

Q&A for Purchasing a Business Phone System

In spite of the increased use of email, mobile phones, and text-based communication, most businesses today cannot operate effectively without a fully functioning phone system. It's a necessity for sales, customer service, working with partners and vendors, speaking with investors, and maintaining a professional image.

Since all businesses are different, it's important to find the system that fits your budget and provides the capabilities needed to support your operation. Below are the answers to the most asked questions about purchasing a phone system. Whether you're purchasing a traditional on-premise PBX system or a hosted Cloud PBX system, this information should help you find the system that's right for your business:

Q. Who should I call for a quote?

A. The best resources for which telecom companies to consider are usually found through references provided by trusted friends and business associates. You may want to limit the number of providers you speak with to three. This will give you competitive choices without creating the confusion that can come from speaking with too many vendors.

Q. How should I interview and evaluate potential vendors?

A. In the first meeting, you should ask the representative to tell you about their company, then have that person answer the following questions:

1. How long have you been in business?

You'll want to work with a company that has the experience to understand your business and help you choose a cost-effective system that will work for you now and long into the future. If the salesperson is not pro-active on your behalf, this might be a picture of the company's approach to business in general. If they are not responsive to you when they are trying to make a sale, they are likely to not be responsive after the sale.

2. How many certified, trained technicians work for your company?

The company you choose should have licensed, experienced, certified service technicians available for installation and service calls. Find out how many technicians are available and what the response time would be if a technical issue is urgent.

Then ask what is involved in making changes or additions to your system or moving it entirely. As your business grows you want to be sure the vendor and system you choose can easily and cost-effectively support this growth.



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3. Is your company a licensed, authorized dealer for the equipment you sell and service?

There are many gray-market unauthorized resellers and/or business partners selling equipment throughout the U.S. Many of these companies are in violation of distribution agreements (selling to unauthorized resellers or selling outside their authorized territories). This can result in finding out later that the products you purchased are altered, outdated, or discontinued, or that the manufacturer warranty is no longer valid.

Don't take the companies you are talking with at their word. Always call or look on the manufacturer's website to verify that the company is a licensed, authorized dealer. This protects your interest and investment. It is worth your time to validate companies for dealer authorization before contracts are signed.

Q. How can I best evaluate the systems?

- A.** Request a "hands on" demonstration of the equipment they are recommending for you. Do not settle for a demonstration at your office. You'll want to see their actual facility to make sure it's not a garage-based operation. If you are part of a committee, it is important to bring all the members for the demonstration.

Everyone needs to have all the information to make an educated decision. You can tell a lot about the company by walking through their office, meeting their people, and observing work habits and their office environment for neatness and professionalism. You wouldn't buy an automobile without a test drive, and you should treat a telecom system purchase the same. Allow plenty of time for each demonstration to make sure all your questions are answered to your satisfaction.

When considering a hosted PBX phone system, be sure the vendor has processes in place to ensure call quality. Additionally, confirm if a hosted PBX solution works with your existing IT infrastructure.

It's also important to learn how the implementation of your new system would be handled. Make sure the system would be programmed specifically for your business and not installed "as is" from the manufacturer. Typically, low-cost solutions provide limited training time, default programming setup, or hidden added costs for a total solution. You'll want to avoid this.



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Q. How will my employees get trained to use the system I choose?

A. Most companies train new users initially during the install, but you'll want to find out how much training time is allowed and if they offer training after the install. Ask if they have dedicated trainers who can be available when new employees are added — and be sure to understand what and when they charge for training.

Q. Is there anything else I need to do before making a decision?

A. If you require services such as voice or data cabling, linking of remote sites, or LAN or WAN (local or wide area networks) advanced networking applications, you will need to ask further questions to qualify the company. Ask for specific company references for these applications. Make sure to see a demonstration of these applications prior to making a commitment.

When selecting a hosted PBX system, confirm that you are able to retain your existing telephone numbers. Additionally, verify you will still be able to send and receive faxes with your new solution.

Also ask about their inventory. If parts are needed for service find out if those parts are available locally or need to be shipped in from the manufacturer. If your system breaks down and need parts, you'll want to be working with a provider who can minimize any downtime your business might experience.

Beware of any proposal not written in plain English or that is hard to understand. There may be a reason they appear that way. Trust your feelings. If what is being offered appears too good to be true, it normally is.

Be sure to get references and call those references. If others have had problems with the companies you are considering you'll want to know about them. When talking to references, inquire if there are any companies they would not do business with, and why.

Q. What if I get more than one good proposal? How do I decide?

A. Evaluate all the areas important to your company. Make a list of pros and cons on each company. If all the proposals compare apples to apples, look at the pricing. However, don't just look at the initial cost, but at the true cost of ownership. While you always want the best value for your money, this does not necessarily mean the cheapest initial cost. "Cost" and "value" are very different concerns. The initial price or cost paid is never the total cost over the life of the system. Evaluate customer service, the cost of moves, additions, training, changes, extended maintenance costs, down time costs, response time costs, etc.



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There is another old rule of business that always applies to purchasing equipment. Keep in mind that, if price, reliability and service are the most important buying criteria for your purchase, you will generally get only two of the three. The difficulty is in deciding which two are the most important and which company offers those two. Take time to analyze your information, make the right decision, and, in the long run, you will experience less stress with minimal down time — and have an acceptable solution for your telecom needs.

Finally, ask if your choice is a company you can trust and work with for the next five to 10 years as your telecom partner.

Q. Why is a member of The Ideacom Network a smart choice?

A. The Ideacom Network is a national organization of telecom resellers that have joined together to promote each other's success. Each member undergoes a thorough examination of its business practices prior to joining. The Network only admits companies that demonstrate their commitment to customer care, financial stability, and community leadership. Consequently, end-user customers seeking voice and data equipment and services can be sure an Ideacom member has attained elite status in their respective communities.

Telecommunications trends change daily if not hourly. Ideacom members are part of a network that stays abreast of the very latest technologies whether they are VoIP (Voice over Internet Protocol), data communications or converged solutions (a combination of the two). A strong emphasis is placed on ensuring that each member maintains the latest technical certifications for the products they represent and that sales personnel are more than adequately trained.

It is a close-knit group of business professionals who lean on each other in times of need. Because of their unique relationships, they can assist each other in the event of local calamities (such as power outages, etc.) by sharing technicians and parts. No other group of dealers in the United States can work together as effectively as the Ideacom family of professionals. Because Ideacom members share best practices culled from decades of experience, Ideacom members are truly "thought leaders."

An Ideacom professional will custom-build a solution for your business and install it on time and under budget. And they will maintain it 365/24/7. The Ideacom Network has agreements in place with some of the leading vendor partners in the telecommunications field.

In summary, by purchasing from an authorized Ideacom member you are buying from a company that is dedicated to excellence. For more information on Ideacom or to locate a member near you, visit www.ideacom.org or call 1-866-433-2266.



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