The Hosted VoIP Buyer's Guide

Your business needs a new phone system.

Your customers, suppliers, partners, employees—they all expect you to have a phone system. But what kind of system is the best fit for the way your company works? It's an important question because that system impacts so many aspects of your business, like your budget, employee productivity, and customer care.

So what are you looking for?

Most companies are in the market for a modern phone system that's:

- **Affordable.** Access all the enterprise features you need without breaking the budget.
- **Mobile.** Run your business from anywhere, and empower your employees to be productive no matter where they're at.
- **Scalable.** Nothing should stifle your company's growth—especially not your phone system.
- **Professional.** Advanced voice features help deliver positive customer experiences over the phone.
- **Reliable.** With the right system, you never have to miss a call.

That modern phone system you're looking for? It's Hosted VoIP.
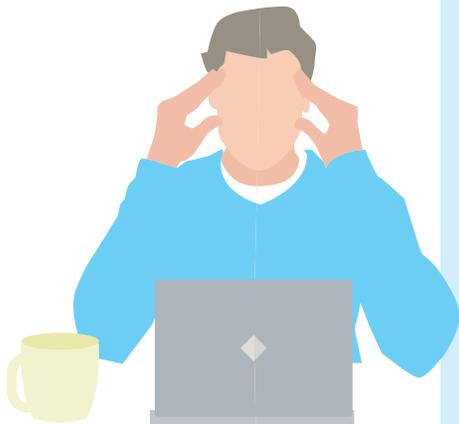
But you're busy.

The last thing you want to do is spend time picking out a phone system. But you also want to find a system that works for you, which takes effort.

That's why we created this buyer's guide, as a checklist to save you time. It outlines the steps you can take to select, test, and purchase a Hosted VoIP phone system. It also includes questions you'll want to ask during the process, and factors you'll need to consider.

Here are the steps you should take:
1. **Research.** Learn what options and features are available.
2. **Explore.** There are a lot of providers out there. You need to know how to narrow them down.
3. **Demo.** From the vendors you picked, see what system has what it takes.
4. **Purchase and Implement.** Iron out the details (there's a lot!) about buying and deploying the system.

STEP 1

Research

First, you'll want to take the lay of the land. Start by collecting the names of possible providers, especially those that look like they have specific products and services that help companies like yours. You'll want to search for:
- Hosted VoIP reviews
- Top ten Hosted VoIP vendors/providers lists
- Hosted VoIP features specific to your industry

STEP 2

Explore

Take that list of Hosted VoIP providers and pull out your red pen. This is deep-dive time, where you dig through the vendors' offerings and see if they'll get the job done. If not, strike them from your list.

Most importantly, this is the phase where you want specifics on items like:

- **Costs**
    - Do you have to sign a contract, or is the service month to month?
    - Are there pricing or service tiers?
    - What features come with each tier?
    - Will you receive any third-party billing?
    - Will they give you a quote that breaks down all their pricing?
    - Are there maintenance, licensing, and upgrade costs?
- **Features**
    - Are there startup or activation fees, or are features all-inclusive?
    - Do they offer basics like auto attendants, conference bridges, voicemail to email, Find Me/Follow Me, and call recording?
    - How easy is it to manage and set them up?
    - Do you receive new features when they become available?
    - Are updates free, or part of a service charge?
- **Mobility**
    - Do they offer a mobile app?
    - If yes, what voice features are available through it?
    - Can you make calls on your mobile device using your business number?
    - Does the mobile app cost extra?
    - Is the app available on iOS and Android?
- **Support**
    - Is support included in the price, or is that extra, too?
    - Do they offer tools to help determine if your network can handle their solution?
    - What kind of support can you expect during setup?
    - Once you're up and running, who will take care of you?
- **Reliability**
    - How many datacenters do they have?
    - Do they publish their status and uptime?
    - Will they guarantee uptime?
    - Do they have any backup options if there's an Internet outage?

Nobody's perfect, so don't be surprised if no one provider gives you 100% of what you want. The point of this step is for you to recognize which of the above items mean the most to you and to identify the vendors that check off those particular boxes. Those are the ones you'll take for a spin during the next step.

STEP 3

Demo

Invite the vendors from your narrowed list to demonstrate their product.

BEFORE the demo, you should:

- **Review your current needs.**
  - Identify any pain points introduced by your current phone system.
  - Ask employees what they'd like to see in a new phone solution.
- **Grade the incoming vendors before the demo.**
  - Base your grade on the features and services that are important to you. Grade them uniformly, such as scoring them on a scale of 1–10.

DURING the demo, don't forget to:

- **Ask questions.**
  - Don't be shy about pointing out any areas where the system falls short. Perhaps the provider has a solution in the works that'll be available by your go-live date.
  - If you haven't already, now's the time to ask about:
    - ◆ References.
    - ◆ Past deployment sizes and timeframes— how long did it take the vendor to deploy similarly-sized accounts?
    - ◆ Integration with third-party platforms you use.
    - ◆ Training—is it included in the price, or does it cost extra?
- **Observe how simple the solution is.**
  - How much training will it take to get your employees up to speed on it?
- **Identify any problems you may have with the solution.**
  - Give the vendor the chance to address them.

AFTER the demo:

- **Grade the vendor again on the same criteria you used for the first grade.**
  - This time, base it entirely on the impression you received from the demo.
- **Average your initial grade with the post-demo grade.**
  - This should help you arrive at a solid overall score for the providers.

At this point, you should have enough information to make your decision, pick a vendor, and set plans for the purchase and deployment.

STEP 4

Purchase and Implement

You've made your pick, but don't let up on your Hosted VoIP provider. They should be more than happy to answer your questions about the deployment, including:

- **Timelines**
    - How long will deployment take?
    - When is the go-live date?
- **Project management**
    - Will you get your own project or account manager to oversee installation?
    - If not, who should you contact with questions or concerns?
- **Training**
    - How is training handled?
    - Is it remote or on-site?
    - What resources, training videos, and documentation are available?
- **Number porting**
    - How long does it take?
    - Are there extra charges?
    - What happens in the meantime while the numbers are switched over?
- **Provisioning**
    - How difficult is it to program hardware like phones to function with the phone system?
    - Does the vendor offer plug-and-play hardware or zero-touch provisioning tools?

Of course you don't have to hold these questions in reserve until the purchase and implementation step. You can always whip these out during any of the previous phases.

How to Buy a Hosted VoIP Phone System Checklist

Here's a quick summary of the stages we covered and the questions we suggested for your potential phone system providers.

Step 1: Research - Collect names of possible providers below.

1.

2.

3.

Step 2: Explore - Score vendors on a scale of 1 to 10 in each category.

Score this section after demo.

Vendor Names	Cost	Features	Mobility	Support	Reliability	Pre-Score	Post-Score	Overall
1.								
2.								
3.								

Step 3: Demo - Invite vendors to demonstrate their product.

Your top 5 phone system needs (features, pain points):	1.
	2.
	3.
	4.
	5.

Vendor Names	References	Past Deployments	Integrations	Training	Problems
1.					
2.					
3.					

Take notes on the categories.

For Example: References: Yes **Past Deployments**: 2 mos. **Integrations**: Yes (Salesforce, Chrome)
Training: Remote, on-site available   **Problems**: extra charge for more than 10 voicemail boxes.

How to Buy a Hosted VoIP Phone System Checklist

Step 4: Purchase and Implement - Ask your Hosted VoIP provider about deployment.	
How long will deployment take?	
When is the go-live date?	
Who should you contact with questions?	
Is training remote or on-site?	
What training resources are available?	
How long does number porting take?	
Are there extra charges?	
Is it difficult to provision hardware?	
Plug-and-play hardware or zero-touch provisioning tools available?	

Try Jive Business Phone Systems.

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