

An expert guide | Should you invest in hosted telephony?



Our simple guide outlines everything you need to consider when deciding on the right phone system for your business.

What we do...

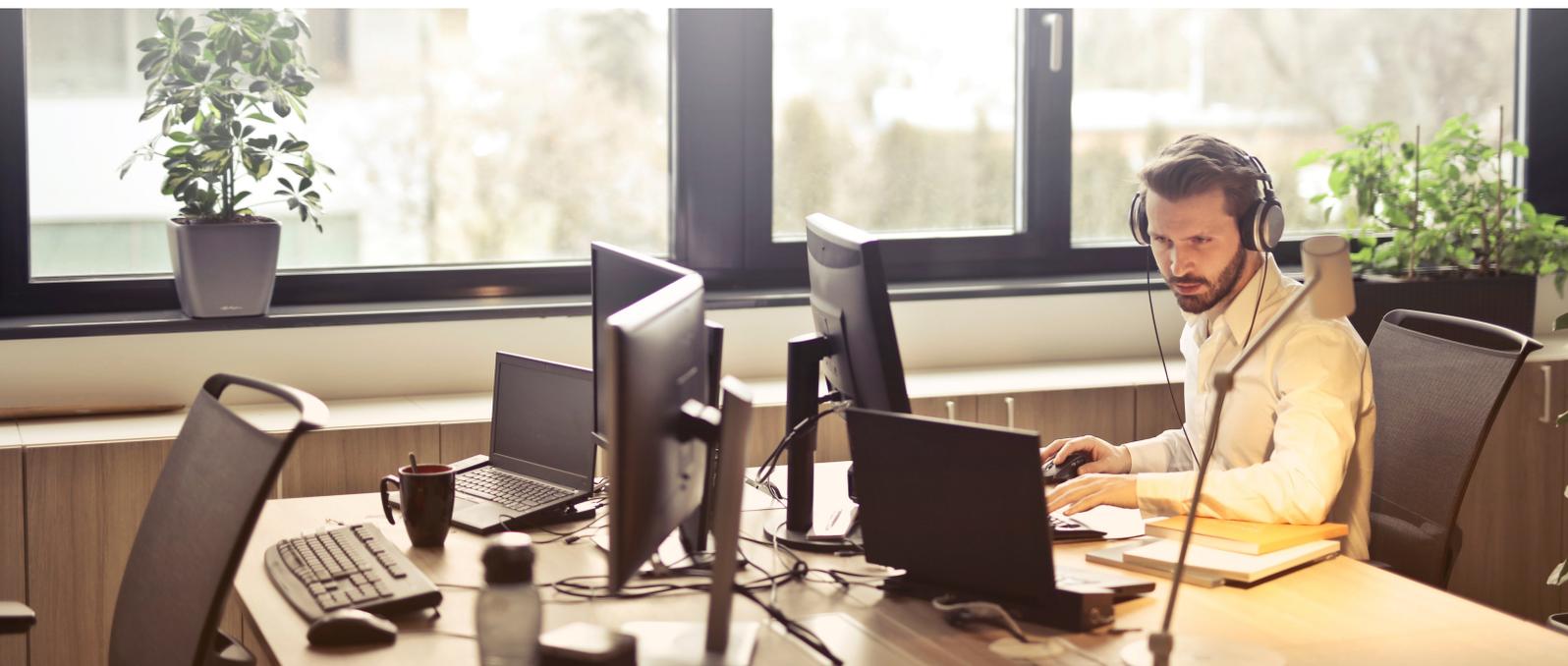
As a trusted managed service provider we constantly review the services we provide to ensure that our customers receive the best possible technologies available to them. Our business structure and solutions enable us to stay agile and responsive, allowing us to adapt to the changing trends within the market and our customer base.

In order to enhance our offering, we regularly review providers face-to-face. This allows us to onboard new products and services that will allow our customers to take advantage of newer, more advanced technologies. This puts us in a unique position and enables us to give you the best advice in the industry.

This buyers guide has been collated to help you choose which path to take with your telephony investment. Unlike other providers, we don't believe there is a right and wrong way; it's merely what services your business better.

Introduction

Communication throughout your business is changing. Handset display size is no longer the priority for most businesses; all the focus is now on apps and collaboration. What's more, the decision you make now has the potential to grow and adapt with your business needs for the next ten years or more. If you get it wrong then you could find yourself doing the same reviews in just 3-5 years' time.



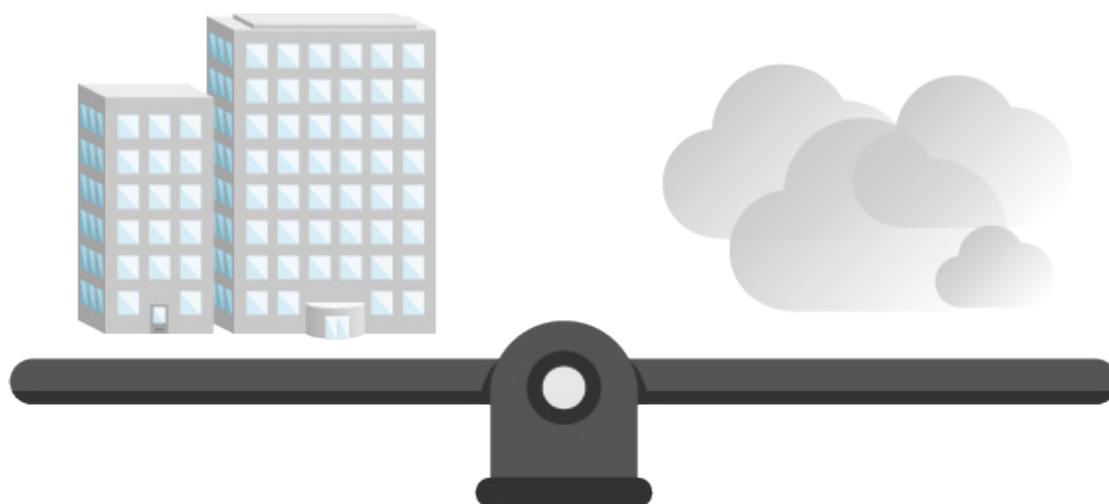
What do I need to consider?

Everyone calls hosted telephony something different. The one common theme or phrase we hear through our partner meetings is VoIP (or Voice over Internet Protocol to use its full name). There are currently over 3 million VoIP users throughout the UK, with growth in both on-prem (on premises) systems and hosted systems expected.

The two main talking points leading into 2020 have been the Openreach copper network switch off in 2025 (watch our video - [WLR Switch Off](#)) and GDPR Compliance. These talking points, coupled with the huge demand for home working solutions at this current time, generate a lot of purposeful questions when considering your new communication system move.

Do you need on-prem or hosted?

A simple answer is that we don't know until we have had an in depth discussion about your business requirements. However, hosted generally offers more flexibility and benefits to Small Businesses. Most providers out there will advocate one over the other to all of their customers, but we are different. We can confidently say that any feature, function or service you wish to implement in your business can be provided with either an on-prem system, hosted product or hybrid solution.



Reliable and cost-effective solutions

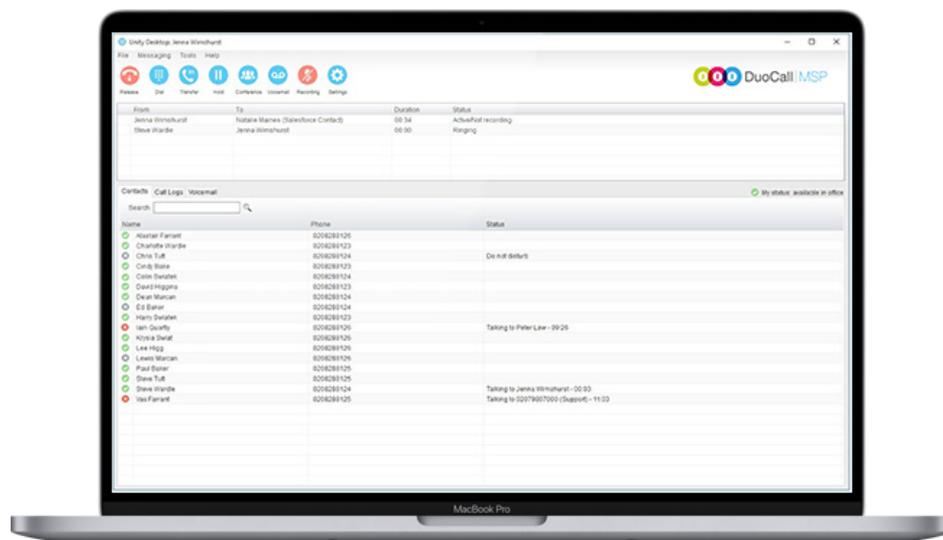
Take your time to review the infrastructure of the vendor you are talking to. Remember that the Unified Communications market is set to reach \$143.5 billion by the end on 2024, meaning new and upcoming brands are always arriving on the scene due to the growing potential.

Although it may seem less time consuming and easier to choose the cheapest option, this may damage your ability to communicate effectively in the future. You could find yourselves searching for a replacement solution sooner than you may think.

Business applications

It's essential that you review your business before you approach a provider. Work out which applications and services you currently use internally and find out which promote the best productivity. It's also important to identify any business-critical applications that you simply can't operate without.

Use these applications to shape the communications element of the project and see which ones can be incorporated into a wider communications eco-system.



Feature set

The future of telephony is all about collating a plethora of features into one single pane of glass. For this reason, you should always look for a Unified Communications platform that takes you beyond the standard voice features. Although you may only take advantage of voice now, a more versatile solution will open doors for you as your communication requirements develop.

Ideally, your provider should offer voice services as a minimum and allow you to expand into the feature set with apps, bolt-ons and additional services that are designed to enhance their platform. Allow your chosen partner to design a communications strategy that ensures you only pay for features you actually use.

Accessibility and control

Your communications platform is an integral part of your business and should be accessible from wherever you are. Meshing your business' successful applications together requires a powerful management system that is easy to use.

Check that your provider can deliver a fully interactive portal that allows you to make adjustments on the fly and adapt to your ever-changing telephony needs. Having management, call recordings and call logging capabilities in one place simplifies the user experience, saving time and improving efficiency.

You will also need to think about how you would like to deploy your communication strategy so that you can ensure ease-of-use. Do you want something that's entirely on-prem or something that combines on-prem and cloud solutions? Perhaps you want the freedom of a technology stack wholly built on the cloud.



Try and avoid too much disruption to employee productivity

Finally, make sure that the communication strategy you choose is something that is easy for your employees to adopt and take advantage of. Ideally, you want something that combines simple installation and set-up with the features that your employees genuinely need in order to maximise productivity and efficiency.

Choosing a small business phone system isn't an easy task

There are many methods of communication available to businesses including SMS, instant messaging, video-conferencing and more; but the phone system still remains the most important tool for communication in the workplace.

At this stage, it's probably worth mentioning what a small business is. Here's a rough guide of how businesses are categorised within the phone systems market:

- Micro Business = 1-10 users
- SMB (small to medium size business) = 11-250 users
- Mid-Market = 250 to 1000 users
- Enterprise = 1000+ users

Nowadays, most phone system capabilities are primarily software controlled and therefore scalability over the years has dramatically increased (due to improvements in the hardware they reside on). For example, you can now buy a phone system the size of a shoe box that will easily support 100 users or more.

If you have a virtual server (e.g. Microsoft Hyper-V or VMware), a single host can potentially support hundreds, if not thousands, of users.



How to buy the best small business phone system

The impact that the right business phone system can have on your company is huge.

In a world of collaboration tools and apps, it's easy to overlook the potential of the standard phone system. However, statistics show that something as simple as switching from a traditional PSTN line to VoIP can be game changing. The average savings that occur after switching to VoIP can range between 50 and 75%.

So, what should you be looking at when you are thinking of investing in a new phone system? Which considerations are crucial to your success? Let's take a look...

1. Features

The first and most important thing to consider when choosing a phone system is which features are offered. Critical systems like call queues, conferencing capabilities, and IVR are common for many small businesses. Some of the other components you may want to look for include:

- Video or multi-media calling options
- Automated directories that allow you to find employee extensions rapidly
- Voicemail to leave messages for employees that aren't immediately available
- Call recording features
- Intelligent call queueing and call hold for when the correct agent is not available for a customer
- Call forwarding, for when you need to move a conversation over to someone new
- Music on hold to give your callers something to listen to while they're waiting

Sometimes, even the simplest of features can make the biggest difference to your telephony experience, for both agents and callers. Ensuring your callers receive a good experience is essential when it comes to your reputation and professionalism, so make sure you know you're getting the best before you invest.

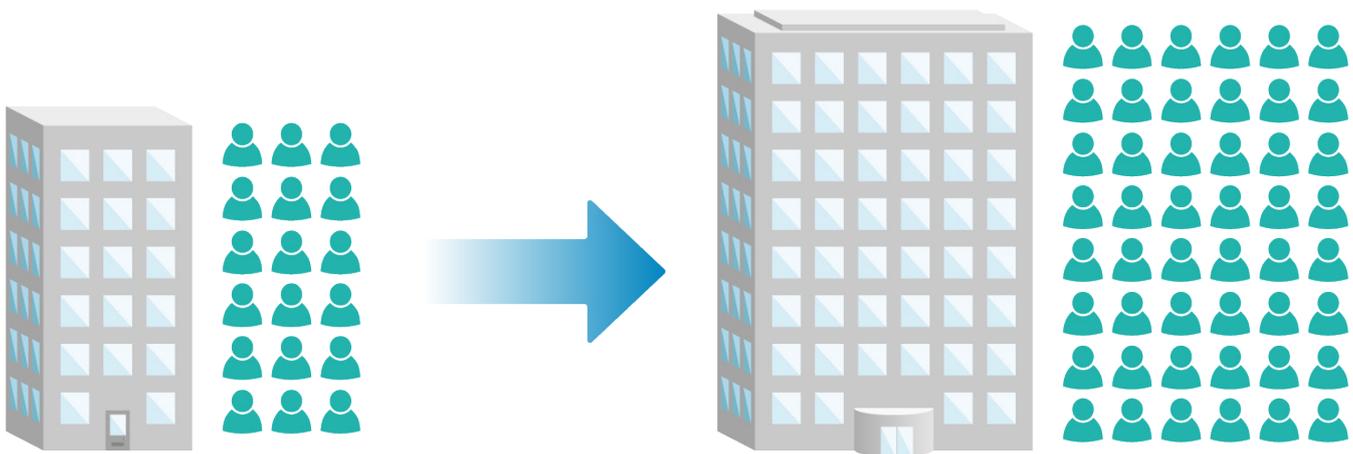


2. Size of the system

You will need to think about the scope of your phone system – how large is it going to be? You might need phones throughout your offices, in your reception area, in a conference room, even in a shop or warehouse floor.

Determining the size of your phone system will help you figure out how many lines or “trunks” you’ll need to implement in order to manage the number of incoming and outgoing calls your employees handle each day.

Remember, it’s important to look for a phone system that can scale with you. For instance, as your business grows, you might decide that you want to bring new employees on board or add new features to your telephony strategy. If that’s the case, you’ll need a phone system that can manage this growth.



3. Initial investment and total cost of ownership (TCO)

Although price shouldn’t be the only thing on your mind when you’re buying a phone system, it’s not something that you can afford to ignore. The type of phone system you choose will impact your initial investment. For instance, hosted VoIP solutions typically have a very low up-front cost. On the other hand, on-premise phones are more expensive up-front, but they come with fewer ongoing expenses for you to worry about.

VoIP platforms are often the best solution for smaller businesses because it allows for cost-efficiency and scalability. It’s worth thinking about the total cost of ownership for your system too. Cloud phone systems often have a low TCO, because your provider handles maintenance and server configuration for you.

4. Flexibility and mobility

Small businesses tend to have a plan to scale and grow. For this reason, it is important to think about your growth plan over the coming years when you are investing in a new phone system. If you think there is a potential for rapid growth, you need to consider whether the phone system is equipped to support this.

This is where you may wish to consider a hosted cloud or VoIP system as you can add new users easily when needed, meaning it is very supportive for rapid growth.

Due to the Covid-19 pandemic, more employees are working from home than ever before and this may be something you wish to support and continue as a business. Having a system which allows you to utilise your business mobile gives you this flexibility. VoIP phones allow you to do this as they use the internet to make and receive calls.

5. Redundancy

This is not an area that any business wants to think about or dwell on, but it is crucial to have a redundancy plan for your infrastructure. This needs to be spoken about with your potential provider to ensure you are fully prepared and supported in all eventualities.

6. Security

It cannot be over emphasised how important it is to speak to your potential provider about security if you decide to choose a hosted VoIP solution. You need to be sure that they are experienced and equipped to keep your data and conversations secure.



Take time to consider your investment

Choosing the right phone system for your company is a huge decision to make; this process shouldn't be rushed. Gathering all the information about your business and processes before speaking to a provider will give you clarity on what is important to you. Below are further points to help with your decision.

Speak to your employees

Your employees will be the people using your new phone system - ask them for their input. Many employees will have been exposed to various different phones throughout their career and may be able to highlight a new perspective on things that you may not have considered or been aware of.

If you are preparing to change an existing phone system, this will take some adjustment from your employees. By asking them what their likes and dislikes are about the current system, you may get a better idea of the features you want to include or exclude on the new system.

Insist on Quality of Service (QoS)

Make sure you insist on quality of service from your VoIP or business phone system provider. To achieve QoS, your provider needs to offer all the elements that are essential to your communication strategy, including the internet, the phone service, and any phone equipment you might need.

Providers should also be able to offer some control over things such as latency and jitter. Make sure that the internet bandwidth provided by the company you choose is adequate, and that voice traffic is always given priority.

Consult the professionals

If you are not sure where to begin or you are not sure what you need to get out of your phone system, reach out to people who can help you! DuoCall provide industry leading advice, guidance and support to businesses nationwide.



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