



Hosted VoIP Buyer's Guide



Before you buy a business phone system

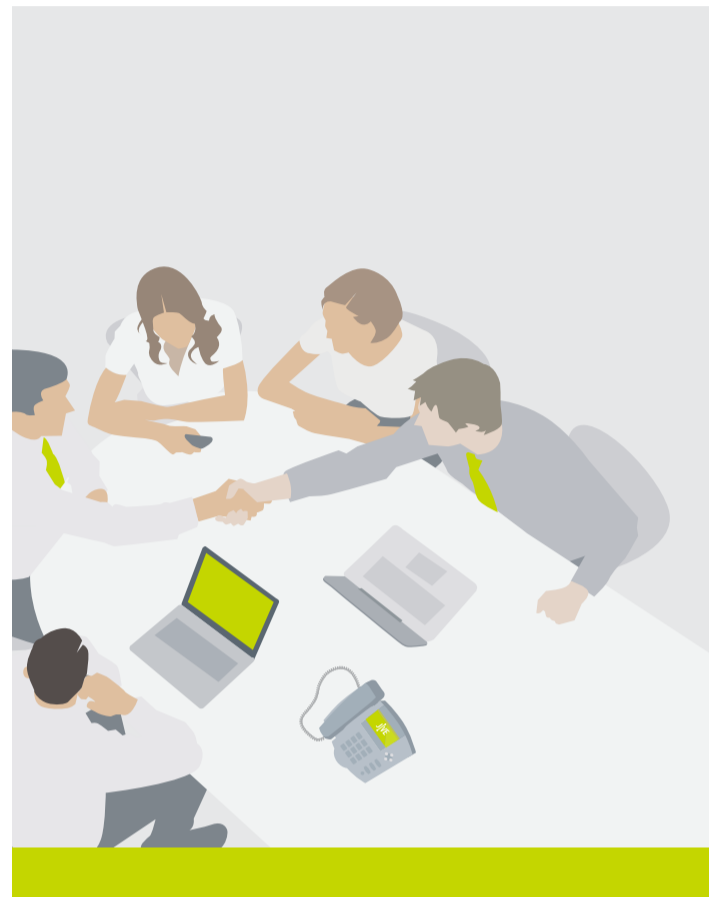
Your enterprise needs a phone system that not only matches your current business requirements—it should also grow alongside your ambitions.

Successful businesses are constantly on the move: growing, adding locations, hiring new employees. Because your phone system has such an impact on your day-to-day—from budgets to employee productivity to customer care—it should scale with your company. Don't invest your time, budget, and energy into deploying one system only to have to upgrade to another later. Choosing the right system from the start saves resources and multiplies opportunities for greater collaboration and productivity.

WHAT AN ENTERPRISE PHONE SYSTEM LOOKS LIKE

The market offers many phone system models designed for enterprises. But most midsize-to-enterprise companies require a modern phone system that functions more as an asset than a utility.

These asset phone systems are:



- **Professional.** Advanced voice features help deliver positive customer experience over the phone.
- **Mobile.** Run your business from anywhere and empower your employees to be productive no matter where they are.
- **Reliable.** With the right system, you never miss a call.
- **Scalable.** Nothing should stifle your company's growth—especially not your phone system.



THAT MODERN PHONE SYSTEM YOU'RE LOOKING FOR IS HOSTED VOIP.

This buyer's guide takes you step-by-step through the process of looking for an enterprise-grade phone system, and why Hosted VoIP is a good fit. Here's a quick preview of the steps we recommend you take as you shop for a system that fits your business needs.

1 Know your current situation.

First consider your existing infrastructure and needs.

2 Learn how Hosted VoIP works.

Why are more and more businesses selecting Hosted VoIP?

3 Assess available business phone systems.

See which system has what it takes.

4 Evaluate potential providers.

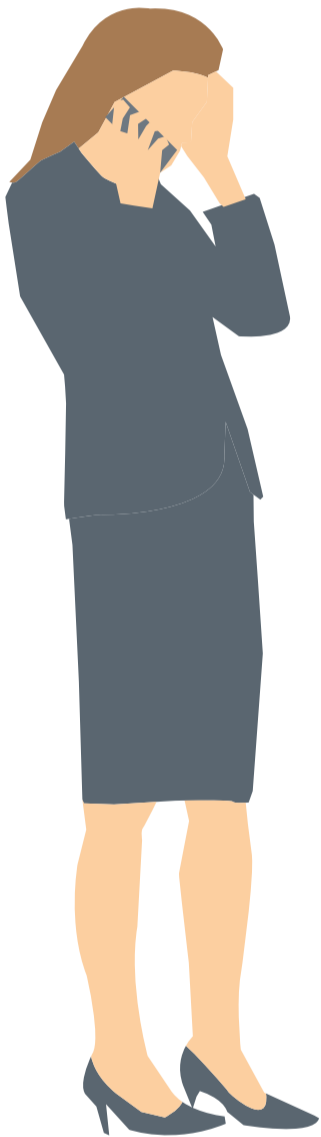
There are a lot of providers out there. Learn how to narrow them down.



#1. KNOW YOUR CURRENT SITUATION.

Start with the phone system you already have in place and ask yourself how it's serving your needs. A few questions you could ask as you evaluate your existing system include:

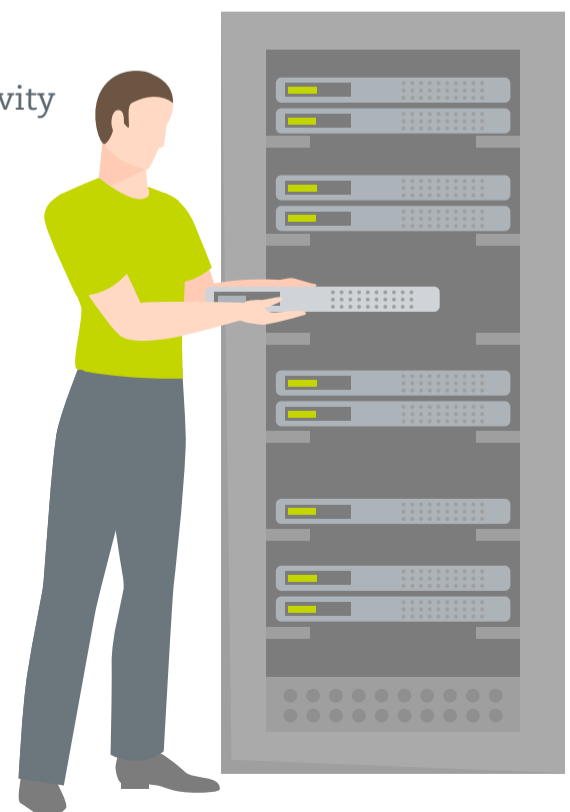
- What's it getting right?
- Where does it fall down on the job?
- What could be better? (Ask around for suggestions from other employees.)
- Does the system meet your current objectives?
- Is it helping your company meet its goals?
- What needs would a new system have to fill?
- What requirements must a new system meet?
- Are you only looking for a phone system? Or are you after a comprehensive solution? (Like video, contact center, conferencing, chat, text/SMS, desktop integration, etc.)
- How important is mobility to your company? Is it must-have or like-to-have?



#2. LEARN HOW VoIP WORKS.

After taking stock of your current phone system, it's time to look at the different systems available. Options you'll usually encounter in the telecom market include:

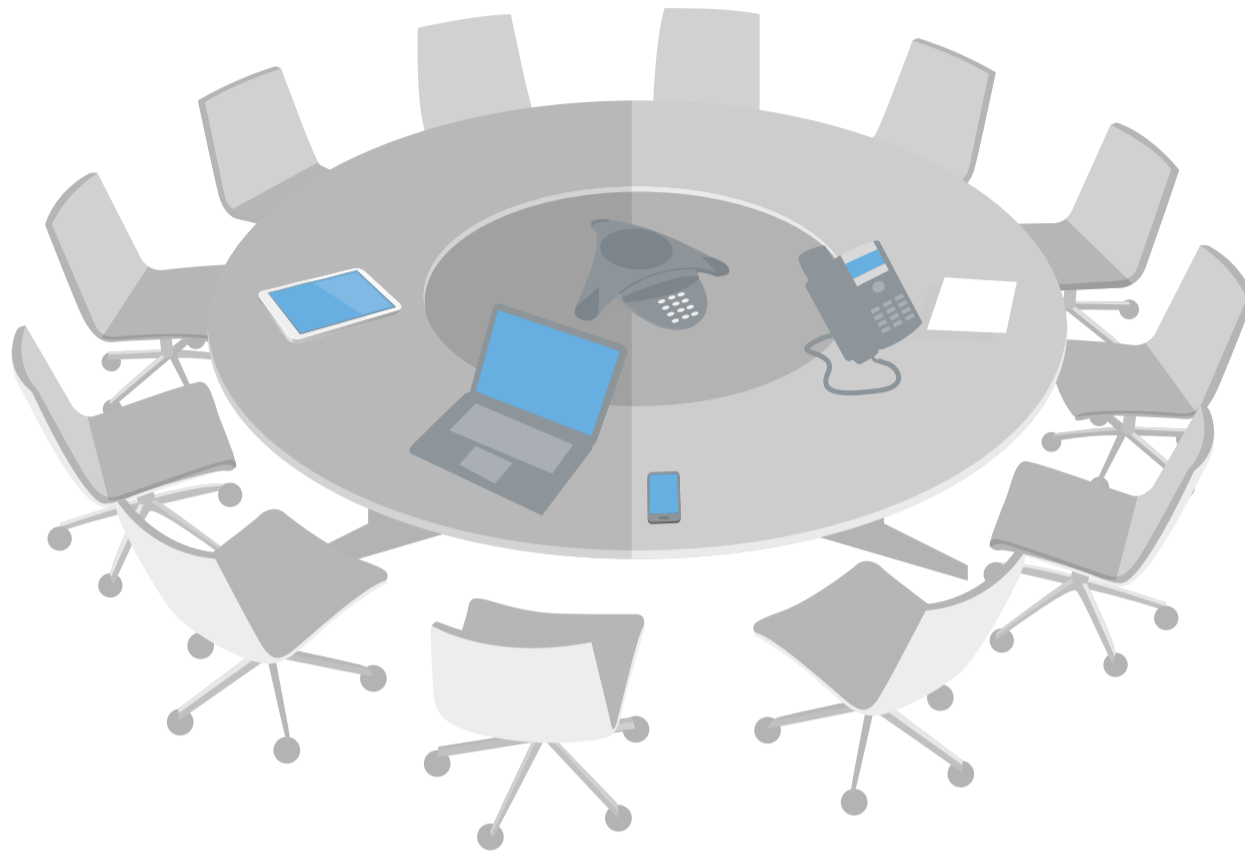
- **On premises.** For decades, on-premises solutions served as the default option for business phone systems. An on-premises (or “legacy”) system is one where your company purchases the system hardware—including servers, switches, etc—and hosts it at your office location. You are then responsible for its upkeep, as well as any maintenance or updates.
- **VoIP.** VoIP stands for Voice over Internet Protocol. It's a technology that transmits calls through data networks rather than through traditional phone lines. Businesses can purchase on-premises VoIP phone systems or cloud-based VoIP services, also known as Hosted VoIP.
- **Hosted VoIP.** A Hosted VoIP phone system foregoes most on-site equipment. The provider “hosts”—or maintains and updates—the necessary hardware and software off-site, delivering voice connectivity remotely.
- **Hybrid.** Many companies, to maintain their investment in an on-premises system while capitalizing on the advantages of a cloud-based one, combine their on-site system with a cloud-based VoIP service.





SYSTEM COMPARISON

	On-Premises	On-Premises VoIP	Hosted VoIP	Hybrid Cloud
Cost	Heavy upfront capex investment. Licensing fees and support and maintenance contracts.	High upfront capex expenditure with lower monthly rate.	Opex; low or no upfront expenditure. Predictable monthly subscription fee	Capex AND opex; company owns and maintains on-site hardware and pays monthly subscription to Cloud service.
Changes/Flexibility	Certifications and technical training required to make changes.	Easier to customize, but still requires technical expertise and hardware configuration.	Real-time changes made in online portal. No technical expertise necessary.	Changes implemented via online portal.
Security	You handle your own security.	You own the system, so security is up to you.	The provider is responsible for security.	The provider handles security in the Cloud.
Access to Features	Obsolescence leads to increasing incompatibility with modern features.	Requires hardware and software updates, which you purchase and implement.	The provider updates the system off-site, giving you automatic access to new voice features.	The state and age of your on-site system limits access to the latest features.
Scalability	Scaling requires additional hardware and time-consuming system configuration.	On-site growth is easy, but adding locations requires another system.	Simple to scale. One system easily accommodates adding locations.	Easy to scale on location. Multiple locations require an additional on-site system.
Business Continuity	Inaccessible or damaged office cuts you off from business communications.	Inability to access the office cuts you off from essential business communications.	Remote access to communications is built-in. Automatic failover to off-site numbers.	Some remote access to phone functionality. If the on-site system is damaged, your phone service goes with it.



WHY BUSINESSES CHOOSE HOSTED VOIP.

By the end of this year, the typical IT department will maintain less than half of its platforms (40 percent*) on-site, with the rest residing in the Cloud. This includes their communications platforms.

In the past, traditional on-premises platforms were seen as mere utilities, a check box enterprises had to mark off. These systems also presented a host of challenges. At the beginning, they required heavy investments in hardware and took time to deploy and configure. Once they were in place, it didn't take long before they became obsolete, isolating enterprises from recent updates and features. As they reached their end of life, these systems increasingly monopolized IT resources to keep them functional.

On-site VoIP offers similar risks, as does hybrid cloud. Only Hosted VoIP offloads the inherent risk of tech investment onto the provider while delivering greater agility, more advanced features, seamlessly scalability, and resilience to outages and natural disasters. With less risk, greater flexibility, no end-of-life for the technology, and access to advanced reporting, automation, and mobility, enterprises are free to funnel their resources away from maintaining their technology and toward outperforming competitors.

*According to Forbes.



#3. ASSESS AVAILABLE BUSINESS PHONE SYSTEMS.

Once you've decided on a Hosted VoIP system, then you should start researching providers. Throw a wide net and keep an open mind as you weigh your options.

■ Reviews

- > Search for the top names on Hosted VoIP review sites.

■ Retention

- > Once you've narrowed it down, look at retention levels. This indicates how happy customers are with their decision.

■ Pricing

- > How affordable are the providers you've picked?
- > How often do they change their rates?
- > Do they lock you into a contract, or do they offer month-to-month service?

■ 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 as they become available?
- > Are updates free or part of a service charge?

■ Security

- > How secure are their communications?
- > Do they use encryption and other security measures?

■ Quality of service and call quality

- > What do customers consistently say about the providers' call quality and the level of service they offer?

■ Onboarding and training

- > What will it take to get started with this provider?
- > Do they offer training?
- > Do they provide training materials like manuals and videos?





■ Support and customer care

- > Is support included in the price, or is that extra?
- > 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?

■ Redundancy

- > What level of redundancy do they provide?
- > How many datacenters host the solution?

■ Mobility

- > Do they offer a mobility 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 it available on iOS and Android?

■ Scalability

- > Does the provider have experience with large deployments?
- > How distributed is their customer base?
- > How easy is it to add users and locations?

■ Reliability

- > Do the providers publish their status and uptime?
- > Is there a formal service level agreement (SLA) guaranteeing uptime?

■ Costs

- > Don't be fooled by the initial estimate on a provider's webpage.
- > Find out if they have any additional charges for support, licensing, upgrades, or third-party services, etc.

■ Analytics

- > Does the provider offer any kind of call analytics and usage reports that could yield insight into staffing and service decisions?

#4. EVALUATE POTENTIAL PROVIDERS.



With all the information you've gathered, hopefully a few specific providers will stand out as good fits for your enterprise. Here's a checklist to help your finalists differentiate themselves. At this point, we recommend you visit their websites, call their sales reps, request quotes, and eventually schedule a demo or pilot with them.

Pricing quote

Request a detailed "no surprises" quote that includes all upfront charges, add-ons, third-party costs, etc.

TCO or ROI Analysis

Using the price quote, don't just look at initial or month-to-month charges. Assemble a comprehensive total cost of ownership (TCO) estimate, or a return on investment (ROI) analysis. A fair evaluation of the different providers won't give the most credit to whoever quotes the lowest price, but who provides the most value—including features, support, security, etc.

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.



IMPLEMENTATION

Before you make your final pick, press your possible vendors on deployment-phase challenges. Hosted VoIP providers should be more than happy to answer these questions:



Trial

Is there a trial period so you can sample the system without commitment?



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 end. You can always whip these out during any phase of the buying process.

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.

1. Know your current situation.			
What's your phone system getting right?			
Where does it fall down on the job?			
What could be better?			
What needs would a new system have to fill?			
What requirements must a new system meet?			
2. Your top phone system needs (features, pain points, etc.):			
1.	4.		
2.	5.		
3.	6.		
3. Collect names of possible providers below.			
1.			
2.			
3.			
4. Score vendors on a scale of 1 to 10 in each category.			
Category	Vendor 1	Vendor 2	Vendor 3
Reviews			
Retention			
Pricing			
Features			
Security			
Quality of service and call quality			
Onboarding and training			
Support and customer care			
Redundancy			
Mobility			
Scalability			
Reliability			
Costs			
Analytics			

5. How to evaluate providers:

	Vendor 1	Vendor 2	Vendor 3
Pricing Quote			
TCO or ROI analysis			
Demo - Invite vendors to demonstrate their product.			
References			
Past Deployments			
Integrations			
Training			
Problems			
<p>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.</p>			
<p>Implementation questions - Ask Hosted VoIP providers about deployment.</p>			
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

Jive Communications leads the Hosted VoIP industry in customer support and reliability. With all-inclusive features, complete control of its platform, and eleven datacenters distributed worldwide providing redundant service, Jive sets the pace for the Hosted VoIP and Unified Communications industry.

