

Picking Your Next Phone System

www.telephonesystemsdirect.co.uk



An easy to understand ebook by Telephone Systems Direct to help you select your next phone system.

Introduction

Selecting the right phone system for your business is getting harder as the technology is becoming more complex, your needs are becoming more sophisticated and customers are more demanding.

This guide walks you through the different aspects of selecting a phone system and the commercial issues that you need to consider in order to ensure that you get best value.

Selecting the Phone Lines to Connect You to the Outside World

Stage 1 is to identify the type of phone lines that will connect your business to the outside world as this will dictate the type of system you need. ISDN is usually the most appropriate solution for business but you should understand why you are rejecting the other options.



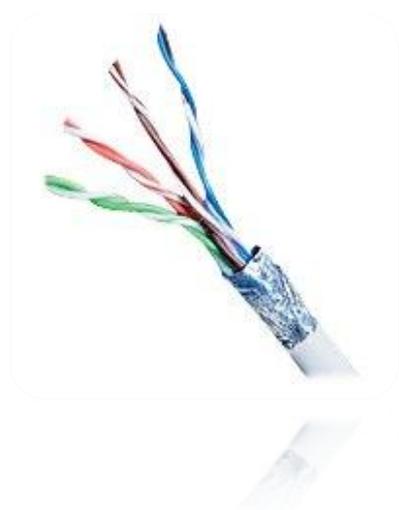
- **Wired or Wireless.** Traditionally all telephony services are delivered through cables, but as technology advances we will see a time where an individual will “plug-in” to the national network wirelessly using a technology like WiMAX or radio tails.
- **Analogue.** Analogue phone lines have been around for a long time and remain robust although feature poor. Small businesses tend to retain one for broadband but alarms and faxes are usually handled via ISDN.
- **ISDN2.** This is the first of the digital lines you can rent. It is essentially two trunk circuits with a third delivering signalling. Only choose this if you expect to have a maximum requirement of 6 lines into your phone systems as upon hitting the need for 8, ISDN30 is the answer.
- **ISDN30.** As for ISDN-2 it is just bigger and more flexible. Starting with 8 channels you can increase all the way up to thirty, and then reduce when you have too many.
- **DDI.** The beauty of ISDN is that with a single pair of conductors (or cables) you can appear to have thousands of telephone numbers due to DDI. Unfortunately not all simultaneously. Each circuit carries calls inbound or outbound. This means individuals or departments can have their own telephone numbers and so reduce the amount of calls taken by the receptionist. Smaller firms use this to remove the need to rent lines for; alarms, fax and credit card machines.
- **Broadband.** When selecting your phone line you also need to consider how you bring the Internet into your building. It is unwise to think that broadband is consistently good enough to carry VoIP calls. Ask about leased circuits or EFM (Ethernet final mile).
- **Cable.** Some cable companies (Sky, Virgin) also provide telephone services and when bundled with broadband can be a cost effective solution in residential situations.
- **SIP/VoIP.** This stands for Session Initiation Protocol and Voice over IP. This is the technology that is used to make voice and video calls over the Internet and will ultimately be how everybody communicates in the not too distant future. Leased line connectivity to an MPLS network is preferable. Using EFM circuits to an MPLS network saves a little but doesn't benefit from the same service levels as leased fibre circuits. Attempting this over ADSL or SDSL broadband is not recommended.

Your telephone system supplier should help you select the most appropriate phone line for your business whilst taking into account for future needs.

Selecting the Cabling to Connect Your Phones to Your Phone System

Stage 2 is to decide on how you are going to connect your phones to your phone system inside your building.

There are a number of things you need to consider when you install cabling into a building for phones and computers.



- **Copper Cables** For a very small office or home the standard BT style 2-pair (CW1308) is common as it is cheap to install but you can only use it for phones.
- **CAT5e/CAT6 Structured Cabling.** This type of cabling is used to connect both computers and telephone handsets to their respective servers and phone systems (PABX). It involves running a pair of cables (one for the computer and the other for the phone) from each desk or location to a central location where your computer server and phone system is located. This type of cabling is very flexible, currently carries higher speeds than wireless technology but is more expensive as it requires a cable running from every phone and computer back to a central communications room. Cat6 has no speed benefits has no benefits over Cat5e as both achieve 1 gb/sec. Even the very best quality voice calls only use 100 kb/sec which is tiny.
- **Fibre Optics.** At this moment in time you would only install fibre optic cabling if you have a need to run a cable more than 90 metres. Beyond that maximum fibre is use to connect a slave cat5 data cabinet enabling you to run a further 90 metres.
- **Wireless.** Wireless is both slower and less secure than wired solutions but can be the only solution if you have an old building or a listed building where running cables would be difficult or prohibited. Wireless is useful in offices where staff “float “around the building. Phone system manufacturers usually offer either integral DECT or Wi-Fi VoIP cordless solutions. Some manufacturers propose cellular phone integration and this may revolutionise mobility.
- **Underground, Overheads & Way Leaves.** Crossing other people’s land or buildings can create problems and you need to check the best route to connect your phone system to the outside world or external buildings prior to buying your phone system as you may be restricted on how you can connect to the outside world.
- **Extending existing systems.** The challenge sometimes is whether to extend an existing cabling network or to start again with a new faster technology. This will very much depend on your current needs, how you plan to grow your business and what you need the phone system to do. These are the issues that you need to discuss with your phone system supplier.

Your phone systems supplier should be able to help you select the right cabling system and also install it for you if you don’t already have the right cabling in place. It is wise to have you phone system supplier install your cabling infrastructure as they tend to comply with the rigorous Cat5e standards.

Selecting the Features of a Phone System

Stage 3 looks at the features of the phone system that will make communication in your business more efficient.

A typical phone system for a business has hundreds of features and so we have selected a few key features from which you should pick your essentials.

Today, all phone systems will provide the basic of call transfer and call hold so we have listed the additional phone system features below with an idea of how they can benefit you.



- **Call Recording:** Call recording can double the cost of a system if done on an external PC. However a limited number of makers give call recording free as soon as you select to have voice mail.
- **Conferencing:** If you need to speak to several people at the same time you will need a conference call facility. Some systems support a maximum of 5 in a call whereas others offer a true conferencing bridge.
- **Music on Hold:** This allows the caller to listen to an advert or music. The benefit of using an advert is that you tell callers on hold about any special offers or additional services that you offer. Some makes allow you to play messages like this from the voice processing card so that you don't have to buy an external playing device.
- **Call Forwarding:** This helps forward calls from one extension to another. This means you can work at another desk and still receive calls. Many can send to mobiles.
- **Voice Mail:** This allows callers to leave messages in a voice mail box so that you never miss a call. If this is used with DDI (Direct Dial In) numbers (over ISDN) then calls can go directly to an extension and if nobody is present the caller can leave a message. Some systems convert recordings and despatch as WAV files to your email inbox.
- **Computer Telephony Integration:** Provides PC screen pops and permits power dialling from within applications on your desktop. The latest variants are installed via a wizard and connect phone numbers to social media such as Facebook.
- **Battery Back Up / UPS:** This feature allows the phone system to operate despite power failures. More often it is used to eradicate power spikes.
- **Mobile Extension:** This feature allows external workers to use their mobile phone as an extension of the phone system and can be paired with an internal extension so that both the office extension and mobile will ring at the same time. Callers answered on mobiles can then be transferred on to internal extensions.

An easy way to involve your team in selecting the right features for your system is to list the features in a spread sheet down the left hand side and then across the top the names of individual members of your team. Ask each team member to tick those features that are essential for their job and put in a question mark for those that would be nice to have. You will then end up with a matrix of required features which then help your supplier help you select the right range of handsets for your team.

Selecting the Make or Manufacturer of a Phone System

You have now a detailed list of what you want from your next phone system. Most companies keep their phone system for many years. They are now very reliable and so selecting the right manufacturer of the phone system is critical.



Stage 4 looks at what you need to consider when selecting a manufacturer of a phone system:

- **Longevity of supply.** Find out how long the manufacturer has been supplying systems in the UK. You are going to be keeping your system for a long time and so you need to know that the manufacturer is committed to selling systems in the UK for the long term.
- **Country of Origin & Pricing.** Is there an established dealership network for the manufacturer? Are they able to get spares easily? Is their pricing fixed and in UK Sterling? You don't want to fall victim to currency fluctuations when agreeing to buy the system and support afterwards.
- **Functionality.** All phone systems have basic features, but does your business require a specific feature? Check the manufacturer offers a suitable range of phone systems.
- **Range of Handsets.** Check the manufacturer offers a range of handsets. The range should include plain ordinary telephones (POTs), hands-free, full function digital handsets, operator consoles, Wi-Fi and then with and without displays and one-touch buttons.
- **Convergence and TDM versus VoIP.** Can the manufacturer support the latest technologies? Voice-over-IP (the Internet) phone systems technology might mean you have to upgrade your computer network. You need to ensure that the range includes support for the latest technologies.
- **Quality, Styling & Ease of Use.** When you look at the range of handsets from the manufacturer are they easy to use? Are they intuitive so that you don't have to spend time and money training people on how to use the handsets? Are there video clips on the Internet to show you how easy they are to use?
- **Applications** Some phone systems have applications that run on your PC in order to help users? Are they available from your selected manufacturer?
- **Moves and Changes.** How simple is it to program changes yourself? Do you have to pay for an engineer to make any changes? Most systems these days can be programmed by you. Only complex changes should need an engineer.
- **Maintenance.** Does the manufacturer give the dealer or supplier of the phone system good support so that if you have a difficult to trace problem the manufacturer will be able to help?

Selecting the Supplier of Your Phone System

Selecting the right supplier for your phone system and its subsequent support afterwards is critical to your business.

There are a lot of companies selling phone systems on the Internet but some don't have the infrastructure to support the phone systems when it has been sold.



Stage 5 looks at what you need to consider when selecting a supplier of your phone system.

- **Recommendations & Testimonials.** Are you able to get up to date references from customers who have recently bought systems from the supplier? Are you able to do a test call to their support line?
- **Specialisation.** Is the supplier a specialist phone company? Are they able to support all the systems that they sell?
- **Accreditation.** What accreditations does the supplier have? What standards have they achieved? How long have they been accredited to a manufacturer?
- **Length of time Established.** How long have they been trading for? A long established business will have considerable experience and resources to ensure you get the best support.
- **Continuity of the work-force.** A stable workforce shows a well-run business and there is a great benefit to having the same engineer get to know you and your system as they will be able to make it work for you in the way you want it to.
- **Contactability.** What are their working hours? Will they be available when you want them?
- **Geographical Support Coverage.** Can the supplier support your system? If an engineer has to travel to your site can they do it in a sensible time frame?
- **Creditworthiness** Are they credit worthy? If they are not then they will have difficulty getting the best terms from the manufacturers.
- **Purchase versus Leasing.** If cash to purchase the system is hard to come by or you would prefer to use it in another part of the business then leasing can be an excellent way to get the system that will help you drive your business forward but without a large up-front payment.
- **Industry Experience.** A long established supplier will have provided systems to a wide range of businesses. This means that they will have experience of how systems are used in your particular industry and may well have thought of things you haven't thought of.
- **Manufacturer Support.** Good manufacturer support is critical to the supplier of your phone system. Most good manufacturers will have an accreditation scheme in place which shows the dealer has technical staff trained up on their systems and are therefore best placed to support the systems.

As you will appreciate Telephone Systems Direct is a specialist phone systems dealership and we provide impartial advice as it is in our interests to make sure you get the best phone system that meets your needs as we would like to support the system once it is installed.

For information about how we can help you go to www.telephonesystemsdirect.co.uk. On the site you will find information regarding our team, its location in the UK, its area of influence, the

products, phone systems services and 4,000 items on all matter of telephony from selecting cheaper phone calls through to the types of phone lines you should choose for your phone systems.

If at any point you wish for clarification on any subject, just pick up your phone and speak to us free on 0800 652 8052.