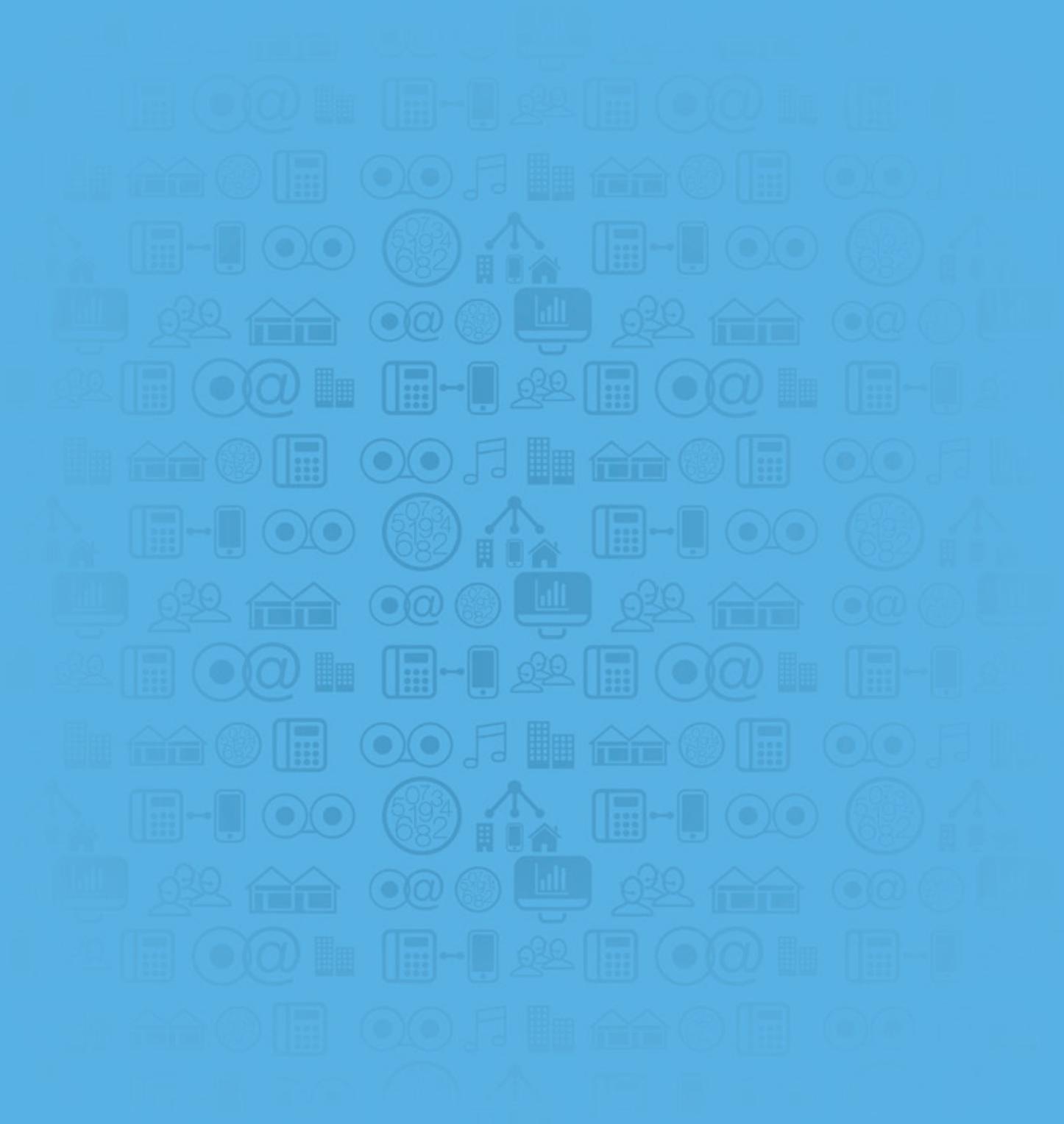


Reclaiming Control with Cloud Phone Systems





Introduction

Technical innovators have been harnessing the potential of the cloud and interoperating systems with telephony systems for some time now. However, despite all the technical innovation, there are some issues that can impede our goals for growth, adaptability and competitive advantage.

In short, the issues companies face should not be technical, they are business challenges. Unfortunately, most businesses are not really in control of their business communications. If we are to use the cloud in a work smart way, we will need technology designed with business staff in mind so that they can drive greater efficiencies and control for their workforce.

In this next edition of our buyers guide to cloud phone systems, we will look further into the key issues that most businesses face with managing their telephony and explore how businesses can reclaim control of their phone systems, derive real insight from rich analytics and look at how to avoid unnecessary expenditure. Reading about solving these issues will help any business owner or IT manager think about their needs and preferences and look at ways to work smarter with their business communications.

Highlights

Identifying the company resources and preferences is key to deciding whether you pay a provider to manage your telephony or appoint someone internally to manage it.

Learn about the key issues around control and cost.

Learn about the steps to take to overcome these key issues that can make for agile, powerful, easy to use cloud phone systems.

Learn about a smarter approach using control in the cloud through innovation, including an overview of technology you may not have known existed.



3 Scenarios: Which business type are you?



SME Business

— With or without IT Staff —

You need to make frequent changes to your ring strategy

You are non-technical but want control of your telephony

Adapt your telephony periodically to business demands

Do you have the internal resource to manage this for you?

Do you have time to manage this yourself?



Larger Organisation

— With or without IT Staff —

You need to make frequent changes to your ring strategy

You require Permission based access for supervisors and users

Adapt your telephony periodically to business demands

Do you have the internal resource to manage this for you?

Do you want to pay for a staff member to manage this or a provider to manage this?



Enterprise organisation

— With or without IT Staff —

You need to make frequent changes to your ring strategy

You require permission based access for supervisors and users

Adapt your telephony regularly to business demands

You have the internal resource but would you prefer to have a provider manage this for you?

You want the platform to be easier to manage and save your time

“The choice will cost time and money or just money. Regardless of your business size or type, broadly there are two choices. Savings can vary greatly by case, but it comes down to what you pay for. Do you pay the provider or manage this with your internally appointed staff member.”



The issues around who is in control of a business's telephony

Who is in control of the day to day operation of your telephone system and who do you think should be in control?

Limited Control



The limited access and control of a telephony systems depends on several factors in terms of ease of use and the ability to set permissions at different levels of an organisation.

Before the introduction of cloud telephone systems, the traditional approach has always meant that companies have been at the mercy of their telephone provider and internally appointed administrator. Businesses have had to rely on their phone provider to make stuff happen. For example, setting up new extensions and allowing for 'additions, moves and changes' – these would need to be planned in advance and be carried out by the provider's engineers. It's also noteworthy that this is how some providers make considerable extra revenue from customers. The same could be said for website development agencies. A smart company will manage its own content and carefully select an approach from a fair minded provider that does not charge for administrative changes but rather empowers the clients to do it themselves through selecting an easy to use content management system.

High Cost



The cost of managing telephony is still high. Maintenance is expensive and there are a significant majority of companies paying high maintenance costs and additional costs which are not attributed to any technical changes to a system.

Also if changes to the system are charged for each time, a company that has the means to do this themselves would have advantages in terms of speed and cost savings.

Time is the other key factor which is in short supply in 21st century business. While you wait for your provider to take action, your business is affected and this is an even greater cost in terms of time.

It is in a company's interest to have a certain level of autonomy so that it can act in the best interest of the business and meet the requirements for new starters or adapt to seasonality changes, schedules and campaigns for driving business growth. This can be made easier without waiting for a provider to action these administrative changes.

Lack of agility and insight



Many companies find they are restricted with their current set up. This is especially true if the system is onsite. The cloud has enabled companies to afford a certain agility and scale up and down as the business requires.

These days however, for a cloud phone system to be truly agile it should have the ability to interoperate with other business systems, such as your customer relationship management system and other business support systems. What the cloud has helped bring about is a thinking around the internet of things and how our smart technology can co-join with other applications and systems. This is necessary if businesses are to compete and provide the level of services that customers expect.

Another important issues is how a system is being used. There is a definite limit to the

Continued

insight that can be derived from a business phone system if the relevant analytics are not accessible by a company. Today businesses need to identify key performance indicators and rely on certain metrics to identify potential capacity issues and help them plan ahead.

Similarly it would be useful to customers to know how their telephony is being used, both by staff and customers. However the companies that are reliant on a provider are stuck in passive mode, not knowing whether action is needed on a system until it damages the customer experience, which in turn can be more harmful to a company's brand. In order to mitigate the risk of that, real time analytics, flexibility and powerful controls are required.

Access to important analytics: Because the data is recorded and collated, companies can look at and analyse how well they are managing their phone system in the context of staff productivity and customer service.

There is no doubt that cloud delivers many benefits over traditional on-premise applications, among them lower costs, reduced or no physical maintenance requirements and productivity gains. However, doubts among some SMEs remain and this is often still down to issues such as inertia, hanging onto existing investment in infrastructure, a fear of losing control and cyber security. It's worth noting that in the Cloud Industry Forum report (2016), the vast majority (98 per cent) of all respondents said they had never experienced a breach of security when using a cloud service.

Another inhibitor to cloud adoption for SMEs can be connectivity with slow broadband speeds, particularly in rural areas. According to Ofcom, 69 per cent of organisations say the phone system is its most vital communication source, however some don't have provision in place for when lines go down. A key factor in mitigating this risk is to find a provider that can be a single point of responsibility for both the phone system and your connectivity. SLA's can be put in place to ensure that businesses are not missing out on important calls and that problems can be resolved quickly.

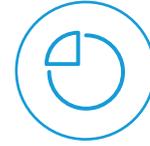
While some businesses are cautious or simply reluctant to place ever more of their eggs into one big cloud basket, the fact is that many are still deciding and looking at what's available and selecting what they feel is right for them based on their unique and future needs – either full on cloud or a hybrid approach.



Steps to overcome the issues



New levels of autonomy. You can be in control.



Access to important call analytics.

A smarter approach for autonomy and flexibility

With cloud telephony, companies now have the opportunity to take more control of their business communications if they wish to. Because the phone system operates as a software based service that companies can manage themselves through a web interface, it can be quickly adapted as per a company's changing business schedules and campaign requirements.

This approach has opened up entirely new levels of autonomy and flexibility, providing companies with the freedom to do a lot more than they could do previously and for a lower running cost.

Within minutes or even seconds they can change the way that inbound calls are routed. Calls may be routed to certain employees or teams at specific times of the week or day. And calls can be diverted to other extensions if a phone has not been answered after a specific number of rings. If a particular promotion is happening or a company is on an away day, all of this can be accommodated to cope with peaks, out-of-offices and other scenarios.

And because the data is recorded and collated, companies can look at and analyse how well they are managing their phone system in the context of staff productivity and customer service.

Tech you may not have known exists

When looking at cloud telephony, other useful channels for customer communications should be considered as well as the context in which you operate. Some companies find that customers engage with them more frequently via their website forms and chat functions. But recently companies are beginning to benefit from enhancing the interactivity of their website by incorporating Web Real Time Communications, (WebRTC). For example, you can now enable customers to make a call direct to your company's phone system via your website with a single click. Not only can this enhance the overall customer experience of your website but this can provide a faster route for customer contact as real time analytics can be used to automatically route calls as an alternative to using an IVR. You may also couple these functions with chat and social media, but identifying your key communications channels will help you focus on the most valuable to your business. You will then be in a position to select the right cloud phone system that has the flexibility to interoperate with your business.

The cloud has created even higher levels of creative functionality because the telephone system can be integrated with the IT of an organisation and needn't operate in silo. This convergence means that companies can conjoin applications.

Here are two ways, for example, that companies can achieve some more clever things with their phone system:

CRM Integration



Know your business, know your customers, and know your prospects.

With the cloud, telephony has evolved from purely voice communication to an intelligent communications hub that operates seamlessly with (CRM) Customer Relationship Management systems and can be at the heart of customer interaction. This can have a hugely tangible difference to a company's productivity as well as a customer's experience of the business.

Examples include click-to-dial, where users simply press a hotkey to dial a number, and screen pop functionality where employees can quickly view relevant information about the caller.

WebRTC



An alternative to an IVR offering new ways for your customers to engage with your business.

WebRTC provides web browsers and mobile applications with Real Time Communications (RTC) capabilities. What this means is that customers can initiate contact with a company representative or customer service agent directly from the company's website and without the need to install any other software applications. Customers can make a call quickly and efficiently to a company's cloud phone system with a single click, rather than having to dig out a number and dial it separately.

With WebRTC, data enables intelligent call routing to the business based on web visitor information in real time. The business can also collate reports on contextual data from a visitor's web sessions. If, for example, someone is browsing on a particular web page and then clicks on a button to make contact, the call will be directed to the most appropriate and relevant person or team.

The key issues we face as can be solved with a smarter approach and enable you to reclaim control of your business communications.

A smarter approach offering control in the cloud through innovation

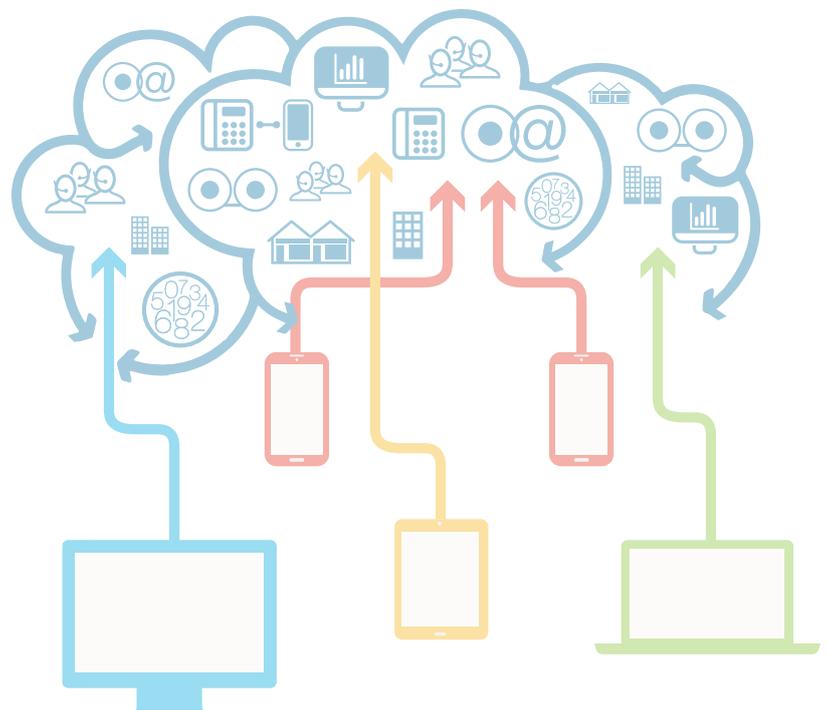
Since its early beginnings cloud telephony has matured with more features and functions being added to further enhance the standard product offering.

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 smarter approach uses 21st Century innovations making for a richer customer experience, allowing for increase efficiency and productivity.”

Remember the new standard for modern telephony since 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.

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 cloud phone system.



Key Trends that will influence your choices with a cloud phone system

The world of business is always changing and in 2016 we can expect to see trends unfolding in how companies operate based on aspects such as how the economy is performing and how technology is evolving.

The success of a business and its growth ambitions will rely on anticipating and understanding these trends.

Cloud Telephony Analytics for true business insight

A detailed and dynamic understanding customer and consumer behaviour has become an important asset for businesses as they increasingly try to predict how people function, interact and buy.

Likewise, the ability to analyse employee performance, both at an individual and macro level (such as a department or team), is enhanced through analytics. As analytical tools have become more prevalent and insightful, as well as being more affordable, their use will increase markedly in 2016 as companies look to reduce costs, compete more effectively and fulfil growth ambitions.

Previously companies could only analyse basic metrics with their telephone system. Now recent advances in certain systems allow the capability to measure greater detail of aspects that can show business insight such as performance and efficiencies of different teams.

Joining Cloud Telephony with Customer Relationship Management

More companies will begin to take greater advantage of more evolved voice communications that co-join with customer databases to provide intelligent communications hubs operating at the heart of customer interaction. This coordinated approach can have a hugely tangible difference on a company's productivity as well as a more positive customer experience of the business.

Features such as screen pop functionality, for example, where employees can quickly view relevant information about the business caller, whether they are a prospect, partner or existing customer.

Channel Personalisation

Customers have come to expect a much higher degree of personalisation, especially as the world of social media and networking has grown and there has been an increase in the number of company touch points. This has been cited amongst marketing experts as the 'pinball effect', however, rather than scatter gunning and treating customers homogeneously, businesses need to understand individual buyer behaviours and customer journey preferences.

The modern telephone system has features that enable companies to more accurately identify the likely needs of customers.

Web Real Time Communications

Customers increasingly expect to spend less time on interaction with a company that they find unnecessary. Hanging on a telephone line is but one example. With other media channels now in the mix, customers will look to use features that they find time saving and valuable.

With WebRTC, for example, a business can enable prospects and customers to make a call direct to the company's phone system via their website with a single click.

Not only can this approach enhance the overall customer experience of a business website, it can provide a faster route for customer contact as real time analytics can be used to automatically route calls as an alternative to using a IVR.

Take the example of an estate agency. With WebRTC, data enables intelligent call routing to the business based on web visitor information of certain regional property in real time. The business can also collate reports on contextual data from a visitor's web sessions. If, for example, someone is browsing on a particular web page and then clicks on a button for property in London to make contact, the call will be directed to the most appropriate and relevant person or team representing the London office.

Before WebRTC came about, external plugins were required to make a web call (e.g. Java plugin to call from a web phone) or achieve other functionality which is now unified under one standard. WebRTC is progressively becoming supported by all major web browsers (Google Chrome, Mozilla Firefox, and Opera).

Remote working & mobile workforces

Freedom from the traditional physical elements of a company, such as working in a specific building or using a fixed office line, continues to increase and many employees now expect this fluidity, especially where it offers them flexibility such as the ability to work remotely or from home.

Similarly customers have become more accustomed to freer commerce. For example, eCommerce has matured to the point where a customer can order a product and have it delivered to them at home or a place of their choosing on the same day. For a long time this applied to larger corporations, but the importance of logistics will also increase among small to medium sized businesses.

This freedom will place even more focus on reliable and fast communications, with the cloud phone system working in tandem with other channels and other business applications, including CRM.

Traditionally office systems have been bound by physical location. The virtualisation of many technologies and applications means that physically this no longer needs to be the case, however, there are certain arguments for continuing to have all or a good percentage of centre staff in one location. For example, staff training and management is generally easier under one roof.

Practices such as remote and flexible working, combined with a desire to reduce costs such as physical office space, means that the virtual call / contact centre will also have a place.

Greater proactivity and improved response times

The evolution of technology means that customers have come to expect a higher degree of proactivity and improved response times from businesses. For example, a relatively small business such as dental surgery or optician will send a text to a customer or call them to remind them that they have an appointment. A company may do likewise to alert a customer when their contract is due for renewal.

And if a customer has reason to contact a business, they may not expect to wait minutes, hours or days for a suitable response.

The increased sophistication of a company's telephone system means that businesses can be on the front foot, especially if their telephony is working seamlessly with their CRM system.

For example, having screen pop functionality where employees can quickly view relevant information about the business caller, whether they are a prospect, partner or existing customer. This can have a hugely tangible difference to a company's productivity as well as a customer's experience of the company brand.

Top tips on avoiding additional costs, reclaiming control and getting the maximum benefit from a cloud phone system

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 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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