

Buyer's Guide to Cloud Phone Systems



Introduction

It's important to understand your options, your current business needs and future requirements before making a purchasing decision for a business phone system in the cloud.

Onsite phone systems are expensive to maintain and their restrictions may not fit with your business needs. If you are looking to move your telephony to the cloud, it is crucial to map business and functional requirements to the solutions available.

With the right business phone system, companies can save time and money. A telephony platform should come with a wide range of features as standard, but buyers should be wary of hidden costs for additional features from some providers. The system should be scalable and able to integrate with other systems and applications in your company, such as CRM. Moving to the cloud should not only be a financial no brainer but also deliver better technology to your users driving greater efficiencies in your workforce. The aim of this buyer's guide is to provide essential information and useful tips to consider before making your decision.

Highlights

Explore the telephony essentials that will improve business agility and help you save on costs as your business grows or flexes.

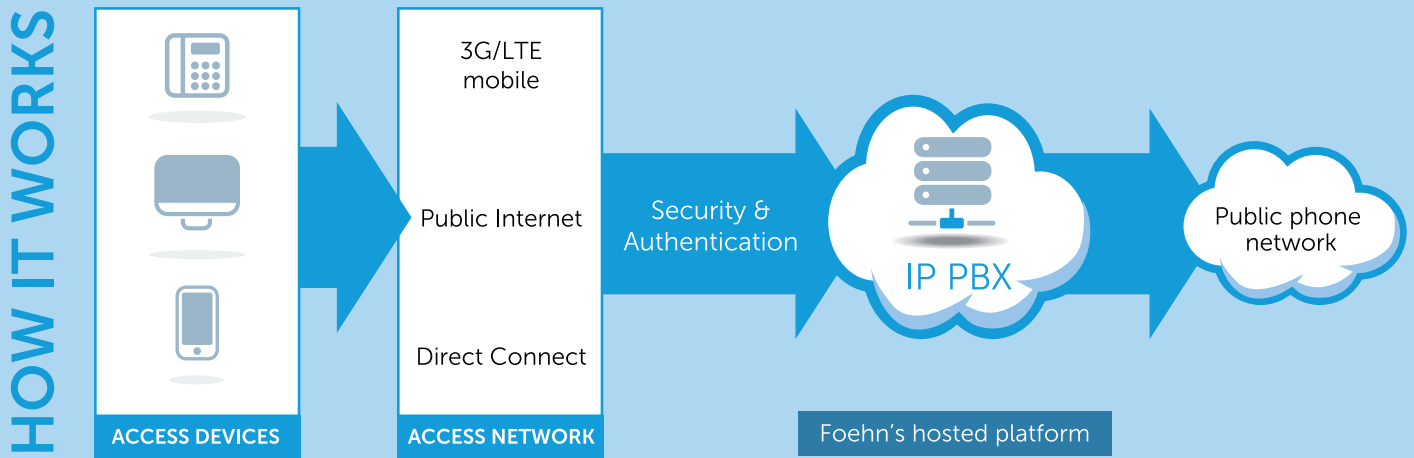
Map business needs to telephony requirements and plot them based on the number of users and scale required.

Reduce overheads, avoid maintenance contracts and understand the risks of hidden feature costs.

Discover how hosted telephony can help strengthen your communications and be flexible enough to adapt, as your business adapts to changes.



Cutting Through The Noise And Jargon



Given the amount of jargon used by those in the telecoms industry, it is hardly surprising that buyers can become confused with differences between one provider's service and another.

Cloud communications, hosted VoIP, hosted PBX, hosted telephony; these are all platforms hosted by a service provider, accessed over the Internet, or by a direct connection to the service provider.

The main difference compared to traditional telephony systems is that instead of paying for upfront hardware and installation, all costs are covered by a low monthly fee and priced on a flexible and scalable per-user basis.

A company should route your calls over a high speed data connection to a hosted network.

"75% of the UK now has access to fibre, we are seeing a massive increase in the adoption of cloud phone systems. According to Cavell Group, the Hosted VoIP market has grown by 17.49% in the last 6 months of 2014"

All you need to get started is an IP phone or even simply a softphone on your computer.

Many people have become accustomed to using VoIP (Voice over IP) from their desktop computers at home or on mobile apps such as Skype. A cloud phone system brings the full impact of the functionality of a feature rich PBX to the desktop from the cloud.

The choices available, range of different features and associated costs can be quite overwhelming for businesses.

Before any key decisions are made, it's important to understand your options, your current business needs and future requirements so that you can keep your costs down, scale as your business scales and only pay for what your business needs.

Identify Business Needs First

If you're looking for a hosted phone system, the first area that needs consideration when choosing a platform is the context in which you operate – both now and in the future. For example, will employees be making and receiving calls only when at their desks in the office? Does the company need to support home workers, flexible workers or a largely mobile workforce? Identifying key business needs first will help buyers to focus on requirements that are most critical.

The following table can help you focus on which requirements are more important to your growing business.

 <h2>Small Growing</h2> <p>— Your business needs —</p> <p>Up to 20 employees</p> <p>You need to set up fast with a main number</p> <p>You are non-technical but want control of your telephony</p> <p>Flexibility to work from home, in the office or on the move</p> <p>Appear big on a budget with a professional business image / Integrate with your CRM system</p> <p>Keep your costs low</p> <p>— Your phone system requirements —</p> <p>Quick set-up and delivery of your 'plug and ring' ready HD Voice Handsets</p> <p>Easy to use portal for admin and users</p> <p>Control of your dial plan, IVR</p> <p>Professional call management</p> <p>Low cost, per user, monthly pricing</p> <p>Free minutes per user UK geographic landline numbers (01,02,03)</p> <p>24/7 Support</p>	 <h2>Medium Growing</h2> <p>— Your business needs —</p> <p>20 to 99 employees</p> <p>Fast set-up of new employees and departments</p> <p>Permission based access for supervisors and users</p> <p>Adapt your telephony periodically to business demands</p> <p>Keep your costs low with no capex</p> <p>Support your business growth fast and remain agile</p> <p>— Your phone system requirements —</p> <p>Define Admins Supervisors or Manager rights at different levels</p> <p>Dial plan control and call management, IVR, ACD</p> <p>Integrations with your CRM and other business systems</p> <p>Automated call distribution</p> <p>Advanced call logging and reporting</p> <p>24/7 Support</p>	 <h2>Larger Company</h2> <p>— Your business needs —</p> <p>100+ employees</p> <p>Add new agents and sites and scale as business expands</p> <p>Integrations with CRM and other business systems</p> <p>Advanced customisable call routing and reporting</p> <p>Minimal capital expenditure</p> <p>Support your business growth fast and remain agile</p> <p>— Your phone system requirements —</p> <p>Scale with ease and add agents and sites with ease</p> <p>Robust centralised system to support multiple locations</p> <p>Advance call management</p> <p>Multiple integrations for CRM and other business services</p> <p>Advanced atomic reporting in real-time</p> <p>Full monitoring and 24/7 support</p>

Being Aware Of The Cost Of Additional Features

Since its early beginnings cloud telephony has matured and more and more providers are adding more features and functions to further enhance their standard product offering.

A note of caution is that some providers charge extra for additional features. Upon first inspection it may appear that a provider is offering all of the features in the services price, but it can come as an unwelcome surprise when a buyer finds out about the hidden costs associated with some additional features. You then need to think fairly carefully about the features the business really needs and those it can comfortably do without. A cloud telephony system is incredibly sophisticated and can help drive the growth and development of a business while keeping costs down. There still appears to be a difference in standards among providers regarding the line between what is regarded as standard, premium and enterprise level feature sets.

The range of pricing per seat for cloud telephony varies considerably and while some providers are only offering basic connectivity, others can provide extra features that are included in the price. The most competitive deal found in the UK is one that offers one price per user, per month, with all features included.

More providers are starting to bundle in UC (Unified Communications) features into their services, however, UC definitions also vary among providers. It is important therefore to look at each feature on offer and assess its true value to your business before being drawn to higher priced services offering features that the business may never actually use.

“The average savings businesses see after switching to VoIP range between 50% to 75%. While the amount of savings can vary greatly by case, 99.99% of customers see a reduction in their phone expenses”

The new standard for cloud telephony in 2015 consists of a standard set of core hosted features including dial tone, voicemail, call transfer, conference calling, call divert and hunt groups. One provider in the UK may offer call recording as standard, however, others could regard this as a UC feature. These UC features generally involve different application integrations, such as with CRM integration, Outlook integration, messaging and presence.

Beyond the basic phone system features that are on offer, buyers should consider the items which when personalised can really support and even transform their business. For example a customised IVR (Interactive Voice Response) system which provides auto-attendant so that calls can be answered when employees are occupied or away from the office. With the right provider you can even have skills based routing to particular departments, or other functionality such as hunt groups and group pickup.

However, not every provider has the knowledge, skills and experience to truly understand your business and what you are trying to achieve. Look for a provider that will understand your business and works with you consultatively to maximize the potential of your new phone system.

Remember that while some companies price on an all-inclusive basis, with a single price per user per month, with all features included, others offer a very low starting fee, but then charge for additional features thereafter. These costs can escalate quickly.

Your Choice Of Device

There are a few options to choose from. Hard phones, which are also sometimes referred to as IP phones.

Or soft phones, such as applications that run on computers that typically require a headset to use properly. Mobile clients can be used as an extension to your company's phone system and can help to further streamline communications and boost business productivity.

Depending on the size and nature of your business you may want to use both. It is important to be clear going forward that should you prefer to use softphones, you choose a provider that can give you the choice.

Call Costs

When a company has chosen and is using a hosted telephony platform, call costs are wrapped into the service. Therefore buyers should pay careful attention to the costs of national, international calls and calls to mobile phones.

Selection Of The Line Provider & Technology

Traditionally ISDN or analogue circuits have been used, however these come with their own set of challenges. When selecting the line type, buyers need to consider the number of concurrent calls they expect and order the right technology to allow for growth. As lead times on circuits can be long, customers often 'overbuy' circuit capacity to allow headroom for growth. Traditional circuits also reveal the businesses location by enforcing geographical numbers – for example a business in rural Surrey can't easily appear as an 0207 number (London).

The cloud computing revolution has taken a grip on the delivery of modern computing infrastructure services. This has been facilitated by the availability of affordable access circuits e.g. DSL (Digital Subscriber Line), EFM (Ethernet First Mile), FTTC (Fibre To The Cabinet) allowing us to connect at high speed to the Internet. Cloud computing vendors offer their software as a service, removing the problems of traditional infrastructures. Companies can move forward managing their business without needing the specialist technical skills.

Support

Companies may wish to have control of their dial plan and make their own additions, moves and changes. But you should also consider that as well as flexibility and control, you should make sure you have the right level of support. Make sure you choose a company that you know have a heritage in IP communications. Control of your telephony may be your priority but you should always ensure your provider is able to offer 24/7 support from qualified and experienced engineers so help is at hand when you need it.

How To Reduce Overheads And Avoid Maintenance Contracts

Maintenance services are not required with hosted telephony.

Typically providers of hosted platforms charge on a per extension basis which makes costs predictable and manageable and means businesses only pay for what they use. There is no longer any need for engineer site visits to make changes to the service as everything is centralised therefore removing the delay to activate any changes. Hosted systems inherently scale on demand. Businesses no longer need to build in capacity overhead for growth or try to predict what their business needs will be in the future to protect their investment.

Businesses can choose their presented geographic location, for example a business in rural Surrey can very easily appear as a 0207 number.

Working from home becomes transparent - as extensions are hosted on the Internet, employees at remote locations, on the move, or working from home are all seamlessly connected to the same system.

A Typical Costing For A Cloud Phone System For 20 Users

Item	Description	Estimated cost (£)
One off costs		
PBX System Hardware	PBX Telephony server, expansion cards	Not Required
Phone Hardware	Desk Phone	1,500
Professional Services Setup and Training	Installation, configuration, training	0
Number Porting & Sip Trunks		0
Storage	Call Recording Storage (30 days)	0
Reoccurring Monthly Costs		
Phone System	20 Users	260
Carrier minutes included	2000 Minutes per user free to 01,02,03 numbers	0
Total Cost of Ownership Year 1		4,620

Cloud Telephony Advantages For Small To Medium Sized Companies

- 1 Improved cash flow – No capital expenditure required
- 2 Better Impression for your business: fully featured – Location independence
- 3 Reduced risk as your company grows – Scale as your business scales
- 4 More responsive – Speed of provisioning & Service deployment
- 5 Just as much control – Have control over your dial plan and management portal



Top tips & considerations for cloud telephony

1 Do the maths – it's worth it!

Select a solution that flexes with your business. A solution that doesn't 'top out' at 25 users eliminates costs of PRI lines/Maintenance/Support.

2 Understand what 'Extras' apply

Make sure you fully understand what the costs are. The advertised costs from many providers are rarely what they appear and you'll be charged extra for every group, IVR or voicemail.

3 Ensure customer service

You're buying a cloud platform, but you still need people. Does the provider offer access to dedicated technical staff? Is this just during business hours and do they match your business hours? Choose an IP communications provider that can offer professional support when you need to expand or make site moves.

4 Integration capabilities

Does the provider have the ability to integrate it with your business systems and can they customise for you? A smart telephony provider should offer you the capability to integrate with your CRM, billing and other business systems.

5 How complex can they get?

Is it a true replacement for an onsite system? Can they go to multi-level IVR, groups, queues, granular management capabilities for larger organisations.

6 Is your connection good enough?

There are so many benefits and line convergence is one of them. If you're running off ADSL and telephony is business critical then use some of the savings to get a proper line.

7 Take care of your traffic – QoS

Mix voice and data only if you know what you're doing. Don't fall into the trap of assuming VoIP is just more data. Ask the provider about Quality of Service (QoS) or look to a bandwidth management solution to ensure uninterrupted voice data traffic.

8 Beware of your firewall messing with traffic – ALG

It is important not to assume that your company's firewall will be ok because you can access the Internet. Check that your firewall is supported and that you can turn off any nasty Application Layer Gateway (ALG) technologies if necessary.

If you don't your system can become unpredictable and this can cause issues such as one way audio and connections coming and going.

9 Make sure your site is secure

How secure do you need to be?
Do you need dedicated lines or secure transmission?

10 Obtain references

Benefit from the experiences of others before you press ahead. By getting references from other companies that may have had similar telephony challenges and requirements, you can learn what worked well and what didn't. Such references are great for sharing best practice, saving you more time and money.



foehn

hosted telephony

Foehn is an established provider of hosted telephony for businesses in the UK. The best value, business grade VoIP telephony with 99.999% platform availability, provides flexibility, scalability and reliability.

01

The Foehn Transparent Pricing Guarantee

02

The Most Flexible Cloud Phone System

03

Delivered by Experts From Start to Finish



Boston Borough Council

– Robert Barlow, Strategic Director of Resources

“The decision to move to Foehn’s hosted telephony was simple. The council has dramatically reduced its costs and been able to provide all users with a modern, agile and scalable telephony solution to meet the challenges ahead.”



SRK Accounting

– Simon Kallu ACA, Managing Partner

“Our choice of Foehn has been the right one, not just because they have provided us with a feature rich system that is configurable and will grow and adapt to our needs but also because they have an experienced team which is highly responsive to our needs as a business.”



Accumulus Consulting

– Geoff O’Shea, Accumulus Consulting

“Our new system works well and does everything we need it to do. Also, any member of the team working remotely can simply plug in their headset to their laptop and function as if they were working in the office. The quality is good and Foehn customer support is very responsive.”



Theatre Sites

– Roger Coleman, Director

“Making the move to Foehn hosted telephony was exactly the right thing to do. Not only does it support our business in ways that any telephone system should, it also provides us with higher levels of flexibility and scalability.”



The Parliamentary and Health Service Ombudsman

– Nicky Dowland, IT Services Manager

“We are now saving in the region of £50,000 per annum and yet still we have a lot more functionality and features compared to our previous phone system”

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