention to what features and functions you can access and update. These can include: call routing, wait times, holiday and closed schedules, auto attendants, voicemail boxes, sound clips, ring groups, and more.

Other portal-based questions you could ask are:

How hard is it to learn the portal?

Are changes made in real time, or is there a delay?

Can I assign different permissions to different users?

Conclusion

You can learn a lot about a vendor from how they treat their customers. Armed with the right questions, you can better vet Hosted VoIP providers. Of course these questions aren't intended as a complete list. They're only intended as a springboard as you determine which Hosted VoIP providers offer the level of support that suits your organizations' needs. By making sure you're working with a provider who sees customer service as a top priority, you can better leverage the full benefits a Hosted VoIP solution has to offer.

Customer Support Findings

You can't put a price tag on good customer service or technical support. Various surveys have found:

89%

26%

55%
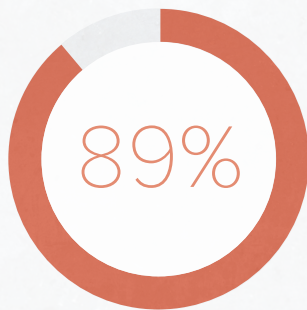
89% of consumers have stopped doing business with a company after a poor customer service experience.

RightNow Customer Experience Impact Report

26% have experienced being shuffled from one agent to the next without any resolution to their problem.

2012 Global Customer Service Barometer

55% would gladly pay more for a better customer experience.

Defaqto Research

About Jive

JIVE

Still have questions? Jive Inside Representatives are ready to talk about Jive's enterprise-grade Hosted VoIP and Unified Communications solutions. Jive's hosted services run on Jive Cloud, an open-standards, Cloud-based platform. The Jive Cloud architecture has been purpose-built to deliver the most reliable, powerful, and economical hosted communication services available to the enterprise market. For more information, or to request a demo, visit jive.com/tour.

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