

Hosted VoIP versus on-site phone systems

Most of us have heard of Vonage either through advertisements or talking with friends who use their service. Vonage is probably the most widely-known Hosted Voice over Internet Protocol (VoIP) provider, especially to the average home consumer. In business, Hosted VoIP is really just starting to take off. As the offerings and providers grow and prices drop, many companies, especially in the small to mid-sized space, are asking if they should consider this option over the traditional on-premises PBX (phone) system.



Brian Childers
Guest column

Is Hosted VoIP better than a regular PBX? Whether you should choose one or the other for your organization depends to a large extent on your VoIP/ PBX requirements and your budget, but hosted is viable for almost any size company. Here we will do our best to explain the differences between the two choices in order to provide a better understanding of both and from that you will be able to make a more informed decision for your company when the time comes.

Hosted VoIP systems are generally housed in a highly secure facility with redundant systems, power, and network access to minimize critical single points of failure. Customers don't have to worry about floor space, security, dedicated cooling systems, and cost of installing the PBX system on premises. A big advantage of hosted solutions is that they have minimal setup and activation costs. Capital costs are virtually eliminated with the exception of possibly the handsets and some local network switching equipment to provide Quality of Service (QoS) to accommodate prioritizing voice traffic and to provide Power Over Ethernet (POE) which eliminates the need for dedicated power supplies for the handsets. With POE, the network cable conducts the power to the device as well as the communications signal. Now both your voice and data can be delivered over a single line.

Hosted PBX solutions have much lower startup and operational costs as compared to an On-Premises PBX. There are many hosted VoIP providers who offer services for as low as \$30 per month per user. In contrast, there's a major up-front cost involved with a PBX, sometimes in the tens of thousands of dollars. A good rule of thumb for an On-Premises solution is around \$800 per handset. Furthermore, you likely will need to subscribe to additional maintenance expenses on a periodic basis. Since there is virtually no on-premises equipment for a Hosted VoIP solution, it has minimal maintenance costs.

You not only save capital expenses money but also on space, time, and special environmental considerations as well. Maintainability is a challenge for regular PBX solutions. You are at the mercy of an annual support contract or dedicated PBX Administrator to manage the PBX if you don't already have someone.

"What happens if my network access goes down?" is often asked regarding a Hosted solution. With an On-Premises PBX calls will generally default to a "fast busy" or the annoying tone in the ear announcing that "the number you just dialed is no longer in service" in some cases. With a Hosted solution the calls are delivered to the system where the caller can at least leave a voicemail or calls can be automatically forwarded. It is recommended that you have two internet access sources with automatic failover. This will eliminate virtually all outages and single points of failure.

To summarize, Hosted VoIP solutions can provide businesses with the following advantages:

- Low startup costs - Small businesses looking to operate more efficiently and keeping costs down are excellent candidates. Hosted

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VoIP services offer low start up costs since there is no PBX equipment to purchase.

- Ongoing monthly savings - Combining your voice and data networks into a single infrastructure help you realize the benefits of Internet telephony by reducing the need to support two separate network systems. This also includes the lowered costs of moves, adds, and changes.

- Advanced features - With Hosted VoIP, your business can take advantage of included

advanced features such as find-me/follow-me, call forwarding, call waiting, voicemail to email, 3-way call conferencing and many more that are traditionally available only with very expensive PBX systems built for large customers.

- Business continuity - In the event of a disaster at the company's facility, Hosted VoIP provides accessibility from virtually any high-speed internet connection. Clients are still able to place calls that are delivered to voice-

mail or phone numbers can be automatically forwarded to company cell phones using pre-defined "disaster configuration" templates. Applications called "soft phones" will also work with a USB headset and a computer with Internet access. The headset is not even required.

- Business focus - Just like Hosted data systems, Hosted VoIP is a turnkey solution. Businesses no longer have to be in the voice and data business if that's not their core focus. You will be able to focus on running your business, not on running a communications infrastructure. Be sure to choose a provider that is focused on delivering solutions only to businesses to best understand your needs. ■

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A lot of thought goes into the design of a school building. Classroom types, functions and sizes, fine arts and athletic spaces, spaces for community use and spaces for student gathering. Then there's square footages, cost, materials and technology.

At Huckabee, another critical design component is the **safety and security** of the building. Huckabee has a team dedicated to this cause and encourages design collaboration between the architects, school administrators, local law enforcement and other district personnel to make our schools safer. We actively participate in Rapid Response exercises with local law enforcement and their SWAT teams to see first hand how the building's design plays a direct role in crime prevention.

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