Slingshot

phone system buyer's guide

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CONTENTS

Introduction

So you are considering a phone system and have no idea where to start. This guide will provide you with a base understanding of business phone systems from telephone lines to the types of systems that are out there.

The Basics

Before getting started, you will want to know how many employees need a dedicated handset or extension. Typically, in a regular office setting, if there are fifty (50) employees, you will need fifty (50) handsets. Some offices require an extension or line for fax machines, credit card terminals, point of sales (POS), etc. Take note of all the handsets and devices that are needed.

It is a good idea to keep the future in mind because it is inconvenient and expensive to upgrade to a bigger system, especially after only a short time. Many businesses make forecasts about the growth of their business

in the years to come. Increasing staff, mergers, and acquisitions must be considered before making a major purchase.

What is the office profile? Is this a single location company? Are there multiple locations? Perhaps you are deploying a contact or call center. Depending on the type of location this is, the features of each solution will become more apparent.

Types of voice services

Analog Lines

Analog lines are often referred to as Plain Old Telephone Service (POTS) lines and provide a single analog communications circuit between the phone company and your office. The analog line is the traditional service that is offered and is a reliable solution for routine business applications and locations.

Each analog line provides one connection that allows for one (1) concurrent call. If you require multiple concurrent calls, you will need more lines.

Note: For line provisioning, a rule of thumb is 1:4 – one (1) line will accommodate four (4) employees. For a small business with less than ten (10) employees, it is typical to see three (3) analog lines: two (2) for voice and one (1) for fax.

The ratios change depending on the type of office profile. For example, a warehouse or manufacturing plant with 100+ employees,

but only ten office personnel may only need five (5) business lines. Whereas, a contact or call center with fifty (50) employees who are required to be on the phone at all times will have at least fifty (50) lines.

Analog lines can be used in conjunction with a digital telephone system or private branch exchange (PBX) that manages and routes all the calls. It can also be used with basic analog phones without a system at all, like a restaurant or retail store.

Analog is an ideal solution for small companies of less than 50 employees.

Digital Lines

Digital lines, also known as ISDN PRI, provide a digital communications solution that gives your customers high-speed bandwidth over their existing phone lines. Digital lines convert a copper wire pair phone line from a single circuit into two digital connections.

ISDN PRI delivers 23 voice channels over one circuit. Compared to analog lines where you would have to deliver 23 analog circuits, the digital solution is much more efficient and cost-effective.

Other benefits of digital lines:

- ISDN PRI connections reduce line noise and interference, so your customers enjoy digital performance when using high-bandwidth applications.
- ISDN PRI lets your customers operate multiple devices simultaneously on one phone line.
- ISDN PRI reduces your infrastructure and maintenance costs for delivering high-speed connections due to its multi-channel technology.

Unlike analog lines, digital lines require customer premise equipment (CPE) like a PBX to connect to.

Digital lines, like ISDN PRI, are ideal for customers with over 50 employees.

Voice Over IP (VOIP)

Voice over IP (VoIP) is a methodology and group of technologies for the delivery of voice communications and multimedia sessions over Internet Protocol (IP) networks, such as the Internet.

The market for consumer SIP devices continues to expand; there are many devices such as SIP Terminal Adapters, SIP Gateways, and SIP Trunking services providing replacements for ISDN PRI digital lines.

Types of Solutions

Traditional PBX

A traditional business phone system (PBX) is located at the customer location and is sometimes called customer premise equipment (CPE). The PBX connects to the telecommunications company through analog or digital lines.

The PBX manages and routes all inbound and outbound calls. An employee has a handset or extension where they can receive and take calls. The PBX provides all the features to the extension like caller ID, voicemail, conference, etc.

Hybrid Solution

A hybrid solution is similar to that of a traditional PBX, except that it can take advantage of VoIP technologies like SIP trunks.

As mentioned earlier, companies with multiple locations can take advantage of SIP trunks by seamlessly connecting the offices and sharing the resources of both offices.

Since hybrid solutions have the capability of VoIP, adding a telecommuting option to allow employees to work from home.

Hosted Phone Solution

Hosted phone simplifies the solution by providing a cost-effective, cloud-based platform that grows with your business. Using the internet to deliver enterprise-grade services, companies can take advantage of some of the key benefits:

1. **Lower monthly pricing** – On average, individual business phone lines can range anywhere from $45-$80 per month based on minutes used, long-distance calling areas

2. **Lower (or no) operation expenses** – many companies use an outside vendor to make hardware changes, phone

moves, etc. and pay additional fees to do so. Hosted PBX phones are Ethernet-based, and carry their programming with them. Users can pick up their phone and move it anywhere they can get an Internet connection. Besides, companies can make interactive menu changes on their own in a matter of minutes, rather than placing a service call that might take days to be completed.

3. **Follow Me features** - Never miss an important call again with Hosted PBX Find Me/Follow Me features. Each extension on a Hosted PBX system can be programmed to call up to 10. Calls can roll over to a cell phone, a home phone, even another office phone. Also, voicemails can automatically be emailed to each extension user, with the Caller ID, time of call, and length of message attached to the email.

4. **Low upfront costs** – many CPE hardware-based PBX systems can cost anywhere from $5000 through $20,000+ to install, wire, and configure

in an office when you factor in all the user handsets plus the PBX itself. Hosted PBX service setup, however, only entails the cost of the handsets.

5. **Seamlessly connect multiple locations** – Whether you're a large multi-site corporation, or a virtual company comprised solely of telecommuters, Hosted PBX can provide instant communications between offices and employees at no cost. Dialling an internal extension on your PBX is a no-cost call, regardless of the user you're calling is in the next town or the next state.

6. **Failover provides an always available solution** – Because all of the main menus, voicemail, and extensions reside outside of your office, even if you lose power or your Internet connection your external callers will still get your main phone menu – every time. Each extension can have an emergency failover phone number configured, so if for any reason that extension's handset goes offline, calls

to it will automatically be routed to the failover number.

7. **Easy to use** – Every Hosted PBX phone offers a variety of easy to configure softkeys to help users with typical everyday phone functions. Transfer calls, put users on hold, redial, select Do Not Disturb, and setting up three-way calls are just a few features that Hosted PBX softkeys can be configured to perform. Buttons are clearly labelled, making new users immediately feel comfortable with using the features on their phones.

8. **Streamline calls with Interactive Voice Menus** – A common feature with Hosted PBX is the ability to have multiple Interactive Voice Menus. Easily direct callers to the correct departments and end-users within seconds of their inbound call starting. Hosted PBX systems can have several different Interactive Voice Menus that can be triggered by certain dates, timeframes, or events to make sure

callers can always reach the person they need, right away.

Other Considerations

Integrating business processes into the business phone system like CRM, ERP, and HRIS. Assuming your business is growing and has other systems in place, the likely next piece is the possibility of streamlining all business processes while lowering costs and increasing efficiency.

Having a good base understanding of basic phone services and solutions will allow you to make a better decision on the type of business phone system to purchase.

If you have any questions, comments, or concerns. Please contact us at sales@slingshotvoip.com or calling 877-776-0673 option 1