

The Business Buying Guide to Voice Over IP (VoIP)

Part One: An Introduction to VoIP

Summary: What Is Voice Over Internet Protocol?

Part Two: How VoIP Can Help Your Business

Summary: Benefits of VoIP

Part Three: Selecting The Right Supplier

Summary: How to select VoIP for your business

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Our free quote comparison service gives you;

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- quotes from up to 6 pre-qualified suppliers, matched to your needs
- fast, easy access to competitive quotes.

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Part One: An Introduction to VoIP

Summary: What Is Voice Over Internet Protocol?

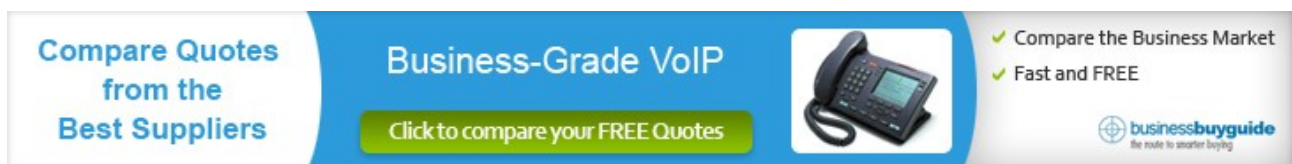
Voice over internet protocol (VoIP) is a communications technology that uses the internet to transfer voice signals in the form of bits and bytes. It delivers these bits and bytes to a specified internet address rather than a telephone number. It's easier to think of it as being like sending e-mail from one computer to another, but in real time and using voice instead of text. The technology that most likely runs your existing switchboard and phones is a traditional public switched telephone network (PSTN) service. VoIP's advantage over this is its ability to combine several services, such as voice mail, video, e-mail and conferencing. This instantly increases your ability to collaborate and can result in higher productivity.

You've probably used VoIP services without even realizing it. Every time you've used an instant messenger program to initiate a voice conversation or sent a voice mail, you've used this cutting-edge technology.

But how can this benefit your company? Well, for starters, it's likely to lead to lower phone bills. And it could reduce the need to travel, too. If you have branch offices, they can be connected either through a dedicated lease line or virtual private network (VPN). Since all calls routed over the internet, irrespective of the network, are free, this leads to significant savings over existing voice services for inter-company communications and makes use of any under-utilised network capacity that you're paying for.

VoIP technology is not new, but some work may be needed before it achieves the reliability of traditional phone systems. Dealing with lots of hardware and service providers as well as handling technology considerations like the integration of VoIP networks with traditional phone systems may sound intimidating. However, with a little help, you will realize that the products on offer are easy to use.

Key requirements in the move to VoIP remain lower costs, abundance of choices, bundled services, high quality, reliability and availability. Most of these issues have already been addressed by VoIP service providers. And if you let them help you implement VoIP services correctly, it can lead to significant savings.





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Part Two: How VoIP Can Help Your Business

Summary: Benefits of VoIP

The days of businesses having to spend large amounts on communications due to a lack of affordable, flexible options are over. Voice over Internet Protocol (VoIP) and IP telephony allows the creation of appropriately scaled services to meet the requirements of businesses everywhere, especially multi-site ones. Advantages of migrating to VoIP include:

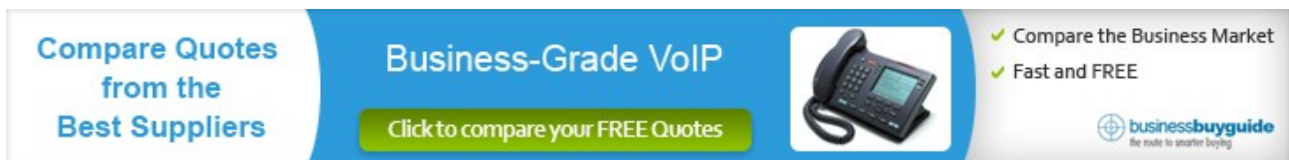
- Lower costs
- Improved control over technology
- Simpler system management
- Bundled services
- Improved network efficiency
- Potential for future application enhancement and development.

VoIP solutions offer businesses the chance to select a scaled-down system that does not rely on large volumes to provide better pricing, unlike wire-line public switched telephone networks (PSTNs). Further, network convergence technology means that the business's phone systems provider will also take care of data service needs. A single connection will be the delivery channel for multiple service offerings — data, telephony, and video — and this immediately reduces telecommunication costs. Moreover, fewer specialized staff resources are required to manage the systems.

A company's network will be utilised to its full capacity. This offers improved efficiency in addition to standard features such as teleconferencing, integrated voice mail, e-mail, fax and messaging options, encryption and integrated information services. It also bypasses long-distance phone charges. And once a VoIP platform is in place, it's incredibly easy to add further applications or upgrade system settings.

But there are some downsides that must be considered. One drawback is that if the network is down, neither the computers nor the phones will work. Further, although there have been dramatic improvements in voice clarity and quality, some vendors' systems are better than others in terms of infrastructure robustness and service reliability. To overcome these concerns, many providers offer guarantees and certified assurances of quality of service (QoS) and availability.

But most problems are related to lack of clarity on actual user requirements and attempts to simply throw bandwidth at the problem. Before choosing a platform, you need to determine your usage requirements. Once you've done this, you can work with a VoIP vendor to choose the most appropriate solution for your needs.





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Part Three: Selecting the Right Supplier

Summary: How to select VoIP for your business

Once you've made the decision to switch to voice over internet protocol (VoIP) telephony, you must perform due diligence to ensure you pick the right service provider and solution. Clearly, cost savings are topmost on your mind, but you need to consider overall efficiency as well. Your options are wide-ranging and every vendor has a slightly different solution to offer. And this can be extremely confusing.

In choosing the solution that most closely fits the needs and scale of your company, you should aim to focus on three major aspects:

- The provider's technical expertise: This will show the commitment of the vendor towards internet telephony. Solutions offered must provide scalability and flexibility.
- How responsive its support team is: Examine how complete its suite of support services are. Also, look for a responsive and accessible after-sales support team.
- Whether the provider has a customer-focused approach: A customer-friendly, interactive and alert approach is likely to signify the vendor's level of interest in forming a long-term relationship with you.

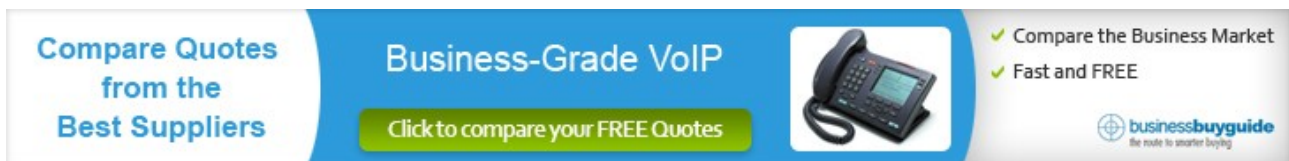
A provider should also demonstrate a solid understanding of your businesses needs and the ability to build solutions to match those needs. You must also ensure that the solution can scale up as your company grows.

In preparing to purchase a VoIP system, you need to clearly define your business needs for both the present and the future. Aligning your convergence systems with realistic growth goals and organizational vision is a worthwhile exercise.

When you come to choose a solution, you should look out for:

- A complete suite of communications and business applications
- Back-up options for emergencies or system failures
- High reliability and availability records
- Flexibility and scalability
- Multi-vendor interoperability
- Excellent voice quality
- Easy implementation and management
- Integrated networking between sites
- Clarity about total costs and the payback period
- Guarantees of quality and service levels
- Robust support options

You need to get this right because if you end up with an unsuitable IP telephony system, skilful implementation or competent service will not solve the problem.



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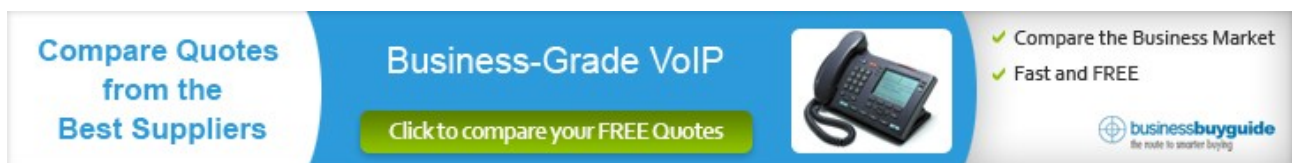
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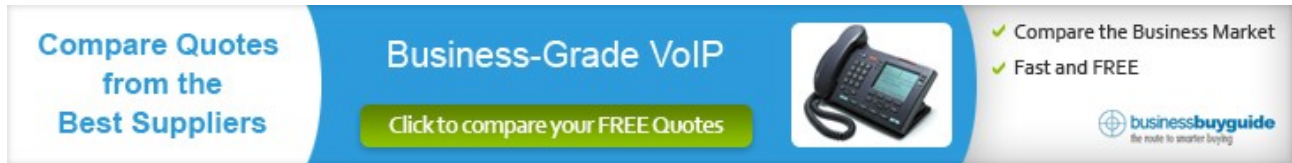
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"I found the service to be comprehensive. I was provided with the information and proposals that I was looking for, with very little input from me, and suppliers contacted me very quickly"

Paul Mullin, The Alternative Company Limited

"Service put me in contact with several qualified suppliers, saving me time."

Sandra Bennett, W A Fairhurst and Partners

"I am very happy with how prompt and quick the response was, efficient and fluid."

Peter Carter, Asahi Seiko Europe Ltd

"I got all the information and prices that I needed from one source, quickly and efficiently."

Graham Hill, Averox

"Extremely prompt and effective, received RFQs and the phone call in the allocated time, as promised."

Ben Holt, BikeRight

"Worth the while if you want to save time"

David Martin, Adjusting Solutions

"They delivered all that they promised"

James Buckingham, ARC Technologies

"Prompt and efficient! The week after, we selected the best supplier, and have installed new phone lines and equipment."

David Louzan, David St James Estate Agents

"Very good, and fast response from all suppliers."

Peter McKeown, Georgous Properties Ltd

"Perfect service... satisfied with the level of professionalism"

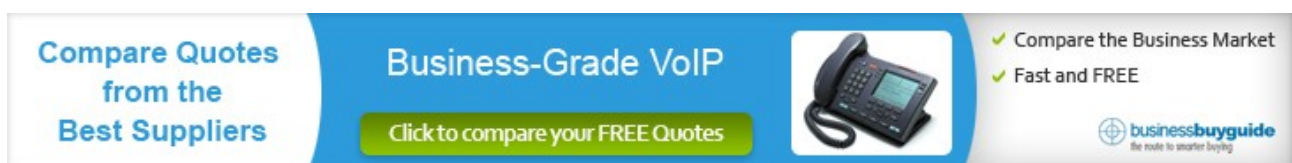
Tony Johnston, Greyridge

"Excellent service – they put me in touch with helpful friendly suppliers"

Josh Martin, Veritas Productions

"The website and service was user friendly, and I quickly received contact from all matching companies"

Laura Mann, Brooks Macdonald Asset Management




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