

THE BUSINESS OWNER'S CLOUD COMMUNICATIONS FAQ

Unsure about how cloud communications differ from legacy on-premises phones, and why you should move your business phones to the cloud? We've assembled and answered some common questions that business owners ask.

On-premises phone system

Cloud communications system

HOW DOES A CLOUD-BASED SERVICE SCALE WITH MY BUSINESS VS. AN ON-PREMISES PHONE SYSTEM?

Requires a server called a private-branch exchange (or PBX). Some are scalable (you can add more capacity) and others simply will not scale beyond a certain number of users. In some situations, you have to purchase phone lines in modules, e.g., you buy capacity for 12 users when you only need 9 lines.

Scales with your business, so you are never paying for users you don't need. You purchase service for the exact number of users you have. Adding a new employee is as simple as ordering service and plugging in another phone.

TAKEAWAY

Look for a provider that gives you flexibility with no long-term contracts and mix and match packages. This ensures that the provider earns your business today while adapting to any changes needed for tomorrow.

CAN MY BUSINESS DEPEND ON THE CLOUD? HOW RELIABLE IS IT?

Shuts down when the power goes out or the phone lines are disrupted – your customers get a busy signal. Not very reliable. They're also subject to whatever disaster strikes your office location, e.g., fire, flooding, severe weather, or theft can render your phones unusable or offline.

Runs on your provider's network, which should have multi-region datacenters and built-in redundancy that ensures an outage in one server or datacenter doesn't bring the whole system down. Electricity or internet outages may impact your office's phones, but not the cloud phone system, which in the event of an outage would reroute calls to your mobile phone. In that regard, they are highly reliable.

TAKEAWAY

Look for a provider that offers financially backed service level agreements with uptime as high as 99.999% (which means less than 26 seconds of downtime per month). So long as you don't settle for anything less, your business can definitely depend on cloud reliability.

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IT SOUNDS COMPLEX. HOW DO I SET IT UP, AND WHAT'S INVOLVED IN TRAINING?

Usually requires a specialized technician to install, set up, maintain, and make changes. And you'll have to schedule the service, which can take weeks. Employees may be given a phone system 'cheat sheet' that tells them how to transfer calls, conference someone in, and so on.

Is easy to implement and usually doesn't even require a visit from your vendor. Every phone is shipped to you with simple instructions for how to plug them into your existing internet connection. And support agents or your IT partner can talk you through how to use the online dashboard to configure phone numbers, assign call forwarding, and more. The process takes just hours, not weeks.

TAKEAWAY

Look for an easy-to-use cloud communications system whose provider offers 24/7 support.

HOW IS A CLOUD-BASED SYSTEM PRICED?

Usually requires annual contracts and additional charges for feature changes, moving or adding lines, maintenance, and more. Plus, you have to pay the phone company for phone lines and long distance.

Is priced on a flat monthly fee per user and generally includes local and long-distance calling. Business features like voicemail, call forwarding, conferencing, video, and other communication features are all included in the cost.

TAKEAWAY

Be sure to ask your cloud communications provider if they require a time-based contract or if they charge you for the phones themselves – if they do, walk away because others don't.

HOW MUCH DO I NEED TO WORRY ABOUT CALL QUALITY OVER THE INTERNET? LIKE STATIC, ECHOES, AND CHOPPY AUDIO?

You shouldn't have to worry about this at all – your provider or IT partner should run network tests and pre-qualify your network before any kind of deployment to ensure call quality and clarity. Cloud phone system call quality should be as good as that on land lines.

TAKEAWAY

Since cloud communications rely on your internet connection and network setup, you'll want to look for a provider that rigorously tests your network (e.g., does a multi-day vs. a 15-second test) for bandwidth and redundancy and advises whether it should be upgraded to support voice calls.

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WHAT'S THE BIGGEST BUSINESS BENEFIT TO A CLOUD COMMUNICATIONS SYSTEM?

"Biggest" depends on what matters to you. But cloud communications systems in general are more affordable, more reliable, and easier to set up than on-premises phones. They also scale with your business more flexibly and deliver communication and collaboration features that your customers and employees are used to having on their mobile devices. Last, they are usually integrated with a mobile app that gives your employees the ability to make and receive business calls from their mobile device, so connecting with customers or other employees isn't dependent on employees sitting at a desk all day.

TAKEAWAY

Consider a cloud communications service from a company that delivers fully unified communications and collaboration features like chat, video conferencing, and screen sharing. You'll be glad you did even if you don't use the features right away.

WHAT HAPPENS TO MY EXISTING BUSINESS PHONE NUMBERS IF I SWITCH? AND WHAT ABOUT 800 NUMBERS?

You keep your existing phone numbers when you change communications systems. Moving phone numbers is called 'porting'. Porting local phone numbers takes about 2-4 weeks depending on how quickly your current service provider responds, and porting tollfree numbers typically takes about 1-2 weeks. There is usually a bit of overlap time where your phone numbers are active on both services.

TAKEAWAY

Make sure you follow the provider's instructions for a smooth number porting experience.

NEC'S UNIVERGE BLUE CONNECT

CONNECT is a leading cloud-based business communications system from an on-premises and cloud communications provider with over 120+ years' experience delivering quality solutions and cloud services to over a million users. CONNECT delivers:

- 24/7 support from our certified team of experts available via phone or chat
- Industry-leading 99.999% uptime service level agreement that's financially backed
- No contracts, because we work hard to earn your business each month
- One predictable bill
- Integrated video/web conferencing, screen sharing, team chat, file sharing and backup, and more, with the desktop and mobile apps that keep you connected no matter where you are or what mobile device you're using

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