

New phone system checklist

Considering replacing your office telephone system?

Here are a few considerations that we hope will ease the way. If you arm yourself with answers to the following questions, you should find it much easier to choose a system that suits your needs.

First, take a look around, do a quick survey of your existing phone system:

1. How many phones do you need?
2. How many staff will you need 1-3 years from now?
3. How many people are likely to be on the phone at once?
4. Can you identify how your existing system lets you down?

The answers to these questions should give you an idea of how many extensions (internal phone lines) and trunks (external phone lines) you need, along with some idea of missing features.

Now, consider your external calls, and do another quick survey:

5. Do you have more than one office? If so, how many calls are inter-office?
6. Do you make international calls? How many?

The answers will give an idea of how to best route your external calls.

In other words, what sort of trunks do you need?

You may be able to save money by choosing to route some calls over an IP network such as the Internet, or over the traditional PSTN network.

It will also be useful to get an idea of the existing IT systems – you may be able to leverage your IT infrastructure to save money and add functionality to your phone system.

Try to get an idea of the following information:

7. What type of cabling is installed for the network?
8. Does the cabling run to every desk?
9. Do the network switches support Power Over Ethernet?

The IT infrastructure will give you an idea of whether your network is suitable for IP telephone extensions, which could save cabling expenditure and simplify installation.

Spend some time working out which telephony features will really be of benefit to you. In doing this, think about how people in your organisation work.

10. Do some staff members need to move around a lot within the site?
11. Are people away from their desks a lot?
12. Do you have home workers, or field based staff?
13. Do you use computer applications to store contact information?
14. Do you have groups of people to deal with incoming calls?
15. Do any users have “special” requirements, such as receptionists, call centre supervisors, or staff working in harsh environments?

These questions will give you information about the capabilities of the applications and terminals you will need on a suitable system, including CTI applications, voicemail systems and programmable key modules.

Your choice of PBX Platform should be made with these criteria in mind from the start, rather than treating them as ‘bolt-ons’, in order to get the best integration and ease of use.

Finally, don’t forget to take into account your installation and maintenance requirements.

Solutions:

Now you are probably armed with a host of information about your existing system, along with some requirements for a replacement. Some of the technology areas that may provide you with a business advantage are discussed here.

Multiple Offices:

If your organisation has more than one site, consider whether you can save money by routing calls between offices over a VPN (Virtual Private Network) on the Internet, rather than the PSTN.

This can be a particular benefit if your offices are located internationally. This may require setting up VOIP trunks.

Mobile Workers:

If staff move around your site a lot, but need to stay in touch, then DECT wireless handsets may provide a big benefit, by allowing people to stay in contact while on the move.

Modern Business DECT systems offer all of the benefits of PBX connected desk phones, allowing access to voicemail and call transfers while away from the desk.

Computer Telephony Integration (CTI)

If your organisation uses a Customer Relations Management Package (CRM), or a computer based contact manager, you can often make life simpler by connecting the telephone system with the computer application.

This can allow calls to be made directly from your chosen application, which saves having the numbers stored in two places, and makes it much quicker to find contacts and place calls, through “click to dial” functionality.

The above should get you off to a strong start with putting together a fundamental “requirements list” that will put you in good stead when you begin looking at potential solutions.