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WHITE PAPER

# 5 Tips to Choosing the Right Business Phone System

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Communicating with others is a vital part of life. And in a business environment, effective communication is essential for success. Businesses need to have easy-to-use communications systems that enable the everyday conversations that move a company forward. Organizations large and small have a wide array of phone systems to choose from, and business-decision makers need to consider numerous factors when selecting the phone system that is the right fit for their company.

Feature-rich business phone systems were previously viewed as only for the enterprise, but technological advances have made it so that SMBs can take advantage of the same enterprise-grade solutions but at an affordable price. Modern IP phone systems allow users to swap out their legacy equipment for a phone system that fits the needs of today's fast-paced, mobile business. When decision makers are faced with determining which solution to invest in, there are numerous tips that could prove useful. Here are the five top tips for choosing the right business phone system.

## The Importance of Communications

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Communication comes in many forms. Business professionals of course often interact by speaking, whether in person, over the telephone or through the use of Web and video conferencing solutions. Video conferencing integrates voice and visual channels to heighten the overall experience. However, much of business communications today is performed in writing, with professionals utilizing tools like unified messaging, email and text messaging. These are only some of the many ways that people regularly interact.

In organizations of all sizes, communication plays an integral and irreplaceable role. Much of a successful business depends on building positive relationships with clients, partners and coworkers, and this requires the establishment of trust, which can be accomplished with effective communication. In fact, the way in which a company builds and maintains relationships can significantly impact its level of success, as it relates to its reputation and credibility, meaning that the more effective communication is, the better the business results will be.

Consider an [IT Mashable](#) article from contributor Henry Conrad, for example, which discussed why every business needs a good phone system in order to be successful - to enable essential everyday conversations to take place. The last few decades have witnessed remarkable change in the communications solutions that are available.

## Planned Obsolescence

In addition, outdated legacy phone systems could be costing a business money and deterring success. In a recent [Billings Gazette](#) column, contributor and communications expert Matt Duray explained how unified communications solutions have evolved

to allow businesses to leverage powerful applications and technologies in an effort to improve productivity and boost success. Duray touched on how more organizations are becoming familiarized with the concept of planned obsolescence, where a product is designed with a limited lifespan and thus becomes obsolete after a certain time period.

“Small to medium-sized businesses need to take a close look at their phone systems to evaluate when obsolescence will strike and what steps they can take to avoid this,” Duray wrote. “Many of the existing phone systems that businesses are running have been discontinued [and] are no longer supported by the manufacturer. This basically means the technology has run its course, stopped being manufactured and is becoming exceedingly difficult to service. In other words, if a business is running its communications infrastructure on obsolete technology when it breaks down, there won’t be anyone to help fix it. This is a giant risk that business owners are taking when their customer relationships are on the line. An outdated phone system will ultimately crash. Businesses cannot afford to go down and cut off all contact with their customers.”



Duray highlighted how integral communications are for regular business operations, and organizations need to invest time into determining which solution will provide the best phone system for their particular needs. This highlights the growing importance of having a strong understanding of specific company needs.

### **Tip #1: Evaluate business needs**

The first step to selecting the right business phone system involves a thorough review and analysis of business needs, existing problems and the company’s goals as they relate to the integration of new technologies and solutions.

This step should be done before any quotes are sought or vendors are contacted, because while providers can be helpful in making the decision, no one truly knows the business like the people in charge and the everyday workers. Defining business requirements is a crucial step, as procurement policies can then be shaped to align with the determined needs.

### **Tip #2: Compare and contrast on-premise and cloud-based solutions**

Once business needs are fully understood and outlined, it is important to consider the main types of phone solutions, which are essentially on-premise and cloud-based.

On-premise phone solutions are generally a popular option for larger enterprises with the resources to manage and support on-site hardware, or companies that have highly sensitive data and wish to retain control. As technological advances in communications have been vast in recent years, the latest solution type to emerge is cloud-hosted phone systems. These leverage cloud-computing technology, allowing the provider to host and manage all major equipment and hardware at an offsite location. These types of solutions have essentially opened the door to small and medium-sized businesses to take advantage of enterprise-grade communications at an affordable price by eliminating the installation and maintenance costs that go along with on-premise solutions.



Cloud-hosted VoIP and cloud unified communications services do not require a capital investment. Voice over Internet Protocol, or VoIP is a technology that delivers data over the internet in a digital form, which means significantly more cost effective phone service than legacy systems are able to provide.

In addition, hybrid solutions are just beginning to emerge, combining the benefits of on-premise and cloud-based unified communications solutions and applications into one offering. Such a solution means that businesses will soon be able to use premise-based solutions while still deploying UC applications in the cloud, enabling them to keep resources where they would be most useful.

### **Tip #3: Consider advanced UC features**

Another important consideration to make when selecting the best business phone system is what sort of advanced features would be particularly useful for the company. For example, unified communications solutions combine the benefits of VoIP telephony with advanced features such as instant messaging, video conferencing, presence, mobility and collaboration capabilities into one on-premise business phone system that can be used by both office workers and remote employees.

When selecting a business phone system, an essential element will be the new solution's compatibility with other equipment. While legacy equipment should be replaced and upgraded as necessary, it is often beneficial to select a solution that is capable of integrating new, enhanced functionality with existing equipment. With seamless integration, companies can tackle one of the top complexities that disrupt business today.

#### **Tip #4: Take a closer look at mobility, projected growth and employee habits**

While initially evaluating business needs is necessary, it is also a good idea to focus on a company's mobility needs, as some will require additional capabilities to meet the growing demands of a mobile workforce. Smartphones, tablets and business applications have begun to significantly impact the way that work is performed, and more people are relying on mobile devices in the corporate environment than ever before. Business Spectator recently explored this trend, focusing on the need to utilize mobile applications for future business.

"As technology evolves, and new trends emerge, end users' demands and expectations of software applications are constantly changing," Business Spectator's Kylie Kelly wrote. "Modern users expect 24/7 mobile access to all the applications and online services that they would use on their desktop or laptop computer, visiting e-commerce sites, accessing their bank online, and more recently, loading their work applications. Businesses will find it impossible to ignore mobile if they wish to remain competitive in the next few years and must consider the most effective way to develop and adapt business applications to the needs of the mobile user."

Kelly also detailed how one of the main challenges in providing for mobility needs is ensuring that the new operating environments of solutions are adequately supported, regularly testing apps as a means of reducing risk of failure and lowering costs associated with regular and ongoing maintenance.

This does not have to be an expensive endeavor requiring IT infrastructure to be completely overhauled. Enterprise mobility solutions are cost-effective, enabling businesses of any size to embrace BYOD and easily integrate smartphones and tablets with existing communications applications. The recently released ShoreTel Dock is an exceptional tool that allows employees to utilize an iPad or iPhone as a desktop phone solution on the go.

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In addition, a company's projected growth should be considered. If an organization plans to grow substantially in the coming years, it would make sense to select a business phone system and service plan that is highly scalable, allowing additional extensions to be added and plans to be adapted as the company adds new employees or expands geographically.

Employee habits should also factor into decisions, as certain features that go unused due to employees' behavior will do the company no good to include as part of its custom phone solution. Reaching productivity in the modern office is a sensitive equation, and by carefully exploring these many business-specific factors, decision makers can set up the team with the best chance of success.

## Tip #5: Research providers and planning purchasing

When making a business phone system selection, it is essential to take the time to re-research providers and put forethought into purchasing. It is important that the provider is able to meet all business needs, and decision makers should vet vendors before signing any contract. Much of a solution's success will depend on the standard of services that are delivered. Furthermore, a business phone provider should be a partner in business, as demonstrating an interest in helping a company reach its goals is paramount in ensuring that the right system is put in place.

## ShoreTel Provides Solutions for All Business Needs

One of the great things about ShoreTel is that it is an industry leader in both customer satisfaction and low total cost of ownership, meaning many businesses have found custom ShoreTel solutions capable of meeting and exceeding their specific needs. ShoreTel solutions have already been vetted by many satisfied businesses around the globe, making them a clear choice to address business communication needs.

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In fact, ShoreTel's custom solutions eliminate the many barriers that other providers still have in place. This means that businesses can consult ShoreTel for a wide variety of reasons, including to simply replace its legacy phone system, help develop a new office site or branch, upgrade unified communications solutions or modernize its contact center by pursuing a multi-channel solution. ShoreTel also helps businesses master mobility and embrace BYOD with its recently released ShoreTel Dock. The dock is the first and only business-grade device that allows users to dock their iPad or iPhone to their desk phone so that transitioning between working remotely or on the go and at the desk has never been easier.

One development demonstrating the company's commitment to providing the best possible business communication solutions is ShoreTel's recent announcement of its Connect offering, which effectively merges on-premise solutions with the cloud for one hybrid unified communications solution. Upon completion, customers will have the option to choose premise- or cloud-based UC solutions and applications, but also the ability to include the best of both in an integrated solution. This new offering is slated to be rolled out in early 2014.

"We are pleased with the continued momentum of our cloud business and steady market share gains, which reflect our commitment to offering customers brilliantly simple and flexible UC solutions and business phone systems," said Keith Nealon, president of ShoreTel's Cloud Division. "ShoreTel's cloud growth, along with our strong on-premise business, gives us a unique position in the marketplace."

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### About ShoreTel

ShoreTel is a provider of business communication solutions whose brilliantly simply unified communications platforms, applications and mobile UC solutions promise a new rhythm of workforce engagement and collaboration. With costly complexity eliminated by design from its award winning, all-in-one IP phone system, UC and contact center solution, and its industry leading hosted business phone system, workers enjoy a freedom and self-reliance that other providers can't match. Users have full control to engage and collaborate, no matter the time, place or device, for the lowest cost and demand on IT resources in the industry. ShoreTel is headquartered in Sunnyvale, California, and has regional offices and partners worldwide. For more information, visit [shoretel.com](http://shoretel.com) or [shoretelsky.com](http://shoretelsky.com)

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