



## PHONE SERVICE/SYSTEM PROVIDERS

Remotely Hosted Ongoing Phone Service	In-House Hosted Purchased Phone System	Internet Only Ongoing Phone Service
<a href="http://www.gotvmail.com">www.gotvmail.com</a>	<a href="http://www.altigen.com">www.altigen.com</a>	<a href="http://www.packet8.com">www.packet8.com</a>
<a href="http://www.messagepoint.com">www.messagepoint.com</a>	<a href="http://www.shoretel.com">www.shoretel.com</a>	<a href="http://www.vonage.com">www.vonage.com</a>
<a href="http://www.virtualpbx.com">www.virtualpbx.com</a>		<a href="http://www.lingo.com">www.lingo.com</a>
<a href="http://www.connectmevoice.com">www.connectmevoice.com</a>		<a href="http://www.covad.com">www.covad.com</a>
<a href="http://www.inaport.com">www.inaport.com</a>		<a href="http://www.speakeasy.com">www.speakeasy.com</a>
<a href="http://www.accessline.com">www.accessline.com</a>		<a href="http://www.broadvoice.com">www.broadvoice.com</a>
<a href="http://www.voicenation.com">www.voicenation.com</a>		

## TIPS TO EVALUATE PHONE SYSTEMS AND SERVICES

- Determine which features are important to you and rank them 1-5:
  - Which features service the customer better during and after business hours?
  - Which features enable the internal office users to service and manage calls more efficiently?
  - Which features enable the receptionist to do their job more efficiently and provide a better experience for the customer?
  - Which features enable outside workers to communicate with the office more cost effectively and/or enable existing phones such as cell or home phone lines to act as if they are office phones?
  - Can my phone system scale if needed? Do I have the need now or within 5 years to connect 2 offices into one phone system?
  - Is my current internet connection going to play a factor in my phone system? If so, do I need to increase bandwidth?
  - Will cordless phones increase our company's productivity? If so, will this play into out of office users equipment.
  - Will I grow as a company in the next 5 years? If so, will they work out of the existing office. How many additional phones/people?
- During evaluation, ask about written guarantees and expectations regarding:
  - Installation – What is your process to insure the installation goes smoothly? Will my phone numbers be kept or will I be required to change them? Will

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- you be outsourcing the installation, if so to whom? Will extra wiring be needed?
- Downtime – How will you insure my business will experience ZERO downtime in phone or fax service during installation if over business hours? If someone were to call during downtime after hours, what measures are taken to ensure the call and fax is handled? What happens to calls and faxes if the proposed phone switch were to go down during and after business hours. What is your quality of service uptime rating for the switch? (Less than 99.9% is unacceptable for business switch.) If the switch ever goes down, what are the charges for a typical service call. What is covered? Who pays labor and parts if the equipment fails?
  - Phone number – If we switch our service to you, can we use our same phone number (not all phone numbers are portable). If we use a phone number provided by you, and fall out of love with your service, do we own that number and is it portable to another provider?
  - Contract – is there a contract and will you provide us with a sample copy to review up front?
  - Telco Charges - Who is responsible for local and long distance charges?
    - How can your phone switch provider assist in finding you lowest per-minute or unlimited local and long distance packages without compromising call quality and service.
  - Relevant references - Ask to speak with existing clients using the exact same equipment proposed.
  - Support - Adds/Moves/Changes - Compare the cost of adding a phone, moving a phone, and changing a phone costs. These can with older phone systems be the most expensive part over the life the phone system.
    - What are the costs associated with service and maintenance?
    - Does the dealer have remote maintenance capabilities?
    - What changes can we make ourselves to avoid service calls?
  - Disaster Recovery –
    - What impact will our phone communications have on our disaster recovery plan?
    - Do I have documented who to call at the local and long distance carrier to reroute calls after a disaster? Do I have a local vendor to call?
    - What number will calls be forwarded to?
    - Does my local carrier provide voicemail if the system is down or all lines are busy?
    - Do I need to order one extra phone or find out how long it will take to get an extra phone if one ever gets broken or fails to operate? Can I use off-the-shelf phones with my phone system in a pinch?
    - What service level can I expect from my phone vendor to get my company up and running at remote location in case of a disaster?
    - Is there anything on my phone switch that needs to be managed regularly by my IT or admin such as backups, voicemail capacity, logs etc?
    - Does the dealer provide backup during a power failure?

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# TYPICAL PHONE FEATURES FOR SMALL BUSINESS PHONE SYSTEMS

—Excerpts from "Phone System Buyer's Guide.", Buyerzone.com

## The base system

The central base system, or cabinet, controls and oversees the entire phone system. This price differs between systems and rises as cards and accessories are added. A small central unit can cost as little as \$1,000, with the price increasing considerably to the tens of thousands of dollars for larger systems. The base system will be the main limiting factor for your phone system both in terms of features and expandability.

## The actual phones

Most systems can be equipped with several different types of phones. The least expensive sets may cost less than \$100. Most mid-level handsets sell for \$100 to \$300 per unit.

Receptionist stations are also more expensive, but they bring important features for the person at the center of your telephone system. Most businesses will buy a mix of models.

## Phone features/system add-ons

You will also need to purchase phone system accessories such as voicemail, conferencing, dial by name, music on hold, and Computer Telephony Integration (CTI - e.g., integration with your contact management software) if your phone system does not come with them built in.

Many manufacturers sell equipment bundles that can save you quite a bit. These typically include the central control unit, several phones, and voicemail. They are sold in varying sizes - your vendor can help you choose a bundle and then add on any other equipment you need.

## Wiring and installation

Installing wires in an unfinished building can be fairly inexpensive. However, installing wiring through already finished walls can add quite a bit to your total cost. If you are in a location with existing wiring, make sure you have the dealer inspect it so you can re-use it if possible.

## Everything else

This includes training, programming, service, and future modifications. Pricing is usually based on the time these tasks will require and can often be the most flexible portion of a bid. Sometimes, it is best to compare the hours that will be spent completing training/programming/service tasks with the price tag for the service.

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## GETTING STARTED TIPS

### Employees

- **Receptionist** - If the receptionist uses a computer screen to answer phone calls, set up one day each month where the receptionist practices using only the telephone to route calls. This insures that if the computer ever goes down, the receptionist will still be familiar with how to route calls without using the graphical user interface found in the computer console software.
- **Point of Contact** - Appoint a phone administrator who will perform new employee training and is responsible for directing support requests to the phone system provider. This person will be responsible for routing the first month's questions to either online help or to contact the phone switch vendor.

### Training

- Provide training time based on the features you ranked as most desirable to use in your initial phone purchasing feature ranking.
- Schedule a second training session one month later. Until you use the phone system, you won't know what questions to ask. At the first training, ask users to keep notes of questions for the second training session.

### Billing

- Double check your phone bills for accurate negotiated rates.

### Communication

- If applicable, how will I let my clients and employees know of my new phone and fax numbers?
- How will I communicate to clients about our new system up front? How will our staff encourage clients to use to system their fullest advantage so our clients may feel the benefits from the new features?