



# PBX BUYING GUIDE



## HOW TO CHOOSE THE RIGHT PHONE SYSTEM FOR YOUR BUSINESS

While moving to an IP phone system will bring great advantages, the more options, features, functions and capabilities that are available, the more decisions the buyer has to make. That makes it crucial to thoroughly understand your needs before you buy. Here are seven steps to help in that process.

### 1 Determine how many users, and what kind of users, you need to support.

This isn't necessarily the same as counting the number of phones or extensions you'll need. You may need phones at the reception area or loading dock, for example, but such phones don't represent individual users. And you probably don't want to pay the same monthly fee for those extensions as you would for your sales staffs', as most hosted solutions would require. In addition, if a lot of users are going to be working from home or other remote sites, you'll want a solution that makes it as easy as possible to set up and configure their phones. In fact, such ease of setup may let you use more remote workers than you could otherwise. Either way, a thorough analysis of the number and type of users you need to support is a crucial first step in choosing the right system.

#### How many users do I need to support?

- Main Office
- Branch Office
- Remote Workers
- Call Center

## What kind users do I need to support?

- Attendants
- General Office
- Remote Workers/ Telecommuters
- Call Center Agents

## 2 Estimate how many simultaneous calls you need to support.

In general, you may need to handle anywhere from three to five simultaneous calls per every 10 employees for ordinary businesses, to nine or 10 calls per 10 employees for call center-type setups. Knowing this number is important if you're planning to use the flexibility of IP telephony to tailor your telecom service to your needs. For example, with a traditional PBX, your options include buying either individual analog lines or higher-capacity circuits such as T1s. But a dedicated T1 carries 23 voice circuits. If you need to support 24 or 25 calls at a time, you have to buy another T1, most of which will go unused. On the other hand, you can buy SIP (VoIP) trunks that run over your broadband Internet connection in the exact numbers you need. Or you can mix and match PSTN and SIP circuits in any combination you wish. SIP trunks can connect directly to your IP PBX.

- How many simultaneous calls do I need to support?
- Typical business (3 to 5 simultaneous calls per 10 users)
- Call Center ( 8 – 10 simultaneous calls per 10 users)
- How many circuits do I need to support my call volumes?
- T1
- PSTN
- SIP trunks (VoIP)

## 3 Decide what kind of phones your different users need.

Just as you don't want to pay a full monthly fee for those seldom-used reception-area or loading-dock extensions, you probably don't want the most expensive multi-button phones for all your extensions either. A lot of employees may need little more than a dial tone, voice mail and the ability to transfer calls. Others will need multiple lines, speakerphones, programmable keys, bright color LCDs and more. A more general consideration is whether you want to have to plug every phone, even those in the middle of conference room tables, into a power outlet. If not, make sure to get models with Power-over-Ethernet (PoE) capability. And if you don't have an extra Ethernet connection for every IP phone you're installing, try to get models with two ports, so users' computers can access the LAN through them.

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## What kind of phones/ features do my different users need?

- Basic business phones
- Speakerphones
- 2 or multiple lines
- Power-over-Ethernet
- Dual Ethernet Ports
- Programmable Keys
- Video Conferencing

## 4 Determine how much support staff and time you can commit.

IP PBXs are getting easier all the time to administer and manage. Still, doing it all yourself can require assigning a reasonably tech-savvy person to spend a fair amount of time on the task. The skills and time required will vary according to the type of system involved, particularly when you are totally responsible for all maintenance. Comparing the requirements for each type of system to the staff resources you are in a position to commit will be a big help in clarifying your purchasing options.

- How much support staff and time do I want dedicate to my phone system?
- How easy or difficult is it to administer the system? Can I administer remotely?
- How much will the vendor help monitor and maintain the system?

## 5 Decide how important service quality, reliability and security are to you.

Start by asking whether you can afford to lose phone service if and when your Internet connection goes down. If you can't, even temporarily, you'll need a solution that includes or relies entirely on PSTN connectivity, which provides a dedicated channel or circuit between you and your callers over traditional wired phone lines. The same goes if you need guaranteed voice quality. On the other hand, perhaps you can put up with a bit of uncertainty about how your calls will sound, and feel confident that your Internet provider is reliable. If so, you may want to opt for the savings and features that come with VoIP connectivity, which you can use even if you choose a premise or hybrid-hosted solution rather than hosted service. Most important, think carefully about how willing you are to have all your voice mail messages and prompts stored in a service provider's data center rather than in your own building.

- How much will my phone system depend on the Internet for the delivery of calls?
- Where do voice mail messages, prompts and call records reside?
- What are my disaster recovery options?

## 6 Analyze your long-distance calling patterns.

This is the other half of the tradeoff between the guaranteed reliability of PSTN service and the savings of VoIP connectivity. Look at how much you currently pay for PSTN phone service, including DID numbers (individual, dedicated dial-in numbers), inbound toll-free lines and unlimited or per-minute calling plans. Add your long-distance charges for calls such as those between branches, if they're not covered by your calling plan, and those to overseas destinations. Pay particular attention to routes that may cost significantly less with VoIP service. With these figures in hand, you'll be ready for the next step.

- How much will do I currently pay for long-distance calling?
- If you have multiple locations, how much are you paying for calls between different locations?
- What are other communication charges and fees I am currently paying?

## 7 Determine which combination of PSTN and VoIP service will best fit your needs.

If you decided above that you have to rely solely on PSTN service, you have already completed this step. Otherwise, start by adding up the costs of extensions and calling plans you would need with a hosted VoIP service. Next, look at the various combinations of PSTN lines and SIP (VoIP) trunks that are possible with premise or hybrid-hosted IP PBXs. Then figure out what your current pattern of long-distance calls, which you analyzed in the previous step, will cost under the different combinations. Don't forget to note which solutions will give you free VoIP calling among your company's branches or sites, as traditionally hosted solutions do not include free VoIP calling among branch sites. Finally, decide what part, if any, of your voice traffic you're willing to send via VoIP in order to save money, and what part absolutely requires PSTN transport for quality, reliability and even safety purposes.

- How much will I save by moving all my long-distance calling to VoIP?
- How much will I save if all inter-branch calls are free via VoIP?
- How important is guaranteed quality and reliability in my phone service?
- How important is saving money, even if there's a quality and reliability risk?
- What will the charges be for DID numbers, toll-free numbers, etc.?

## MAKING THE RIGHT CHOICE

Going through the above steps will help narrow down your choices. It may in fact eliminate some of the options entirely. For example, if you absolutely need the quality and reliability of PSTN delivery, hosted service won't work for you. In the end, you'll be balancing three main factors. One is payments to suppliers, including equipment purchases, maintenance contracts and telecom services. The second is the quality and reliability of phone service. The third is your ability or willingness to monitor and maintain your equipment entirely on your own.

## About Fonality

Fonality is a leader in business phone systems and contact center solutions for small and medium-sized businesses. Deployed over 44,000 times in 125 countries, Fonality's award winning IP-PBX VoIP phone systems have connected more than 750,000,000 mission critical phone calls. PBXtra is based on Fonality's patent-pending Anywhere Management®, Hybrid-Hosted™ architecture, plus an improved, modified version of the popular open source code base with 5,000,000 lines of code to add reliability, stability and enterprise-class features. PBXtra delivers the advanced capabilities of an enterprise-class phone system for 40 to 80 percent less than traditional offerings. Fonality headquarters are in Los Angeles, and the company has offices in Brazil and Australia. Company investors include Intel Capital, Draper Fisher Jurvetson, and Azure Capital partners.

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