



VoIP

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PHONE SYSTEMS
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VoIP

Internet-based phone systems
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What is VoIP?

The world of business technology is full of nifty acronyms. You're probably familiar with the ones that abbreviate MegaByte, Random Access Memory, and World Wide Web, but maybe not so familiar with the one used for Voice over Internet Protocol.

That's **VoIP**, and it falls under the far-reaching rubric of Business Telecom. More specifically, it belongs to a category we could call "Phone Systems with Enhanced Features and Functionality," which may be a bit of a mouthful, but sums up perfectly what VoIP is all about.

VoIP is a service, not a brand name. It is a telecom solution built for dynamic, fast-paced organizations in the 21st century, and is perfect for businesses that would benefit from a modern telephone system and the more professional look and feel that comes with it.

VoIP is not POTS, another acronym you may know which stands for Plain Old Telephone Service and which uses analog signalling and copper wires for voice communications. VoIP, by contrast, sends and receives calls digitally over the Internet where enhanced speed and bandwidth requirements keep call-quality crystal clear.

Finally, VoIP is a vehicle for savings and improved productivity. It is affordable, flexible, and feature-rich, and the only thing companies must do to partake of its cutting-edge functionality -- voicemail-to-email transcription, "transfer anywhere" call routing, click-of-the-mouse scalability -- is make the switch.



Switching to VoIP is Easy

Moving from a traditional phone system to an Internet-based VoIP system is a fairly straightforward process for most businesses. Especially when they've enlisted the help of an experienced telecom or IT services firm, which is usually the case.

The first thing you and your VoIP solutions provider will do is conduct a basic VoIP-readiness assessment. This is to make sure your facility meets the minimum network requirements for operating a VoIP system, and it will look into two important factors: bandwidth and another neat little acronym called SIP.

Whenever you hear the term "**Bandwidth**" nowadays, it's most likely in reference to the Internet connection you're getting from your Internet Service Provider (ISP). Emailing, uploading and downloading files, and streaming videos all require a certain amount of bandwidth to work properly -- as does making and taking phone calls over the Internet.

So having enough bandwidth is critical when using a VoIP phone system. Not only will it determine whether you can make and take calls simultaneously with your other daily Internet functions, it will ensure that the voice quality is high and is free of delays, echos, and choppiness.

Your VoIP solutions provider will make simple calculations based on how much bandwidth you receive from your ISP, how much you use in your daily operations, and how much you'll need to handle phone calls, video calls, voice messages, and all the great features VoIP provides.



Switching to VoIP is Easy

Once you've established that your facility has enough bandwidth to support a VoIP system -- which in this day and age is highly likely -- it will be time to consider **SIP**, which stands for Session Initiation Protocol and which allows VoIP phone systems to be "interoperable" with all other kinds of phone system.

In other words, SIP ensures that the actual telephones used by your employees will make calls as you'd expect them to, whether they're connecting with traditional landline phone systems or other VoIP systems.

Your VoIP provider will make all the appropriate recommendations for how your SIP network should be implemented, and at that point -- after both bandwidth and SIP have been analyzed -- the only significant issue left to assess is the phones and other hardware you'll need.

There too, your VoIP provider will have a wealth of information pertaining to hard phones (traditional desktop phones), softphones (software you'll load on your PCs to make and take calls from your computer screen), headsets, and your router.

And then it will be time to talk features.



Business Telecom Features Improved by VoIP

Phone systems aren't the most exciting things in the business world, but they do give us lots to talk about. If you're like most business owners, one topic you've probably dealt with is phone system features and whether yours make communications between your internal and external clients simple and reliable.

Many features found in traditional systems are of course also available in VoIP systems, and quite a few of those are improved upon in the latter. Take **Voicemail**, the once visionary business telecom feature that hasn't really evolved too much beyond its stated purpose of delivering spoken messages to those who have missed our calls.

But a modern VoIP system can do something with voicemail that's quite remarkable: transcribe voicemail messages and send them to an email address as text!

Another standard feature you're surely familiar with is called **Call Routing**, which is how incoming calls are distributed to certain personnel based on things like extension number, department requested, caller's language preference, and even the time of day.



Business Telecom Features Improved by VoIP

But unless you're on a VoIP system, there's little chance those calls will be routed using "Find me / Follow me" functionality. Those are actually two features: the first allows users to receive calls on a specified internet-enabled device, and the second allows them to receive calls on a "virtual number" that can be routed to multiple locations to ring simultaneously or sequentially.

And what about when you need to add new users to your phone system? If your company uses a traditional phone system, you'll have to deal with all sorts of wiring headaches and phone company proceedings, whereas with VoIP it will be as simple as opening a web browser and clicking "add user."

That's what's called **Simple Scalability**, and it's one more example of how VoIP works better -- and how, most likely, VoIP will work better for your business.



New Features Available Only to VoIP Users

Some businesses keep their landlines because they believe that its call quality is unmatched. Traditional phone systems are also perceived as highly dependable because they remain operational during a power outage. However, advances in technology have made VoIP call quality equal to -- and sometimes even better than -- that of landlines.

Others simply have a fear of the unknown. They hesitate to replace old phones out of concerns that they might set off a chain reaction of technical issues. For this and other reasons, they hesitate to switch to VoIP.

But aside from its portability and cost savings, VoIP simplifies phone systems management and offers businesses a long list of features available only to users with a VoIP setup.

If you're still on the fence about transitioning to internet telephony, consider what you could accomplish with some of these phone features:



Remote Management



Voicemail to Email



Call Conferencing



Call Duration Reports



Interactive Voice Recognition (IVR) Capability

New Features Available Only to VoIP Users



Remote Management

It's not practical for small businesses to allocate what little tech resources they have to fix problematic phone systems. Since VoIP can be managed remotely from any location with an internet connection, businesses can hand off phone management to an IT services provider or appoint a single VoIP administrator.

For many businesses, being able to simplify or outsource their phone system's management is critical to their decision to switch to VoIP. If you choose to manage your own VoIP, your designated administrator can do so from a centralized web portal, which allows your own personnel to perform updates or make changes to your system -- unlike in traditional phone systems, which uses an interface that only the service providers can configure.



Voicemail to Email

Voicemail is a useful feature for individual phone users, but it is particularly beneficial to business users that need to be accessible to clients, colleagues, and third-parties or vendors at all hours of the day.

Enhanced voicemail for VoIP, however, takes this functionality further by not only enabling users to check voicemails online, but also allowing them to read their voice messages. This can be done via a voicemail-to-email function that transcribes voicemails into text and sends it to a user's email.

New Features Available Only to VoIP Users



Call Conferencing

VoIP call conferencing is a veritable means for businesses to connect with colleagues from multiple locations and hold meetings without leaving the office, using either desktop or mobile devices. Thanks to faster internet speeds and greater availability, VoIP conference calls have become indispensable for most businesses.

VoIP has also made organizing virtual meetings a breeze. Although there have been advances on traditional phones, their features simply don't compare to what VoIP can do. With VoIP conferencing, business users can hold face-to-face meetings via video conferencing, manage call attendees, record calls, share documents and even their desktop screen during a call. Imagine doing any of these on your traditional phones.



Interactive Voice Recognition (IVR) Capability

The VoIP component of an IVR-enabled system makes it possible for businesses to create complex detailed menus that allow callers to request for services using voice commands. It is especially useful to businesses with high call volumes, but overall, it's beneficial because it automates your customer management processes.

Customers have different needs that should be addressed with as much personalization as possible. An IVR capability makes the customer service process smoother, customized, and more effective by providing the first level of assistance to your company's customer service department. If managed well, it can effectively funnel customer concerns to the right support staff and reduce instances of unnecessary calls.

New Features Available Only to VoIP Users



Call Duration Reports

One way to examine the goings-on in your office is to analyze call duration reports, which are easily accessible from a VoIP dashboard. This is particularly useful to businesses where phone calls -- whether it has something to do with client interactions, business party conversations, or personal calls -- play a role in determining productivity.

Managers can leverage data from these reports to understand call patterns and determine which employees have higher call volumes. This information can be used to measure productivity and efficiency. Finally, with call duration reports, you can determine whether there is a need to modify workflow and whether there is a need to scale phone systems or bandwidth up or down. Beyond duration, you can also analyze almost any call metric in real time with centralized dashboards and reports.





Upgrading an Existing VoIP Solution



We've already discussed the process for switching to a VoIP system, which entails nothing more than assessing your facility's readiness and finding the right service provider. But if you're reading this eBook and thinking, "Wait a minute, why doesn't my VoIP solution have all these features?" you probably need an upgrade. Here are some things you need to take into consideration:

Mobile capability

Employees of both small and large businesses need to be able to use their VoIP apps in mobile devices, such as smartphones and tablets. With a mobile-integrated VoIP system, your staff can conveniently collaborate with colleagues and get in touch with clients and third parties on the go. Needless to say, this capability is essential to companies with remote work and bring-your-own-device policies.

New cables

Newer types of cables can handle a larger volume of data and support speeds greater than 100 Mbps. Should you decide to upgrade your existing VoIP plan, make sure all your devices can handle upgrades in speed and bandwidth.

Scalability

Upgrading your current VoIP systems should also be about eliminating the necessity for moving to a new system in the future. Your current VoIP infrastructure may be able to handle your business's requirements, but will it be able to five years from now? You may not see the need to deploy high definition video streaming; but in a few months' time, it might be the norm, and your current phone facilities need to be able to adapt to changes at a moment's notice.

Make the Switch

Switching to VoIP is more than just getting a slick upgrade to your communications infrastructure. It's all about getting an efficient, fast, and flexible communication system that meets your business's requirements, increases ROI, and enhances your efficiency and productivity.

If you already have a VoIP system but aren't satisfied with its performance, the flat-rate support of a Managed Services Provider (MSP) is the best way to enhance your solution without breaking the bank. An MSP will recommend the right VoIP system for your business, assess your network and facility's readiness, handle the installation, and provide ongoing, 24x7 support.

In today's business environment, sticking with a traditional phone system is indefensible. Whatever your landline can do, a fully integrated VoIP system can do so much better, and the huge savings is just a small yet significant part of it.



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Are you ready to make the switch?

Call us today to talk with one of our seasoned consultants.
We're happy to answer your questions, provide recommendations,
and audit your current IT network.

Request your free consultation today!

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