



Has Your Business Switched to VoIP Yet?

Amazing Bottom-Line Benefits for Every Business...

Executive Summary:

In today's age of rapid technology change, businesses of all sizes are looking for ways to improve efficiency while keeping costs down. Even though many companies look to the latest technology trends to support their activities, their telephone services and business telephone systems – as well as their potential impact – are often overlooked.

This paper takes an in-depth look at the evolution of 21st century telephone systems: from the copper-wired plain old telephone systems (POTS) to today's on-premises and cloud-based Voice over IP (VoIP) systems and services. You'll be presented with key considerations that any organization interested in this critical business tool, including:

- Telecom Today – A Quiet, Steady Revolution
- What's in Your Phone System?
- What is VoIP?
- Why Business Loves VoIP
- It's All About Access
- How VoIP Works
- How Does VoIP Really Save a Business an Average of 30% or More?
- What it Takes – New Phones? New Service?
- How to Switch to VoIP
- VoIP FAQs

So if you're considering upgrading your phone system – or are motivated by saving money and adding enterprise level services to your business – read on to understand what today's phone systems can do for your business and your business' bottom line.

Telecom Today – A Quiet, Steady Revolution

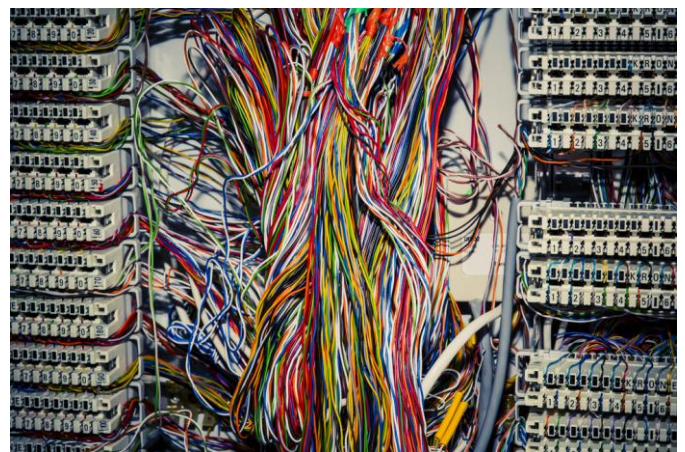
Over the past decade, there has been a quiet and steady revolution in the world of business telecommunications. While rapid advances in technology have made their way into IT organizations as early as the 1980s, adoption of the newest technologies for office telephony have lagged until the turn of the century.

Part of this lag was due in part to the mentality "if it ain't broke, don't fix it." Unfortunately, this thought

process has permeated telecom decision-makers since the advent of touch-tone phones. Another contributing factor is the ubiquity of cellphones and smartphones, as the ever-growing millennial workforce often abandons desk phones entirely because of their lack of mobility; and therefore, decide to simply delay or not make decisions related to traditional phone systems. But perhaps the *biggest* factor due to this lag is because of unfamiliarity with the simple nature of the technology. Using the internet for phone calls through something called "VoIP" sounds complicated, and just didn't make sense when compared to the warm and familiar feeling of using traditional phone lines from the local phone company along with a phone system we can see and touch – even if we hated paying an arm and a leg for it.

So what's the latest? The bottom line is that today's businesses are rapidly migrating to a Voice over IP (VoIP) based phone system and service, either as part of a Unified Communications (UC) strategy or simply as a replacement for older, traditional phone systems. This is because VoIP systems can create measurable and significant business value, are simple to understand and deploy (with little or no impact on business processes), and possess features that make businesses more efficient and increasingly mobile.

Which begs the question: What is VoIP, how do I get it, can it really save my company money without getting me fired, and what are the practical options for today's savvy businesses? Read below to see how VoIP can benefit you right from the start.



What's in Your Phone System?

First, there was Plain Old Telephone Service, or **POTS**. For nearly a century, POTS phone service was delivered

over copper wires from the telephone company's local office to phones that businesses usually leased from service providers like Ma Bell (AT&T) or (after the breakup) one of the Baby Bells like SBC, NYNEX or PacBell. These service providers offered everything: local access, long distance calling, equipment and more. And typically, these providers were the only viable option in town. Businesses often had a private branch exchange (PBX) or key system that would live in the phone closet, connecting office phones inside the business to outside telephone company lines for all external calls. And surprisingly enough, some businesses (and maybe even yours) still stand by this setup today.

Although most people think of "the cloud" as something new and unfamiliar, **cloud-powered phone systems** have been available for decades. Originally offered under names like "Centrex", cloud-powered phone systems eliminated the need for businesses to have an on-site PBX. They also enabled access to revolutionary features (such as direct inward dialing, or DID) without having to go through a switchboard or attendant. However, the phones, service, and long distance services were typically leased or purchased at high rates from the local telco or telecom carrier with little to no viable choice for competition. But enough of this for now; we will dive deeper into today's cloud options later on in this document.

Then, in 1995, **VoIP** was introduced to the masses as a new, affordable way to communicate. Now fast forwarding twenty one years to 2016, and more businesses use VoIP than any other form of telephone service!

What is VoIP?

So what is VoIP and how does it work? Put simply, VoIP services use the vast and robust public Internet – the same network that carries data, email and web traffic – to transmit and receive digitized telephone signals and data packets instead of sending your calls via the traditional POTS copper wires. These outdated copper wires are leased from a legacy phone company and private long distance networks that are managed by individual long distance carriers (remember AT&T, MCI and Sprint?).

But today, if you have a broadband internet connection you already have the basic plumbing (commonly

referred to as "access") that you need to connect your business to a VoIP service. And that on-site phone system that businesses used to use? It has morphed and is now hosted in the cloud. In other words, the physical phone system, PBX, or switch that used to reside at your business location has been replaced by a centralized server that is "hosted" in the cloud at a VoIP service provider data center.

Truth be told, a cloud-hosted phone system is no different than physically having a phone system at your location except that a cloud-hosted system is much more efficient. This is because you don't have to pay to maintain it, service it, and upgrade it. Plus, a cloud VoIP phone system is smarter because the computers possess better technology than desk phones. And on top of all this, your service is a lot less expensive because you don't have to buy the equipment or pay for maintenance and upgrades!



Experts agree that it's not "if" you will switch to VoIP, it's about when, how, and with whom. But why is that?

The Pros of Making the Switch: Why Businesses Love VoIP

- **Savings:** In our "do-more-with-less" business environment, savings are critical. In fact, saving money is likely the biggest driver for VoIP adoption because businesses who migrate to VoIP see an average of *30% savings* and save as much as *70%* when compared to their previous bills for legacy landlines and copper-wired phone systems.
- **Ease:** VoIP is simple. Getting started is easy, with seamless setup of your VoIP environment and little or no learning curve (especially if consumers take

advantage of Bring Your Own Device, or BYOD) because VoIP providers do all the heavy lifting for you, from migrating your old phone numbers to getting you connected to the network through low-cost or included equipment.

- **Efficiency:** At this point, many POTS phone lines are nearly a century old! So dumping antiquated phone lines and legacy hardware makes switching a no-brainer. And the best part? No new wiring is required – if you’ve got Ethernet, you’re already set up for a VoIP solution.
- **Better Quality:** Did you know that you’re *already* enjoying the improved quality of VoIP calls? Virtually all Long Distance (LD) carriers use VoIP on the intercity long-haul portion of the calls they complete for you *whether or not you have VoIP access on the end points*. Your ears can’t detect any difference in quality; and in fact, most users notice an improvement in voice quality overall!
- **Enterprise Level Features:** VoIP provides access to enterprise level features that have previously been out of reach to the average business. Popular features available through most service providers include caller ID, call waiting, call hold, conference bridge, auto attendant, voicemail, voicemail to email, and more.
- **Flexibility:** VoIP offers users the resilience they need, like adding and removing users at will, enabling features at will, and customizing their phone system. Most providers also offer ‘BYOD’ – with VoIP, you can take your office phone (or a spare) with you wherever you go, plug it into *any* Ethernet jack, and get connected. Anywhere with a reliable internet connection can now be your mobile office. Providers also offer mobile apps for Android and iOS to keep users connected through their smartphones.
- **Expandability:** Is your business growing? Need to add phones or lines? No problem! With VoIP, your business can expand seamlessly without the need for an on-site visit from your provider. Adding users and extensions can be easily done through your admin portal or dashboard.
- **Practicality:** VoIP is a practical solution. It saves a business money, it’s easy to deploy, it’s a seamless solution, and it gets rid of the weakest links – the physical points of failure inherent in a physical phone system – while offering enterprise-class features at a reasonable price.



All About Access

So, if Long Distance carriers are already using VoIP for THEIR business, why shouldn’t you? Little did you know that when you make a long distance call and once the call is passed to the LD carrier – even if it’s the same carrier you use for local access – the “middle” part of the call is likely translated from analog voice into digital packets, and then sent over the Internet to the other end, where it’s converted from digital packets into analog voice for the last mile to the receiving end. These LD carriers reap big savings by utilizing VoIP technology, and now you can, too. By switching to VoIP, you gain the benefits of an all-digital, all-Internet based phone network that goes where you go, virtually anywhere in the world.

Why switch now? Because the status quo can cost your business big time and money as long as you stay with a POTS system. First, POTS translates into higher monthly fees for basic telephone access AND long distance calling. Switching to VoIP makes economic sense and will continue to do so as broadband connectivity continues to permeate every business and home.

Second, staying with a POTS system also means continued a continued cash flow beyond access and long distance; meaning there are ongoing maintenance and repair costs for legacy POTS lines and legacy hardware – phones, PBX systems and dedicated telephone wiring – that will only increase as equipment and lines become older and obsolete. So why throw good money into a black hole? It’s only a matter of time until all businesses switch to VoIP, so the choice is

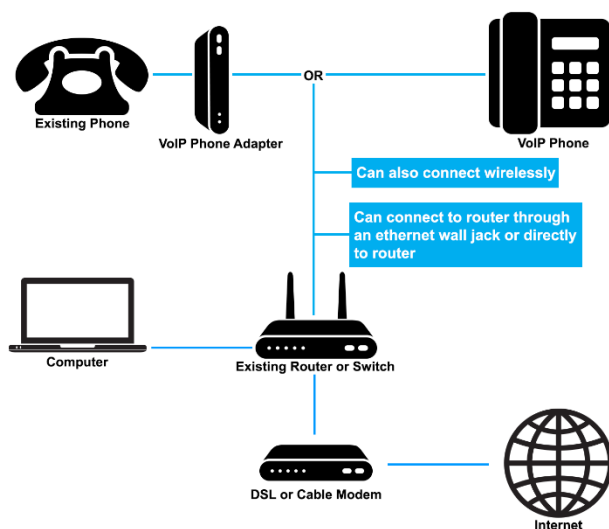
to either wait and do nothing or take action and make the switch.

How VoIP Works

So how does a VoIP phone work? It isn't any more difficult than using your standard phone system. Here's how it works: a) Pick up phone, b) Call any number, c) Talk, d) Hang up. Get it? It's that simple and seamless because VoIP works just like the legacy POTS, PBX or Centrex systems that you're using today. And for the most part, dedicated IP phones look just like the phones you're using today. These devices can be as simple as a legacy desk phone or laden with buttons and displays for a myriad of features that are available from the broad range of VoIP providers.

How does VoIP differ from POTS? From a user's perspective, there is *very little* difference between the services. The big difference is that you need to use broadband bandwidth or an internet connection instead of a hard-wired, leased connection in order to access your VoIP network. Another major difference is that VoIP access is separate from the VoIP phone systems; meaning, you do not need to get both from the same supplier (although many businesses do work with a single vendor to acquire VoIP).

How a Basic VoIP System Works



Note: There are a few different ways to connect to your existing router but all methods are fast, simple, and easy to set up.

How Does VoIP Actually Save a Business an Average of 30% or More?

It's not uncommon for a business to save an average of 30% to 70% on their phone bills by switching to VoIP from a POTS. But how? First, choosing a VoIP system means you eliminate the expensive, individual leased phone lines from your legacy phone company that you pay for every month.



Basic phone service has grown increasingly expensive because the phone company has to build in the cost of maintaining their aging infrastructure. With VoIP, you connect with the help of the Internet via broadband access - something you're probably already paying for today. By choosing VoIP, consumers also eliminate costs used to maintain and repair legacy on-premises telephone systems, which can include PBX systems, heavy desk phones, and attended switchboards.

VoIP service costs less, VoIP handsets cost less, VoIP maintenance costs less, and VoIP enterprise-level phone systems and services are also available...for less.

How to Switch to VoIP: Your Phones, Your Service, and What it Takes

Here are the steps you need to take in order to ready your business for VoIP, to order your VoIP service, and to customize your phone system in five simple steps:

1. **Select a VoIP Service Provider:** The first step in moving to VoIP is to evaluate and to select a VoIP service provider. Depending on whether or not you already have local broadband access, this service provider will advise you to increase

your local broadband services for the best voice quality, or inform you that your current level of bandwidth will be sufficient for VoIP.

2. **Local Access:** Once you are set with adequate local access or bandwidth, your new service provider will help you migrate (or “port”) your existing phone number(s) if you so desire. They will also advise you on how to cancel your old telephone lines and service, explain how their service works, show you long distance options, review the telephone system features you need, and assist in providing advice on new VoIP telephones.
3. **Cloud or No Cloud:** VoIP providers offer both on-site (equipment on your premises) and hosted/cloud (equipment at their location) options. With cloud-based VoIP, you can simply plug your VoIP-enabled phones into any Ethernet jack to get service. With on-premise VoIP offerings you generally connect to a central VoIP router. Doing so gives you the major advantage of being able to utilize existing internal telephone wiring and analog equipment while simultaneously taking advantage of lower VoIP pricing and new features.
4. **Phone Equipment:** Your VoIP provider will assist in helping you choose the phone hardware that you will use. You can opt for a phone system without bells and whistles that emulates legacy phone service, or get phones with new features such as call door phone buzzer integration, auto-attendant, voicemail-to-email and conferencing to name just a few. Select providers also offer a Bring Your Own Device (BYOD) option that lets you use your existing IP phones to help cut costs. Or you use your other phones with a VoIP system by routing them through an Analog Telephone Adapter (ATA).
5. **Features:** VoIP providers offer tons of features that add efficiency to any business. The most popular features include auto attendant, voicemail, voicemail to email, conference calling, call hold, call transfer, call waiting, music on hold, and more. Plus, if you have a mobile workforce chances are you’ll have access to features that can change the way *you actually do business*.

Once you’ve ordered your service and phones, you can cancel your old phone service. However, please note

that if you are porting your existing phone number, you will not want to immediately cancel your service until your phone number has been successfully ported. Plus, many businesses like to stagger the implementation of their new lines rather than doing it all at once, just to ensure that some legacy lines are available in the slim chance that there is a glitch in the VoIP provisioning. You can also prevent any downtime in your service by using advanced call forwarding or requesting a temporary virtual number from your new VoIP service provider.

When all is said and done, you will simply need to plug in your phones to start saving on local and long distance calling. Just plug into your existing internet connection and you’re on your way to monthly savings, more features, better reliability, and the opportunity for new levels of integration with other systems such as CRM, inventory and ordering, and virtually every other business application. And as your needs change over time, you can quickly and easily add or delete extensions, phone numbers, phones, and features to your VoIP plan.



Frequently Asked VoIP Questions:

Q: *Are the savings real, or is that just marketing hype?*

A: VoIP savings are well documented and can be dramatic based on the type of service, existing phones, and features you were paying for before switching to a VoIP service.

Q: I'm a small business. Will a VoIP system still make sense for me?

A: VoIP is very economical and will deliver savings even for just a couple of lines. In fact, VoIP can work for businesses with as little as two users. Plus, VoIP gives small businesses access to the same enterprise-level features that were previously available only to larger businesses.

Q: I'm a large business with over 50 employees. Will a VoIP system actually make a difference?

A: Definitely. And the savings associated with the switch to VoIP can be exponential. If you're not sure, ask your VoIP provider about current or existing customers with companies around the same size as your business. You can also read customer reviews on VoIP services by visiting any number of VoIP sites. There are plenty of satisfied customers who are and have been very happy making the switch to VoIP.

Q: What does it mean to have a phone system in 'the cloud'?

A: Rather than hosting a phone system or VoIP phone routers in your office or on your premises, cloud-based VoIP systems keep, maintain, and upgrade all the equipment (besides the phones themselves) at their data center. The major benefit? There's nothing at your office to purchase, maintain, or upgrade, saving you the costs of having to hire an IT department or schedule a visit from a technician.

Q: Can I buy phones and service separately? If so, what is appealing about keeping them separate?

A: Yes, you can. You may do this to get phone features not available through your VoIP access provider. And also, some VoIP service companies do not offer hardware at all. With VoIP, you're not locked into a single monopoly provider. A few popular VoIP phone brands include Asterisk, Polycom and even Cisco; and popular VoIP service providers include Vonage, 8x8, Mitel, RingCentral, OnSip, Jive, PanTerra, and VoipStudio.

Q: How can I be sure of the quality? Good call quality is essential to our business.

A: There's a reason virtually every long distance call made today is at least partially transferred via VoIP facilities. Subscribers love the voice quality and reliability that VoIP brings. And most providers pride themselves in high reliability in addition to HD voice calls. Ask your provider for a trial and compare call quality between providers before you sign up.

Q: Can I have wireless handsets?

A: Absolutely! VoIP phones come in all shapes and sizes, just like traditional phones. VoIP phones are available in desk sets and wireless models with headphones and belt clips to enable hands-free talking.

Q: Do the phone handsets work the same or different than traditional phones?

A: Exactly the same! If you've ever used a phone, you can use VoIP with little to no training.

Q: How can I compare VoIP options without a lot of sales pressure?

A: Visit VoIPReview.org, the leading website in comparison shopping for VoIP and business VoIP providers. On their site you can compare features, rates, plans, options, and more in an easy to use and understand format. You can also request a quote that will be reviewed and sent to only those companies that best fit your business profile and needs. You can either do some of the research yourself using the tools on the site, or you can let VoIPReview.org do the work for you.

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