

Is VoIP Right for My Small Business?

How to Find the Best Fit

Survival of the Fittest in an Uncertain Economy.

Small business owners are facing daunting challenges across the board. No one knows where the economy will be a year from now. That unpredictability, combined with a credit crunch that is hitting small businesses particularly hard, has small companies minimizing capital expenditures and hunkering down to “just make it through.”

Small business owners, a frugal population to begin with, are investing every available resource into their businesses to ensure survival. Instead of adding additional office space (and overhead), many are turning to remote employees or telework to expand staff but need to make this strategy transparent to prospects, customers and partners. And with competition for customers becoming stiffer by the day, small organizations are burnishing their image to look and sound like a bigger business. To facilitate these new strategies, many owners are taking a fresh look at the way their business handles day-to-day communications.

Even the most basic businesses now require a set of capabilities that would not have been possible even for the largest corporations 20 years ago.—VoIP News

Traditional Phone Networks: Not Designed for Small Business

Even in a robust economic environment, traditional phone services are rarely the best fit for a small business. In tighter times, the consequences of this poor fit become even easier to see. Traditional phone service can hurt a small business’s prospects for growth or survival by draining money and hampering productivity. Small business owners who are looking to squeeze every last measure of savings, efficiency and productivity from all of their office systems can ill-afford the drawbacks of traditional phone service:

Cost. The high cost of a full-blown premise-based PBX network with powerful business communication features puts it out of reach for most small companies. That fact alone forces small business owners to choose between affordability and functionality. The choice many end up making is to start their companies with a few basic lines from the local phone company and limited communication tools that are inefficient.

Complexity. Traditional, premise-based PBXs require a business to purchase, install and maintain equipment on-site—adding a layer of complexity that smaller companies can't always manage.

Inflexibility. As a company grows, it can be hard to make a traditional phone system grow along with it. Adding a new office means adding a new phone system. If the new office is geographically distant, that new phone system could come from an entirely different provider with features that are not seamlessly compatible.

Limited functionality. The bigger a company grows, the more critical advanced communication and productivity tools become to its success. With traditional phone service, many of these tools remain unavailable to small companies unless they upgrade to a costlier full PBX.

VoIP: Changing the Way Small Businesses Do Business.

Small businesses no longer have to “make do” with phone systems that were designed for fundamentally different enterprises. Hosted Voice over IP (VoIP) networks are changing the way small businesses respond to today's communication challenges. VoIP technology uses the internet to transmit voice data instead of traditional phone lines. Any business with a quality broadband connection can use hosted VoIP to get a feature-rich phone system without the cost or management hassles of traditional phone service.

While there are premise-based VoIP systems, most small business opt for a hosted VoIP solution where the equipment and service management is hosted externally by the VoIP provider. With hosted VoIP, small businesses get:

- **Full PBX functionality at lower cost.** Even small businesses today need sophisticated communication tools. Hosted VoIP delivers business-class phone service at prices affordable to smaller companies, allowing them to enjoy features such as automated attendants, ansion dialing, voicemail and advanced mobility features.
- **Seamless mobility.** With VoIP, phone service is delivered over the Internet—allowing business owners and workers to access the corporate phone system anywhere they go. A VoIP system forwards calls transparently.
- **Unified multi-site communications.** Companies of all sizes struggle to maintain a consistent image and level of service across multiple offices. With traditional phone service, multiple offices mean multiple phone systems—often with differing features and service plans. Hosted VoIP provides one corporate phone system that can encompass many offices and provide consistent features and flexibility regardless of location.
- **Easier remote work and telecommuting.** Allowing employees to work remotely is one way small companies are growing business without growing overhead. Hosted VoIP makes it easy for employees to work from home or remote offices—while still maintaining the impression that they are working from the primary corporate office. Incoming calls are easily routed from an organization's main number to individual employee phones, regardless of location.

- **Ease of management.** With hosted VoIP, there is no complicated, on-site equipment to manage or maintain. Companies no longer need to dedicate essential resources to managing business communications.
- **Extensive productivity-enhancing features and flexibility-many unavailable with traditional phone service.** Hosted VoIP leverages internet technology to give small businesses access to a wide range of innovative communication capabilities—including many that are unavailable with traditional phone service. With hosted VoIP, small businesses can maintain call history, utilize reporting to manage call activity, take advantage of virtual transfer capabilities that allow users to access VoIP call controls on their mobile phones to name a few. These features allow users to expand their communications capabilities and ensure they never miss an important call!
- **Lower calling costs.** Significant savings can be achieved with free local and long distance calling, a benefit of most unlimited calling plans. Additional long term savings come into play with free inter-office dialing (through extension dialing), which allows you to connect workers in remote offices or teams that are geographically dispersed. And most VoIP providers don't charge extra for features such as voicemail, three-way calling and fax services.
- **No equipment to purchase or maintain.** With hosted VoIP, the service provider hosts and maintains the network and equipment, not the customer. The only equipment needed by the customer are phones.

Almost all small business VoIP services will show a clear ROI when compared with traditional telephony services.—VoIP News

Aptela. Superior Phone Service. Clear and Simple.

Aptela has been a pioneer in the VoIP market and its feature-rich voice solution allows small businesses to take advantage of the benefits of VoIP technology without the headache of managing it in-house. With Aptela, small businesses get an innovative hosted VoIP solution that allows them to present a polished, professional impression with room to grow—all at prices that make good business sense. With business-class features, hassle-free management and unsurpassed cost savings, Aptela is the phone service provider of choice for thousands of small business users nationwide.

Top 5 Productivity Features.

In addition to cost savings, small businesses are adopting hosted VoIP to gain access to productivity features that are either not available on traditional phone systems or not affordable to small organizations. Aptela's Hosted VoIP solution offers dozens of standard and customization productivity features—from call management, auto attendant, faxing, and voicemail to administration and a web portal. Aptela's top five features, as rated by customers, are:

- **Find Me/Follow Me** is a personal locator that allows users to define how incoming calls are routed or forwarded to them, ensuring important calls are not missed.
- **Virtual Transfer** lets users press ## to access call management features while on a call, including transfer, call recording and send to voicemail.
- **Voicemail to Email Integration** allows users to receive voicemails as email attachments in a .wav or mp3 file format.
- **Aptela Dashboard** displays records of a user's most recent incoming, missed and outgoing calls, and lets users click-to-call any number, listen to voicemails, read faxes and more.
- **Auto Attendant** greets callers and directs them to the appropriate party, eliminating the need for a live receptionist and ensuring an efficient calling experience.

Small businesses are using VoIP productivity features to monitor employee activity, manage call volume, prioritize calls and deliver more responsive customer service.

For more information about hosted VoIP, contact an Aptela representative at 800.994.4496.



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Making the Switch to Hosted VoIP

A Checklist

Before signing on the dotted line, every organization considering a switch to hosted VoIP should carefully evaluate their needs:

Profile your company. How many employees do you have? How many offices? How many remote or mobile users will you have?

Profile your calling. What is your current mix of internal, local, long-distance and international calls per month? Number of outbound vs. inbound calls? Do you make conference calls?

Profile your current phone system. How many lines do you have? What type of phones do you use? Do you need to keep any of your existing lines?

Profile your current broadband connection. What is your bandwidth? How many lines do you have? Who is your current supplier? What is your current network load? How much unused bandwidth is available? Will you need to upgrade your network?

Make a wish list. Do you need an 800 number? Do you have a receptionist or will you need an auto-attendant? Do you need to integrate with email or other systems? Do you need a call center? Voice menus? Will you need to scale your system as you grow? What service level agreements will you need?

What is your budget? How much can you spend in total? What is your targeted per user per month cost?

Will you have one person responsible for managing the system? Or do employees need to be able to manage it themselves?

What type of Internet Service Provider (ISP) will you select? Cable or DSL? You will need a business-grade service that offers Service Level Agreements and can meet bi-directional bandwidth needs.

What kind of router should be in place? You'll need to purchase a VoIP-friendly router and be sure to avoid routers geared for VPNs. The most important aspect of a VoIP-friendly router is that it support Quality of Service (QoS) and includes port triggering.

For more information, contact an Aptela representative at 800.994.4496.

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