

## **Business Telephone Systems** *What Options are Right for My Business?*

A business phone system is the lifeblood of any successful business and whether you are setting up a new office or remote location, or it's simply time to upgrade to more modern features, there are many choices to consider.

While it's ultimately best to speak with an experienced business telephone system representative, this guide will help you get a better sense of the options available, and get you thinking about how you may want to use your new phone system now, and as your business grows in the future.

Of course if you have any questions, we invite you to speak with one of our experts at BCS Voice and Data, where we serve clients across the US. Visit us online at [bcsvoicedata.com](http://bcsvoicedata.com) or call 757-497-3100.



### **Phone System Basics**

One of the first things to consider for your business telephone system is how your phone is answered, and who takes the incoming calls. If you have a central receptionist, you may not need an auto attendant feature. For those who don't have a receptionist, or have more call volume than a receptionist can handle, an auto attendant presents callers with a list of options to connect them with the right person. It also lets callers connect directly with people via a dedicated extension, bypassing the menu choices completely.

Other basic features to consider include:

**Conferencing** – allowing multiple extensions to connect and share a conversation. Do you need the ability to conference in more than two extensions? How many external lines do you need to conference in?

**On hold messages** – Do you want to have music, or even custom-recorded messages while people are on hold? Would you like to provide opt-out options for people on hold to leave a message or have a call-back?

**Voice mail** – Do employees need to be able to check messages when they are away from the office? Do they need to be able to update their outgoing message?

**Lines and extensions** – How many phone lines and individual extensions do you need to support now, and in the future? What about fax numbers, credit card terminals, common areas (kitchens, lobbies, warehouses)?

Part of this consideration also involves how many simultaneous calls you need to be able to handle at a given time, and what happens to calls when all the lines are tied up. What about future growth?

**Other options you may want to consider:**

Call hold and call forwarding, speed dial for frequently called numbers, redialing and public-address in-office paging.

## **More Advanced Options**

**Twinning** – The ability to have your phone (or extension) ring to a cell phone, home phone or other location in addition to your office. This is different than forwarding.



**Call forwarding** – Do you need the ability to forward the main number, or one or more extensions?

**Remote extensions** – Do you need the ability to have employees working remotely be part of the phone system, and accessible by dialing an extension? Do you want to be able to seamlessly integrate remote locations (home-based or otherwise) into your overall phone (and data) network?

**Hands-free** – Do you need hands-free, headset and wireless options for the phone models?

**Conference rooms** – Do you need dedicated conference room or meeting room phones, with more advanced speaker capabilities?

### **Technology Integration**

In addition to more traditional phone features like those listed above, technology advances give businesses even more powerful ways to use their phone systems, and integrate them with overall data network and workflow.

The ability to converge the voice and data networks is the foundation of technology integration. With a strong enough data network, you can leverage the infrastructure to house your phone system as well, using VoIP technology, and manage a single network infrastructure instead of two (data and phone).

Part of that decision involves understanding and analyzing your existing network and bandwidth capabilities to see if it can support VoIP infrastructure. Make sure your phone system vendor can test your network and has the necessary tools to perform a full analysis of data and voice traffic. Sophisticated tools will even allow grabbing “packets” of data for very detailed analysis, including voice and sound quality, and not every phone system integrator will be able to conduct detailed testing.

Other technology integration provides enhanced business communication tools. For example, **Unified Communications and Collaboration** efforts (known in the industry as UCC) let you integrate a number of communication channels, such as instant messaging, video and web conference calls, email and even data access. These systems, like those offered by Mitel, combine server access with simple user interfaces and a variety of ways to deploy.

A real-world example might include accessing data via a touch screen in a conference room and immediately sharing that data with others on the call. If someone has information on a thumb drive, no problem. Simply plug it into the phone’s USB port, or even access a remote desktop, right from the phone.

No more pulling together a web desktop sharing session, while juggling a telephone conference call, and also emailing documents back and forth during the call. The words “unified communication and collaboration” really ring true when you experience a UCC system in operation.

Another example of integration is **VoIP**, or Voice over Internet Protocol. VoIP simply uses internet technology to route calls, both within and outside the office and to the outside world. There are differences in how VoIP is implemented, depending on whether the phone system is hosted at the business’ location



(premise-based), or if the system's server is hosted remotely.

If the system is premise-based, VoIP simply replaces the old PBX-style server in your office and uses the company's local network to route calls. Calls aren't actually made over the internet, but IP technology is used within the office to allow more advanced communication features.

**Hosted or cloud-based** VoIP solutions use a server that is located away from the office, and calls are connected through the remote server using an internet connection. A fast and reliable internet connection is required. Many of the costs associated with a premise-based system are significantly lower, as you don't have to purchase the same level of on-site hardware.

The intricacies of VoIP mean there isn't a one-size-fits-all solution. This is where partnering with an experienced, reliable business telephone system integrator is crucial, as they will help you evaluate your needs, and ensure that whatever solution is selected, you're well prepared for future growth and business changes.

### **Telephone System Integrator (Partner)**

For most businesses, the telephone system integrator is really more of a partner to help ensure your company's in future success. This shouldn't be viewed as simply transaction or vendor-relationship. To fully take advantage of technology, integration and improved efficiencies offered by better communication, select a company that can be an effective partner in selecting the right system, handling the installation and training, and providing ongoing service and support.

Calls into your business represent dollars, so it's vital to work with a telephone system provider that understands your business needs and will be there for the long haul.

A few considerations include:

**Overall knowledge** – Does the company have deep knowledge and experience, or do they seem more like a manufacturer's representative? Do they ask questions that get you to think, and offer suggestions and guidance?

**On-site support** – Does the system provider actually handle installation, integration and support? You want a firm that is equipped and staffed to handle your needs today, and tomorrow.





**Technology** – Do they offer, and support, the latest developments in phone systems, unified communication and cloud-based options? If the company seems like they are a few steps behind, they may not be able to support your growing needs or fully support newer systems.

**Other services** – Do they offer other information technology services and have a strong working knowledge in other areas. Modern telephone systems are now an integral part of your overall IT infrastructure, and the phone system provider should understand those elements, from running structured cabling to setting up audio-video solutions and servers.

There are a myriad of options for business telephone systems, but business owners don't need to feel overwhelmed. Start with the basics and get a good feel for how you'll use the system now, and in the future. Be realistic about your business. Just because UCC is a great technology, doesn't mean it's right for your business.

Once you have a good understanding of your needs, meet with several phone system providers and tap into their expertise. Ask questions, trust the experts, select the right provider to meet your needs, and then enjoy your new phone system.

If you have questions, please contact **BCS Voice & Data** at 757-497-3100 for a no-obligation conversation about your business telephone system challenges and needs.