VOIP FOR BUSINESS USERS

USING INTERNET TELEPHONY TO INCREASE SERVICE LEVELS AND CUT COSTS

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The Internet has revolutionized the way you travel, shop and find information. Cloud benefits include more control, more features and lower costs. Good news. VoIP brings those same cloud benefits to business voice communications. Now you can cut your ties with a telephone network that's over a century old … and bring the disruptive advantages of Voice over Internet Protocol to your business thanks to VoIPstudio.

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Chapter 1. VoIP. A Quick Introduction.

Your phone used to tie you to the past …

Twenty years ago, if you wanted a business telephone system your choices were limited:

- If you were a small, single-location business, you could purchase a mechanical 'key and lamp' system from your phone company. Based on 1940s technology, it offered little or no features.
- If you were a larger, multi-location business, you could acquire a 'PBX' (private branch exchange) from a company like Ericsson or ITT. It offered features like call transfer, but it was a huge investment.

And in either case you had to make all your calls through a monopoly (or, if you were lucky, duopoly) phone carrier. So your calls were expensive. And if you wanted new extensions or locations, you had to get specialist engineers to make changes to your system.

In short, you were completely at the mercy of phone carriers, exchange manufacturers and onsite engineers. Worse, you were chained to the past by a network that was already over a century old.

… but now VoIP links you to the future.

With VoIP you make your calls through the Internet. So as long as you have an Internet connection at your business location/s, you've already got everything it takes to use VoIP.

It's like having an ultra-sophisticated PBX … but it is hosted on the Internet, 'in the cloud'. In fact these systems are referred to as a Hosted PBX.

But don't think about Skype when you think Hosted VoIP. With Skype you're sharing the system resources with about 300 million other people … but with Hosted VoIP from a quality service provider you are only sharing resources with the people in your company.

That means Hosted VoIP gives you business class service. You'll get incredible features, quality and reliability.

VoIP grows with you. Here's an example.

With Hosted VoIP you can start small and grow. How small? Even a one-person business could benefit from a hosted service.

Take the case of Jane, who started a marketing consultancy from her spare bedroom. As a one-person business working from home, she had one inbound

'virtual' number that could be routed to her home landline number or cell phone. She could connect to her hosted features from any WiFi zone, anywhere in the world. And she could have cloud-based voicemail, plus she installed an app that turned her smartphone into a fully-featured VoIP phone.

In short, Jane provided excellent customer service and gave the appearance of being a big business … even though she was a home-based startup.

As her business grew, Jane took on a couple of employees and rented an office in London. In the past she would have had to go looking for an expensive phone system, but all Jane did was book two new extensions on her Hosted VoIP account. She booked one line for her PA/receptionists, and the other line for her account handler/sales manager. It took minutes to organise.

Now Jane could be anywhere in the world and transfer calls to her colleagues, just like they were in the same office. They could have free conference calls. Her colleagues had access to a range of VoIP features (see chapter 7 for the huge list of features). And Jane was paying low monthly sum for her office telephony, with no long term commitment!

Next Jane landed an international client. So she moved to bigger premises in London and opened a small office in Paris. And all she had to do was log-in to her Hosted VoIP account and book six more extensions. She allocated three for the London team, and three for the Paris team. She didn't have to deal with British Telecom or France Telecom as all her calls were going through the Internet. And people in the London office could transfer calls to colleagues in Paris for free, just like they were in the next office. All the employees could also have free conference calls.

The next step will be an office in Singapore, and once again all Jane will have to do is add a few extension numbers of her Hosted VoIP dashboard. Getting business class telecommunications is just not an issue for her.

Throughout the process of growing from a small home business to a small company with offices in multiple countries, telephony was the last thing on Jane's mind. She didn't have to choose between hardware-based systems and worry about maintenance contracts. She didn't have to tie up any capital in expensive hardware or deal with phone companies. And moving office, or opening up an office abroad, took no effort or expense.

"With a Hosted VoIP package," Jane says, "I just focused on giving great customer service, and my telecom resources simply grew as I grew. It was easy. I mentioned this to my father, who had a small accountancy business before he retired, and he was very jealous of my VoIP solution. Back in 1980s he had taken out a contract for a small business system which cost a fortune, had almost no features and actually prevented him from moving into new premises due to the service contract he had to take out with the hardware manufacturer. I'm feeling very liberated by VoIP."

Read on. And find out how VoIP could revolutionize your business communications.

* There are many Hosted VoIP suppliers to choose from. Example costs taken from the [author's own website](#).

Chapter 2. Quick guide. What equipment will I have to buy?

Chapter 13 shows how the author's company can handle the entire VoIP installation for your business, if required. But it is possible for people with just a little technical knowledge to implement their own residential, SOHO and small business VoIP system.

Minimum requirement for a small business.

Buy nothing! The entry-level VoIP installation is:

- an Internet router connected to an ISP (you will likely have this already).
- a PC or laptop (that you can install a 'softphone' app on).
- an account with a VoIP provider (Google 'voip provider' or 'sip provider' to find potential suppliers).

Your VoIP provider will provide you with Mac or Windows softphone software and, usually, a web-based dashboard so you can manage your account.

No computer needed. Use your smartphone!

Actually, you don't even need a PC or laptop for VoIP calls. You can use your smartphone!

There are Android and iOS apps available for making and receiving SIP calls (it stands for Session Initiation Protocol), but some smartphones have built in SIP compatibility. Basically you simply:

- get an account with a VoIP provider
- enter your SIP username and password into your phone
- then use your smartphone to make and receive free or low cost calls.

Your smartphone can get the Internet connection from your office, home or any other WiFi connection. You can also connect to VoIP using the 4G data allowance that your mobile phone company offers as part of your monthly contract.

Here's step-by-step details how to configure an [Android phone for SIP calls](#).

Connecting existing phones to VoIP.

If you already have existing 'normal' phones that are connected to the plain old telephone system (called POTS), you can still use them with VoIP.

You simply need to purchase an ATA (Analog Telephone Adapter). Typically about the size of a USB stick, an ATA turns the analog voice signal from a normal phone

into the digital signal required by the Internet. You can find ATAs (search for 'ata adapter') on Amazon, with prices ranging from about $10 to $50.

All you need to know about ATAs is that they enable you to use normal phones on an Internet connection. But if you want to know the full story, the author has written a blog post about [how a VoIP phone adapter works](#).

Buying new VoIP phones.

If you decide to buy new VoIP phones, they will already be able to produce the digital voice signal the Internet uses … so there's no need to buy an ATA.

Depending on price, VoIP phones can handle simple features (like call transfer) up to video conferencing. Prices range from just $20 for a basic model, up to $200 for high-definition speakerphones with a video screen. Again, searching Amazon for 'voip phone' will reveal a wide range of models, and give an idea of features.

The author's website features VoIP-enabled DECT phones (wireless, so you can walk around the office) and [conference phones (for meeting rooms).](#)

Do I need to buy a better/faster router?

In 99.9% of cases, the answer is no.

Some recent VoIP phones use something called the G711 standard to reduce bandwidth. In fact a VoIP voice call with a G711 phone is going to use just 86 kb/sec (kilobytes per second) of router bandwidth for a voice conversation. If bandwidth is a concern though, the G279 standard uses even less bandwidth, but call quality is not quite so excellent as G711.

You can use a free website like www.speedtest.net to see what speed your Internet connection delivers … but in most cases you'll find a voice call uses about a thousandth of your router's capacity. The VoIP overhead is negligible.

Do I need to buy special cabling?

Again, no.

Your VoIP phone can use the standard Ethernet cabling which is already used to connect your office computers to the Internet. To connect your VoIP phone (or ATA with a normal phone), you can get a splitter and simply use the cable that already connects your computers.

If you search Amazon for 'RJ45 splitter', you'll see models available from under $5.

Some recent VoIP phones even have a wi-fi capability, so no installation is necessary.

Modern VoIP phones can also have a 'power over Ethernet' feature, so they don't need to be plugged into the mains electricity.

What is 'Cloud PBX'?

Great question. And one which leads us nicely to the next two sections of this book … which is using VoIP in small businesses (Chapter 3) and large businesses (Chapter 4).

You might remember from Chapter 1 that a PBX (private branch exchange) used to be just for big businesses. They would often cost $250,000 and need a special room to house all the electronic and mechanical moving parts. And even then they'd only offer relatively basic features like 'call transfer' and 'follow me to another office'. And you'd have to memorize lengthy keypad commands like #*123456### to make a feature work!

Well, just like technology killed the whole industry of processing film for cameras, the Internet has replaced super-expensive PBXs with an economical, easier and more powerful web-based equivalent.

VoIP phones make it easy to use features like call transfer, conferencing and voicemail, and can be used without a Cloud PBX. But a 'Cloud PBX' is a secure web page that gives company-wide control of telephone features via secure webpage.

With a Cloud PBX (also known as 'hosted VoIP) you control which types of call go via which supplier (for example, calls to India from supplier A, and calls to Australia from supplier B). You can set which employees have access to which features. And you can review costs by individual, by department or by location.

So, the bottom line is that the hardware needed to get into VoIP is readily available and quite inexpensive.

If your business needs a Cloud PBX to manage advanced features, that costs from under $5 per month, per user with Pay As You Go calls, through to under $40 per month for individuals who need unlimited international calls.

[The author's website shows prices](). Chapter 14 also has link to other popular VoIP supplier so you can evaluate the best solution for your business.

Chapter 3. VoIP for small / single-location businesses.

Small businesses have two great challenges:

1 - To offer the same (or better) service levels as bigger companies.
2 - To make smarter use of every employee's time.

VoIP can be both empowering and liberating. Here's some scenarios that will resonate with small businesses.

Receive calls on mobile … without sharing your number.

Sometimes you need to leave the office for a few days, but don't want to miss any calls. Yet you don't want everybody to know your private mobile number or home number, because then you'd have no free time.

With a hosted VoIP system you can easily set calls to forward to your mobile, home or any other number. So people will dial your office number in, say, London … and you'll answer the call from the conference you're attending in Dubai.

Of course if you have configured your mobile phone to receive SIP calls, the world becomes your office. And when you're on WiFi, anywhere, incoming SIP calls cost you nothing.

Using your web dashboard you can even re-direct calls to a different number depending on the time of day, and configure your VoIP voicemail.

Have virtual offices around the world.

Small companies looking to expand into other regions or countries can rent traditional landline numbers around the world. This enables their customers in foreign countries to make a local phone call … but their call might actually be answered on the other side of the world.

For example, a company based in France might want to offer customer service in Germany and Italy. They can simply rent a landline number in, say, Berlin and Milan … then route the calls through to their Paris headquarters.

Their German and Italian customers have the reassurance and economy of a local number to dial, but the company has made no investment in office space in either of those countries. Better still, the VoIP routing of the call from one country to another is free, both for you and your customer.

Employees can have a fully-featured home office.

Maybe you don't want office space at all. With a hosted PBX you could have employees and partners working from home - anywhere in the world - and it appears like they are all in one office.

Imagine if your switchboard number was a receptionist working from home in Norway. Calls from your virtual office numbers in London, Berlin and Milan would be routed to her. If the call was from an Italian, she'd say "One moment, I'll put you through to our Italian support team" … and transfer the call to an Italian-speaking colleague working in San Francisco. Or transfer an accounts enquiry to the company accountant in Mumbai.

Similarly, a salesperson working in London could be speaking to a customer … and say she was going to invite colleagues to join a conference call. The customer has the impression you're all in one office, but the colleagues could actually be in Brazil and Moscow.

With hosted VoIP you have ultra-sophisticated PBX features … and global reach.

Have a virtual helpdesk with voice activation.

Small businesses can also reduce the workload on their limited human resources by using Hosted PBX IVR (interactive voice response) instead of an operator.

For example, an IVR system on the support phone number might say: "press 1 for recorded instructions on how to install widget A, press 2 for instructions on widget B, press 3 to leave a message for the engineering team."

When companies are in the difficult growth stage of not being able to employ enough people to cope with peak sales or seasonal support periods, smart use of VoIP technology can take the strain off your human resources.

Grow the business, and VoIP grows with you.

The virtual cloud-based nature of VoIP means that your telecommunications infrastructure is infinitely flexible.

Twenty years ago, a company might invest a significant sum in a PBX system … and then find that they simply couldn't afford to move to new premises because they needed to amortise the 100,000 euros they had spent on a phone system.

Or opening an office in a new country would have been good for business, but the overhead of opening a physical presence in Berlin or Milan, and connecting it with the London office, simply wasn't viable.

In those cases, previous generation phone systems were a disabler.

But with VoIP you can change the shape of your business overnight. Need 100 virtual telesales people to take Christmas orders during December? Not a problem.

Need to open an office in Mumbai for your new software team? It'll be operational tomorrow. VoIP is an enabling technology.

Explore all the features of a hosted VoIP solution.

The scenarios above show just some of the benefits of VoIP for small businesses. Chapter 7 overviews all the features you might find in a hosted VoIP solution.

Chapter 4. VoIP for large / multi-location businesses.

Large organizations have two great challenges:

1 - They need to be able to react quickly to market changes.
2 - They need to streamline capital expenditure and have granular accounting.

VoIP can offer significant cost savings to multinational business, and enable more productivity and accountability down to an individual level. Here are some scenarios that will resonate with larger organisations.

Cut external phone bills (often by more than 50%).

VoIP calls usually offers savings of 50% up to 90% for international calls. For example, a company in Europe would be able to call landlines and mobiles in the US for 1 cent per minute, or even for free. Calls to other developed markets are in the region of 1 cent/minute to landlines and 5 cents/minute to mobiles.

But VoIP can cut costs even more with calls for multinational companies. Say your head office is in Paris and you have an office (real or virtual) in Ecuador. People from Paris could route their calls to customers in Ecuador via their 'virtual' number in Ecuador … so all calls would be made at local call rates.

Suddenly, multinational companies can make calls at local call rates for every market in which they are active.

Free internal calls between your offices, everywhere.

A further cost saving is that calls between your VoIP-enabled offices will be free. So the accountant in Paris can talk with the sales manager in Sydneyfor nothing.

Even conference calls are free. So employees in Paris, Sydney, London and Moscow can have a high-quality conference call at no cost. A hosted VoIP solution will also enable video conferencing, with participants potentially using a mix of executive VoIP phones, laptops and SIP-enabled cell phones.

External parties can be included on conference calls too. So the sales manager in Sydney could seal the deal with a local customer by including him on a conference call with experts from around the world.

And because the Hosted VoIP is a business-class, dedicated package … call quality will be much higher than with shared systems like Skype or Google Chat, where millions of people might be sharing same resources.

'Follow the sun' customer service.

With VoIP, multinational organizations in every country can offer their customers a local number to dial … but their customers calls are routed to a different location depending on the time of day.

This enables the multinational organisation to have support or call center teams working normal office hours, but offer 24/7 global service. For example, a team in the US, Asia and Europe could effectively offer round-the-clock global support between them.

Virtual local numbers also enable business to offer a local/national phone number to customers in more countries, without the expense of a physical office presence.

Add/delete employee extensions in minutes.

With acquisitions, mergers and business re-sizing, organizations need to be able to change the shape of their business with minimal expense and disruption.

With hosted VoIP, entire offices can be relocated, or landline numbers and extension number re-directed, in minutes.

In the days of owned PBX systems, organizations faced major problems with managing the telecommunications aspect of relocations. But with Hosted PBX the global configuration of the corporate communications system can be re-configured via a secure webpage.

This flexibility and responsiveness even extends to the individual level. New employees can be connected in moments, or departing employees disconnected.

One person manages global communications.

Managing international communications assets used to be a full-time, specialist task. A dedicated team would travel the world, negotiating contacts with local hardware suppliers and telephone companies.

With Hosted VoIP, one person can easily manage global assets from a 'point & click' webpage. Adding extensions, configuring call transfers, managing all of the features found in Chapter 7 … these become simple web-based tasks, handled through any browser, anywhere.

Negligible capital expenditure.

Corporate financial managers prefer Hosted VoIP to traditional PBX for a number of reasons:

- No financial outlay in expensive PBX hardware.
- No PBX service or maintenance contracts.
- No long-term commitment, or asset devaluation.
- Easy to grow/shrink costs in line with corporate developments.

- Single global billing, usually on a 'per user profile' basis.

As outlined in Chapter 1, the hardware costs for implementing VoIP are negligible, or even zero if the company uses existing PCs and 'virtual phone' software. No extra cabling is required, existing Internet routers can be utilized, and even existing phones can be re-used for VoIP with a $4 ATA adapter.

Granular cost analysis.

Hosted VoIP is a dream solution for corporate financial managers. In addition to the CapEx benefits mentioned in the previous paragraph, Hosted VoIP gives incredibly granular financial analysis.

Costs can be analysed at a country, building, department, team and individual level. This enables precise financial reporting throughout the business.

It also allows the company to make informed decisions about staffing levels or even individual performance. For example call center staff can be reviewed by 'average time per call', and training offered to them

You can see typical [Hosted VoIP billing options on the author's website](#).

Explore all the features of a hosted VoIP solution.

The scenarios above show just some of the benefits of VoIP for larger organizations.

Chapter 7 overviews all the features you might find in a hosted VoIP solution.

Chapter 5. VoIP for call center operations.

If you're managing a call center then time management, resource allocation and cost control are vital to the success of your operation.

VoIP is the perfect partner for call centers. Whether you have five or 500 call center employees, VoIP gives you all the features and control you need.

Popular VoIP features for call centers.

- Interactive Voice Response (IVR).
The ubiquitous call center application asks the caller to 'press 1 for accounts', etc.

- Automatic Call Distribution (ACD).
At it's simplest, ACD will put customers through to the next available agent. But there are more sophisticated options, including connecting the caller to the best qualified agent or team. Achieved in conjunction with IVR.

- Computer Telephony Integration (CTI).
With CTI your call center employees can manage calls and customer records or scripts from the same screen.

- Predictive dialer.
This application increases outgoing call productivity by calling the contact number, filtering out answer machines, and connecting the call to an agent automatically.

- Call Center monitoring.
A variety of applications exist which help call center managers to capture metrics like time-in-queue, time-per-agent, agent-availability, call recording, etc. These applications can help with agent training and resource allocation.

- Social integration.
Integrating Twitter and Facebook as a tool for call center agents is increasingly popular. With CTI, agents can choose whether to tweet a reply or phone the customer.

Different types of call center.

As with any other business scenario, VoIP technology enables companies to start small with low-commitment and low equipments costs.

- Inbound Call Center
Even small companies can enjoy very sophisticated call center features with VoIP. Features like ACD ensure that customer calls are answered quickly, and CTI means that customer records are instantly available.

- Outbound Call Center

Companies involved in telemarketing can implement a VoIP outbound call center. Popular features are predictive dialing and CTI. Outbound call centers typically buy lists of likely customers, or use software to analyse their own customer base for potential new sales.

- Virtual Call Center

With a virtual call center, employees can be dispersed over a numerous locations. For example, a specialist in product A might be in Germany, or a language-specific team based in Beijing. With VoIP all these people can share resources as though they were in the same building.

- Offshore Call Center

Thanks to the flexibility of VoIP, call centers can be based in countries with lower employee overheads. This is not always popular with customers (9 out of 10 consumers expressed a preference for call centers being in their country), but it is feasible to locate a support team anywhere.

- Web Enabled Call Center

With web enabled call centers, the customer would click a link on the company's website if they wanted to speak with an agent. of course the website is a natural partner for voice over Internet technology, so these solutions enable close integration with the website and the call center.

- Typical prices

Call centers up to hundreds or even thousands of employees can easily be handled by a Hosted VoIP solution (so long as your Hosted VoIP provider has the necessary processing power). Typical costs per employee, per month are:

$4.99 - incoming calls only.
$19.99 - outbound calls to national landlines.
$39.99 - outbound calls to international landlines and some national mobile numbers.

The author's website has more detail on VoIP pricing.

Explore all the [features of a hosted VoIP solution](#).

The scenarios above show just some of the benefits of VoIP for call centers.
Chapter 7 overviews all the features you might find in a hosted VoIP solution.

Chapter 6. Integrating mobile phones.

Love your smartphone? It's easy to use it with your Hosted VoIP account. It's like having your office phone in your pocket. And it will work on any WiFi connection, anywhere.

Check out the apps for your smartphone.

All you need for business-class VoIP on your smartphone is a Hosted VoIP account. You simply install the softphone app for your device, enter your Hosted VoIP account username and password, and the world is your office!

There are softphone apps for Android, Apple, Blackberry and Windows smartphone. Search your device app store for the keywords 'softphone', 'sip' or 'voip'.

There are apps for tablets, laptops and Chromebooks too.

You can install a softphone app on your mobile computing device too. Once again, search your device app store for a suitable app and then link it to your Hosted VoIP account.

Your smartphone and mobile device can access the same Hosted VoIP account. So you could use your smartphone app from a coffee bar WiFi to make a quick call … or connect your laptop to your Hosted VoIP account from your home or hotel WiFi, just like you do in your office, to enjoy all the features of your Hosted VoIP package.

Save money on your mobile calls.

Lots of people use their softphone app and Hosted VoIP service to save money on mobile calls, both at home and abroad.

When you are in your home country, you can connect to WiFi and make/receive calls from your mobile app. The app looks and works like a normal phone dialer, so there is no complicated learning curve. This can be an economical alternative to using the call minutes included in your monthly phone plan. Your Hosted VoIP account will include free calls to other VoIP numbers worldwide, and will possibly include low cost national and international calls too.

When you are abroad you will save even more by avoiding the expense of international calls and network roaming charges. Connect to any WiFi network (hotel, bar, restaurant, airport) and you'll be able to make calls at the same rates as you do from your home country. If you have a landline number connected to your Hosted VoIP number, customers or family can even call your home country number … and you'll receive the call wherever you are in the word!

Many softphone apps - for smartphones, tablets and laptops - also include the ability to have video calls.

Popular features when traveling.

Whether you are going out for lunch or traveling abroad, your Hosted VoIP account and smartphone app keep you in touch with your business resources.

Here's some of the most popular VoIP features for people on the move.

- Global extension
With a Hosted VoIP package, it's simple to make your smartphone app function as your extension number at work. So when colleagues or customers call your extension number, your smartphone will ring.

- Voicemail
If you are not connected to WiFi, your office number can have a voicemail feature. You'll be able to retrieve your voicemails, free, from any WiFi connection. You can also access your PIN protected voicemail from a landline or mobile network at the usual call rates.

- Call forwarding
If you are going to be out of touch while traveling, you can log-in to your Hosted VoIP system and have your calls transferred to a colleague. This is a popular for people going on long flights who don't want incoming callers to be simply directed to voicemail.

- Other popular mobile apps
The author's website shows a constantly updated list of popular VoIP softphone apps, along with details of how to link them to a VoIP account.
http://voipstudio.com/en/manual/User_Third-party-softphones/

It is also possible to configure an Android phone to use VoIP without installing an app. This article shows regularly updated instructions.

The next chapter shows a detailed list of the various features which are available from a Hosted VoIP system. Many of these features are accessible from your softphone app, and also from the webpage-console associated with your Hosted VoIP solution.

A complete Hosted VoIP solution can cost from $4.99 per month.

Chapter 7. Features Checklist for VoIP systems.

Here's a list of features you'll want to look for in your chosen VoIP supplier.

There is a link at the end of this chapter where you can get free chatline advice on any of the features mentioned in this list.

Business Features

- Free Internet calls
With a Hosted VoIP telephone system, Internet (or VoIP) calls are free and unlimited. Enable your co-workers to talk to each other for free, whether they are in the next room, building, city or on the other side of the world - they are just one extension away!

- Reduced call rates
Because your calls are routed over the Internet, the cost is typically much lower compared to traditional telecommunication operators.

- Hosted phone system
No need to purchase and maintain an expensive PBX system. Your business telephone solution is software-based and hosted in the cloud.

- Pay as you Grow
You only pay for the services you need, and the exact number of users, on a monthly basis. This means streamlined costs for companies that are re-sizing.

- No long-term commitment.
Look for a Hosted VoIP solution which does not lock you into a long-term contract. It's a sign that your supplier has faith in their service.

- Instant deployment.
You can usually start to use your Hosted VoIP solution within minutes of opening an account. Ideal for getting new offices up and running quickly.

- International data centres.
To give the best voice quality and fastest data speeds, your VoIP supplier should have data centres in strategic global locations.

- Per second billing.
To minimise your costs, make sure your supplier charges by the second. Some companies round up to the nearest minute, which can add significantly to your call charges.

- Number porting.

This feature enables existing landline and VoIP numbers to be transferred to your new VoIP solution. This means you can manage your old numbers from your new dashboard.

- Remote office.
This feature enables your laptop, tablet or smartphone to use a WiFi connection anywhere in the world. All the features you have in your office will be available globally.

- Mobile application.
Make sure your VoIP provider offers a free app for Android and Apple smartphones. You'll be able to call VoIP colleagues for free, and have cheap landline/mobile calls, from any WiFi connection worldwide.

Technical features.

- Virtual numbers.
Virtual numbers are like normal landline numbers which customers can call from their own landline or mobile phone. Your provider should be able to provide virtual numbers internationally. You control if incoming calls go to a receptionist or a particular extension.

- Web portal.
Check that your VoIP provider has a web dashboard. This enables all the functions of your VoIP solution to be configured, and should allow costs to be analysed.

- Multipoint registration.
This feature enables your VoIP number, or extension number, to be used simultaneously on a PC, VoIP desktop phone or a mobile phone. Perfect when traveling, or just for walking around your office.

- Internet failover protection.
This valuable feature keep your business in touch with the world, even if there is an Internet 'outage' or your router gets unplugged! If your VoIP system can't access the Internet, it will route calls through the normal phone network.

- Call transfer.
Transfer calls from one extension to the other … even if those extensions are in different countries. Gives seamless service between all your offices and people.

- Music on hold.
Now even small businesses can offer the features that a few years ago only big organisations could afford. Music on hold is a nice touch if you have to keep your customer waiting.

- Conference calling.
Conduct a voice meeting with our simple to use conference call feature. Any number of participants can dial into a virtual conference room and conduct a meeting.

- Reception console.
Look and sound professional. Set up a reception anywhere with a web based console. Transfer or park calls with a simple to use drag and drop feature.

- Follow me.
Automatically forwards calls to multiple external numbers (mobile or landline) or extensions simultaneously. Never miss a call with an extension number which follows you wherever you are.

- IVR Interactive Voice Response.
If you don't want a human receptionist, IVR can let callers easily choose which person or team they want to speak with. Thanks to VoIP a caller from, say, New York could be directed to a helpdesk in London … at no cost to the caller or you.

- Voicemail.
Each extension has its own configurable and customizable voice mail service. Voice messages can be accessed online, replayed over the phone, or forwarded to your email.

- Call waiting.
Alerts the recipient of incoming call when the line is busy with an established call. Upon hearing the Call Waiting tone, the user can put the current conversation on hold to answer the incoming call.

- Contacts directory.
Save time and keep organised with a built-in contacts directory. Easily call back your missed calls or redial frequently used numbers.

- Ring groups.
The system can be set so that defined phones will ring on incoming or forwarded calls, with the call connecting to the extension that answers first.

- Extension dialing.
All colleagues are issued with a unique extension number that can be reached from any phone within your company. You can be in the London office and free call a colleague in Paris by dialing just 4 digits.

- Call pickup.
When inbound calls are routed to a group of extensions that are in the same pickup group, any of the phones in that group can answer the call. Perfect for customer support teams.

- ACD queues.
You can automatically distribute phone calls to a specific group of agents on the first come, first served basis. Check your control panel will enable you to adjust maximum queue times, toggle whether callers are told their queue position, and monitor the average wait time.

- Call parking.
Direct your caller to the virtual call parking space and let others pick up the call using any extension in the office. An easy way to put the caller on hold while you find which colleague to connect them with.

- Click to call.
Simply click on a number in your contact list to make an instant connection. Makes calling easier, and saves potential misdialing of long numbers.

- Phone auto provisioning.
Manage all your VoIP SIP phones with one-click central provisioning. No more time consuming manual configuration via phone's web admin panel.

- Call recording.
Calls can be recorded and played back later in order to train staff or meet legal or other requirements.

- Time based routing.
Easily adjust your Hosted PBX system to your office working hours, holiday periods and other time sensitive events. After hours calls can easily be routed to support teams in different time zones, at no cost.

- Company directory.
With this feature, callers can be routed to a given employee by keying the letters of the employee's name. This means calls are connected directly with no receptionist involvement.

- Fax gateway.
Send and receive faxes directly from online control panel. Dedicated telephone numbers can act as a fully functional fax gateway.

- Unlimited storage.
Make sure your chosen supplier offers unlimited storage for voicemail and call recording. Otherwise your callers might get a frustrating 'mailbox full' message if you have been out of the office for a few days.

- Emergency service calling.
The E911 service enables VoIP systems to be used to call emergency services. Make sure your VoIP has an E911 capability.

- SMS gateway.
This feature enables SMS messages to be sent direct to your VoIP soft phone and to your control panel dashboard. Can be useful for customer support teams.

- Dynamic Caller ID.
Dynamic CLI enables users to present the most appropriate caller ID for their call, showing the receiver that the call is originating from a country other than their own.

Third Party Integrations.

Some VoIP companies offer integration with other popular services.

- SalesForce.com
This plugin enables users to initiate a call simply by clicking telephone numbers directly from their SalesForce panel. For incoming calls it can automatically open an associated contact directly, or add as a new lead if the telephone number is not recognized.

- Microsoft Dynamics CRM.
If your VoIP supplier offers this integration, you will be able to call contacts direct from your Microsoft CRM solution.

- Sage ACT!
If your VoIP supplier offers this integration, you will be able to call contacts direct from your Sage accounting solution.

 Find out more.

The author's company gives more information of [VoIP features](). You can also have a free click-to-chat with the company helpdesk if any feature needs further explanation. Just mention you purchased this book for special treatment!

Chapter 8. Top 10 business benefits of VoIP.

As part of the research for this book, the author asked a variety of companies of various sizes - from small startups with just two people through to larger organizations with over 100 employees - what were the most important business benefits of VoIP.

I ranked their responses by popularity for each particular point, and then took a sample quote from each of those points to create the list below.

If you are thinking of of VoIP for your business, you might find it interesting to see what benefits other entrepreneurs and managers value.

1. "We like the versatility of being able to add new employee extension numbers in minutes."

2. 'Some employees work from home one day a week. Their phone acts just like they were in the office."

3. "We like using an app to integrate our mobile phones with our VoIP package."

4. "Create a whole new office, even in a new country, in an hour."

5. "Carry on working even if the Internet has an outage. Our calls are automatically routed via the old telephone network."

6. "With number porting we still use our old phone numbers, so we didn't have to re-print our brochures or business cards."

7. "It's easy to transfer calls to colleagues, wherever they are. I don't even need to know where the colleague is. They can be at in their office, at home, or on the road."

8. "Even though we're a small office, the receptionist feature makes us seem larger."

9. "All our offices act like one big office. Just by dialing an extension number I can call a colleague in the adjacent office, or another country."

10. "Flexibility to move office or change supplier. I don't like being tied in to long-term contracts."

Would you like to give your feedback on the business benefits of VoIP?

The author has created a page where you can give your feedback on the business benefits of VoIP. You can make your comments anonymously, if you prefer.

Chapter 9. Top 10 financial benefits of VoIP.

As part of the research for this book, the author asked a variety of companies of various sizes - from small startups with just two people through to larger organizations with over 100 employees - what were the most important financial benefits of VoIP.

I ranked their responses by popularity for each particular point, and then took a sample quote from each of those points to create the list below.

If you are thinking of of VoIP for your business, you might find it interesting to see what benefits other entrepreneurs and managers value.

1. "After switching to Hosted VoIP, we just about cut our phone bill to landlines and mobiles in half."

2. "Call other VoIP users anywhere for free."

3. "No special wiring needed. We used our existing office computer cables, and WiFi in the warehouse. This saved money."

4. "Manage all users and identify costs from a secure web page."

5. "No capital tied-up in expensive hardware. One contract for our global communications."

6. "Now we get just one bill for all our communications. And our dashboard makes it very easy to account for costs between different departments."

7. "We like having no long-term commitment. That gives us the flexbility we need."

8. "It's easy to manage new office locations anywhere, and to re-size other locations on demand."

9. "The fax gateway means we can send faxes internationally at reduced call rates."

10. "With the mobile app, our sales team use VoIP from coffee shops or other WiFi zones to make international calls. That has saved a lot on our mobile phone bill."

Chapter 10. Top 10 customer service benefits of VoIP.

As part of the research for this book, the author asked a variety of companies of various sizes - from small startups with just two people through to larger organizations with over 100 employees - what were the most important customer service benefits of VoIP.

I ranked their responses by popularity for each particular point, and then took a sample quote from each of those points to create the list below.

If you are thinking of of VoIP for your business, you might find it interesting to see what benefits other entrepreneurs and managers value.

1. "We offer our customers in different countries a local number to call even though we don't have a physical office in those countries."

2. "Out-of-hours service enquiries routed to another office for 24/7 support."

3. "Music on hold is a useful feature. We try to answer calls immediately, but if we can't the music helps keep our callers from hanging up."

4. "Using the Interactive Voice Response feature, our customers can quickly get through to the support team they need."

5. "We use the ring groups feature, so customers calling a support number get to speak with the support expert who answers the call first."

6. "Call recording helps us to improve our training for sales staff and give customers a better service."

7. "Customers can call us direct from our website. They simply click on a link to reach our enquiry helpdesk."

8. "If a customer calls with an enquiry, I can easily start a free conference call with colleagues - even if they are in other countries - to resolve the customer's issue. Our customers are impressed the support we give."

9. "Call forwarding to my mobile means my customers get to speak with me, not voicemail. That's vital for my small startup business, where I really have to try and be better than my competitors."

10. "We added links to our website, so potential customers can call us direct from our website. That makes it easy and cheap for the customer … so the volume of our phone enquiries in increasing."

Would you like to give your feedback on the customer service benefits of VoIP?

Chapter 11. Tips for transitioning from an existing PBX system to VoIP.

So, you've decided that the cost savings, features and flexibility of VoIP make it the right choice for your business. What next?

Ensuring continuity of communications.

The nightmare scenario when changing from a conventional PBX to VoIP is that you end up with no telecommunications.

You can probably imagine the scenario that your PBX has gone (leaving a lot of empty space where the hardware used to be) ... but your new VoIP supplier hasn't yet activated their service.

So your colleagues can't call out. And customers can't call in. It would be like your business had disappeared.

But with the right VoIP supplier and a little planning, you can actually avoid that potential problem very easily, and have failsafe insurance against anything going wrong.

Step one. Check the contract for your PBX.

Ideally, you'll be able to end your current PBX contract and have a seamless transfer to a new VoIP system. So it's worth seeing what your cancellation rights are.

You'll have a few options here:

- if you have a short cancellation period, or your contract is about to expire, go to step two now.

- if you have a long cancellation period, but your PBX features are holding your business back, you could still change to VoIP and leave the PBX to gather dust. Go to step two.

Step two. Get a free VoIP trial.

Reputable Hosted VoIP companies will offer a free trial so you can check that their service lives up to their promise for features and call quality.

So, get a free trial and enable all or some of your colleagues to use the free VoIP service.

If you already have VoIP-capable phones with a recent model of PBX, they will work straight away with your new VoIP service. They could still work with your PBX before the 'switch over'. So line A could be for the old PBX, and line B could be for new VoIP package.

If your phones are the older analog type, you will either need to buy an ATA adapter for each phone (about $5), or buy new VoIP phones (from $25). Chapter 2 of this book has more information about equipment.

Step three. Ask for your landline number to be ported.

After the first week of your free trial, you'll know if the features and call quality were everything you'd hoped for. Assuming everything is OK, you'll need to 'port' your business number to the new VoIP supplier

Porting means asking the supplier of your landline number (for example, British Telecom or France Telecom) to re-direct your phone number to your VoIP supplier. Your VoIP partner will provide you with the connection details to enable this. A reputable VoIP provider will also give guidance on the process and timescale, as they will have done this many times before.

Porting your phone number means there's no need to change business cards, brochures, or anywhere else your phone number in mentioned.

And when customers and others call your business number, they won't even know you have switched from PBX to Hosted VoIP.

Number porting can take 7 to 21 days, so you can use that period of time to make sure all employees are aware of the features of their new VoIP system.

Meanwhile, it will be 'business as usual' with incoming calls arriving via your old PBX.

Step four. Be flexible with 'changeover day'.

Even the best laid plans can go wrong. On the day that your number porting is due to take effect, your new VoIP package will handle all your incoming and outgoing calls, and the PBX in your office is no longer required.

But for a variety of reasons (engineering problems through to clerical errors) it is possible that the provider of your business number won't make the promised date.

For that reason it's worth having a two week gap between when your number porting is planned … and when the PBX contract is set to expire. That gives you some insurance against late porting of your number.

Conversely, if the number porting happens earlier than the promised date, your VoIP system will become fully operational immediately. The beauty of a Hosted VoIP package is that new extension numbers can be add in minutes, so your business won't be disrupted.

Future VoIP changes would be easy.

Now you've made the change from an inflexible hardware-based solution to a highly flexible cloud-based solution, your options for changing supplier in the future are a lot easier.

If for any reason your VoIP supplier fails to meet your expectations, you can simply go to a new supplier and port your number to them. The minute your number porting is complete, the new supplier will seamlessly start to handle your incoming calls.

The author's company offers [a 30-day free trial for businesses](). There is no contract and no credit card details are required.

Chapter 12. Five steps to the right VoIP supplier.

Finding the right VoIP supplier can be confusing. There are literally hundreds of potential suppliers who want your business. By following this five-point checklist you'll be able to identify a shortlist of potential partners … and quality test your #1 choice.

1. Don't go for the cheapest call rates.

Some companies offer ridiculously cheap call prices. And the reason they can afford to do that is because they aren't investing in top-quality lines, servers or customer support.

One of the big reasons you'll change to VoIP is for the cost savings. But when choosing a supplier, it's worth remembering the phrase that 'if something seems too good to be true, it's usually because it is too good to be true'.

At the time of going to press, the author recommends that you discard suppliers who offer call rates cheaper than this:

US / calls to landlines / 1.4 cents a minute
US / calls to mobiles / 1.4 cents a minute

Note. If you are interested in global call rates, the author's own company publishes a list of call rates to just about every country in the world. With VoIP, it does not matter where you are calling from: it's the destination country of the landline or mobile you are calling which determines the call charge.

Calls between VoIP numbers anywhere should be free.

2. Do they have all the features you want?

Not every company offers the full set of VoIP features.

You could review the features in Chapter 7 of this book to create a 'shopping list' of desired features, then make sure your potential partners can meet your needs.

If a company doesn't have all the features you want, delete them from your shortlist. You don't have to compromise with VoIP.

3. Do they have multiple servers, in multiple countries?

Even if you only do business in one country, it's worth making sure your VoIP provider has servers in multiple locations. This is because servers can be effected by external conditions, such as a power line being cut, flooding, etc.

If you have international offices, or are making international calls, it's even more important that your VoIP supplier has servers in different regions. This is to ensure that there is 'redundancy' in your VoIP network (ie, if one server fails, another takes over automatically), and also to ensure that you get fast, high-quality connections around the world.

For example, the author's company has servers in the USA, Europe and Asia.

If a VoIP company doesn't promise redundancy and multi-server locations, delete them from your shortlist.

4. Read the T&Cs. Make sure you aren't 'locked in'.

OK. It's boring … but it's worth checking the Terms & Conditions of potential VoIP suppliers.

Of course, the first task is to find out if they even published T&Cs. If not, move on.

Next, you want to make sure the T&Cs are written in clear, understandable language.

Then you need to check for some potential pitfalls. For example,

- What is the cancellation period? (one month would show your supplier is confident of the their service quality).
- What is the 'fair usage' policy. Even 'unlimited' or 'infinite' free calling plans have a fair usage limit. Find out what your potential VoIP supplier allows.
- Do you have to make a large deposit for equipment/calls? (there should be no advance charges from a reputable company).
- Are there any restrictions on porting your number to another VoIP supplier? Make sure you always own your landline number.

For example, the author's own company has published its [T&Cs](#) in a simple format. Your shortlist of potential VoIP partners should have easily understood terms. If in doubt, delete the company from your shortlist.

5. Get a free trial … then open a support ticket.

By now you should have arrived at a handful of potential suppliers who meet your criteria for features, contractual flexibility and quality of service.

So the last step is to put them to the test by having a free trial. Avoid companies who ask for credit card details or oblige you to sign a contract before implementing your free trial.

Once your free trial is in operation you'll be able to test the call quality and features. Importantly, you'll also be able to check how responsive the customer support team are. Open a few support requests to see how quickly and clearly they respond to you. If you don't have any real problems that need support help … invent them!

Here's a few example questions:

- "How do I forward calls to my VoIP extension to my mobile?"
- "How do I listen to my voicemail messages from my laptop at home?"
- "How do I set up a new extension for someone in another country?"
- "Can you explain your pricing?" Even if you think you understand the pricing, asking for elaboration with this question can be revealing.

If the support team are slow in getting back you … it's probably best to move on to the next company in your shortlist and organize a free trial with them.

[The author's company offers a 30-day free trial for businesses](). There is no contract and no credit card details are required.

Chapter 13. The 'Top 4' Hosted PBX suppliers.

Companies of all sizes who are thinking of implementing VoIP will want to carry out due diligence to ensure they find the right partner.

The previous chapter gave tips for evaluating a potential VoIP supplier. This chapter contains links to the top four VoIP suppliers you might want to approach.

RingCentral

Prices
Standard $24.99
Premium $34.99
Enterprise $44.99

VoIPstudio

Prices
Standard (pay as you go) $4.99
Premium (unlimited domestic) $19.99
Enterprise (unlimited international) $39.99

8x8

Prices
Call sales team

Voipfone

Prices
Call sales team