

Buyer's Guide

What Every Business Needs to Know When Selecting a Phone System



Introduction

Whether you are starting a new business or expanding your existing business, you will need to choose a business phone system that meets your organisation's requirements.

The obvious decision would be to go with what you already know - your service provider from your previous company, or the phone system at your other office location. You could always utilise the system already being used in the building you're in, but you are then stuck with a solution that might not quite meet your needs - or worse yet, require costly resources to update and maintain.

Thankfully, you have options. There are several kinds of business phone systems and choosing the right one can save you money, time and effort. The right system will give you a robust and feature-rich system, that can scale affordably as your business grows and your needs become more complex.

This guide provides you with essential information and tools so you can understand your options, and make the decision that meets the needs - and ambitions - of your business.

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Defining your business needs

Before examining your business phone system options, let's first take stock of your needs as they are key in determining the kind of phone system you will want to use and the vendor you will want to select.



Growing

1 to 19 employees

Your business needs to establish itself – quickly.

- Fast implementation of main business phone number
- Easy set up and management for non-technical users
- Seamless mobility to work at the office, at home, or anywhere in between
- Build a professional image with prospects and customers
- Keep start-up costs down

Scaling

20 to 99 employees

Your business needs to support increasing demand.

- Quick set up of new employees and departments
- Roles based access for company administrators and end users
- Flexibility and customisations to meet individual users' needs
- Innovation to adapt to changing market and business demands
- Manage costs while supporting growth

Optimising

100+ employees

Your business needs to improve efficiency and control.

- Scalability to easily add new locations
- Robust platform to support customised call workflows/routing
- Communication consistency across all parts of the business
- Integrations with other business systems and services
- Maintain costs while driving maximum value

Identifying your phone system requirements

Understanding what you need out of a phone system is only half the equation. Without a firm understanding of how to meet your needs, you run the risk of being “sold” a solution that might look great in the demo or has all the feature boxes checked, but doesn't work the way you work. Let's take a look at the top “must have” system capabilities based on business needs.



Growing

1 to 19 employees

- Easy and fast activation, with 'plug and ring' ready phones
- Convenient online access for admins and users
- Professional call management features
- Cost effective, subscription pricing

Scaling

20 to 99 employees

- Flexible custom settings and workflow configurations
- Intuitive admin and user interface
- Mobility via smartphone apps and desktop clients
- Innovative features such as Google/Box integrations

Optimising

100+ employees

- Reliable and flexible platform; easily add locations, departments, users
- Centralised system; one solution for all users across multiple locations
- Robust; Advanced call management and workflows, integration with business software and cloud services
- Smart communications reporting and analytics

Understanding your options

The good news is you have options. Fundamentally, there are two types of phone systems - Traditional/On-Premise PBX and Hosted/Cloud phone systems. One of the biggest challenges in any vendor selection process is truly understanding your options, the pros and cons, and how each will impact your business. The following summarises what you must know about phone systems.

Traditional, on-premise PBX systems

- Requires hardware which can be costly and complex
- You need to have a PBX at every location
- Requires IT staff to set up, manage and maintain the system
- Provides you with control as the system is not dependent on Internet
- However, each PBX can be single point of failure at that location
- Though feature rich, is generally cumbersome to upgrade and requires modules at additional cost

Hosted/Cloud phone systems

- No hardware means fast setup and no maintenance or management needed
- The PBX is not a box at the client site. Rather, it's a feature-rich, flexible phone system and service "in the Cloud"
- Reliable - that is, the software runs on redundant servers. Reliability is increased, and increased demand scales automatically on the cloud platform
- Cloud systems are one program, one system to maintain. Customer upgrades are simply "turned on", available automatically at no additional cost
- When innovations are introduced, they are available to all customers at once
- Cloud phone systems use a subscription model which means low monthly cost
- You manage your system from a Web browser, through an intuitive user interface that greatly reduces the need for expert training. Features can be managed, modified, upgraded, added quickly and easily

Evaluating vendors and costs

Once you have a good sense for what you will want from your provider, it's time to have a look at specific vendors. Identify one or more vendors in each of the PBX categories you're considering (until you've settled on the right system). Then begin your evaluation of each. Here is an example of a selection process which you can modify to meet your needs.

Step 1

Research

- Visit the vendor Web site
- Access their whitepapers, datasheets, etc.
- Tag those who have the features and services that you want (see the worksheets that follow)

Step 2

Explore Your Options

- Contact each vendor to get a personal demo
- If the vendor cannot let you put their system to the test, take them off your list

Step 3

Try Before You Buy

- Work the demo as hard as you can. Are you able to see how their solution can meet your company's needs, now and in the future?
- Ask lots of questions, especially about your future needs, and about costs now and as you expand
- Fill in the TCO Worksheet (next page)

Step 4

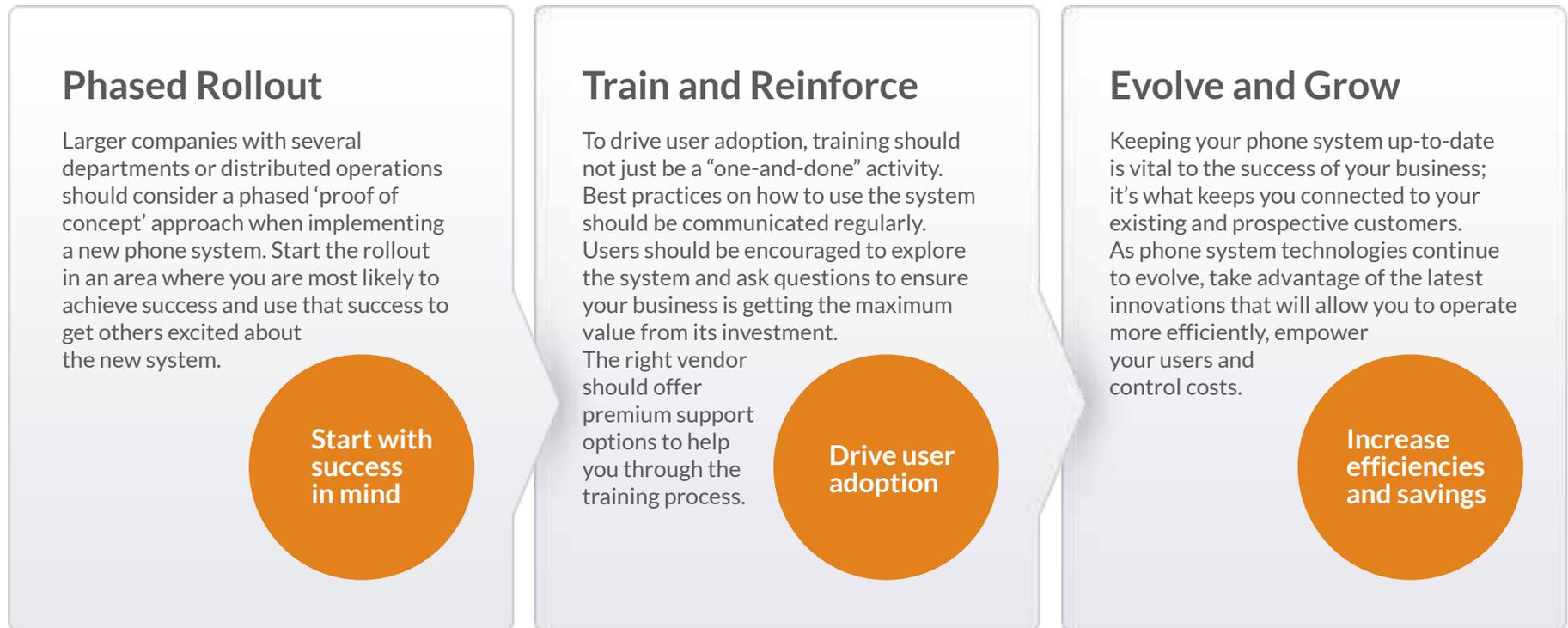
Prepare for Success

- Choose a winner
- Sign them up
- Now plan for implementation

Implementation considerations

You want to have a successful rollout, with your staff (and customers) happy with your choice, eager to make the most of the new system, and taking full advantage of its features to benefit your business.

Here's what we recommend.



Making a decision that is right for you

Tools and resources

At this point you should have a solid understanding of:

- [How business needs must align with phone system requirements](#)
- [Different kinds of phone systems available](#)
- [How to manage the system evaluation and selection process](#)
- [Best practices for a successful implementation](#)

Now, let's get to the interesting part

The following will provide you with a variety of tools and resources to assist you as you consider phone system options and begin your selection process. In this section you will find:

- [Business Needs Worksheet](#)
- [Vendor Shortlist Criteria](#)
- [Total Cost of Ownership Worksheet](#)
- [Links to additional resources you might find useful](#)

Tools & Resources: Needs Worksheet

This worksheet summarises the basic information the vendor needs to determine pricing. Over time as your business grows and scales, these numbers will change, so flexibility and incremental pricing are important.

Item	Your best estimate
Number of Office Employees:	
Number of Remote Employees:	
Number of Locations:	
Average Number of Free-Phone minutes usage month:	
Number of Calls Per Month:	
Average Length per Call per Month:	
Specific Features You Will/May Need:	

Tools & Resources: Vendor Shortlist Criteria

There are certain key questions to ask a potential provider, to make sure they're the right vendor for your company. Here are the top 10 questions you should ask when creating your vendor shortlist.

Top 10 Questions to Ask Before You Decide	Vendor A	Vendor B	Vendor C
1. What kind of platform does the phone system run on? (i.e. on-premise, hosted/cloud)			
2. What resources are necessary to maintain/upgrade the system?			
3. How long does it take to get up and running? What about when you need to add a new user or new location?			
4. What happens if there is a disruption in service? Who do you call and how long does it typically take to get back up?			
5. What is the all-inclusive cost ? (i.e. hardware + software + maintenance+ support+ additional features)			

Tools & Resources: Vendor Shortlist Checklist

Top 10 question to ask before you decide	Vendor A	Vendor B	Vendor C
6. Is there a proof of concept? Do they let you try before deciding on purchase?			
7. How often do they have a new release? How often do they innovate?			
8. How many customers do they have? Do they have reference clients?			
9. Do they have experience in your industry?			
10. Who is in their ecosystem? Partners? Investors?			

Tools & Resources: Total Cost of Ownership Worksheet

On-Premise PBX

One time cost

Input	Description	Estimated Cost*
PBX Hardware	PBX servers, expansion cards	£3,500
Phone Hardware	Desk phones	£2,500
Professional Services	Installation, configuration, training, number transfers	£2,700

Recurring Monthly Costs

Phone System Provider Fees	Software licence upgrades, support / maintenance	£245
Carrier Fees	Unlimited calling and fax, free phone minutes, support	£625

Total Cost of Ownership for year 1	£21,040
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Hosted/Cloud solution

One time cost

Input	Description	Estimated Cost*
PBX Hardware	PBX servers, expansion cards	£0
Phone Hardware	Desk phones	£1,990
Professional Services	Installation, configuration, training, number transfers	£0

Recurring Monthly Costs

Phone System Provider Fees	Software licence upgrades, support / maintenance	£519.80 (Premium)
Carrier Fees	Unlimited calling and fax, free phone minutes, support	£0

Total Cost of Ownership for year 1	£8,860
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*Estimated costs based on 20 in-office users, 1 location

Additional resources

Buying tips

- [About.com: How to Buy a Business Telephone System](#)
- [Cisco: Top 6 Considerations When Buying a Phone System](#)
- [eZine: Cloud PBX Phone System Buyer's Guide](#)
- [Infonectics: Benefits of Cloud-based Telephony](#)

About RingCentral

RingCentral provides cloud computing based business phone systems designed for today's mobile and distributed business world. The RingCentral technology platform eliminates the need for expensive and technically complex on-premise legacy phone systems. Business class Polycom and Cisco desk and conference phones arrive Plug & Ring® ready, and you get implementation advisors and free 24x7 support.

For more information, please visit

<http://www.ringcentral.co.uk> or call 0800 014 8091.