



*Improving Your Business Operations with
a Cloud-Based Hosted Phone System*

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Small- and medium-sized businesses often have concerns that require solutions sensitive to their more limited sizes. One such concern is telephone service. Gone are the days where each business would have a handful of lines dedicated to the incoming and outgoing communications of daily business. Gone are the days where a T1 line solved all your problems. Now, many small- and medium-sized businesses are opting to capitalize on recent advancements in technology and prefer a hosted VoIP phone system. A hosted phone system is a cloud-based system that allows all the benefits of large scale business communications on a small business budget. In addition to the reduction in capital investment, there are several operational problems with traditional phone system options that a hosted phone system can solve. This white paper will explore the benefits of a hosted phone system, including cost-efficiency, flexibility, and disaster management.

SIMPLIFY COMMUNICATIONS

There was a time when any company with more than a dozen or so lines had a bulky private branch exchange (PBX) phone system with a user's manual thicker than the collected works of Stephen King, a closet with a mass of wires that nobody could figure out, and of course, an expensive consultant to take care of it all. And businesses that didn't have the budget for all that were just left out in the cold with little more than two tin cans and a string.

Thankfully, today the landscape is quite different, and the enabling technology has given businesses of all sizes much more capability, greater simplicity and lower costs. Given the right provider, a big business can save thousands of dollars, and a small business can gain access to the advanced telephony features it needs to compete. But, with all that great new technology at hand and a dizzying number of communications services and providers, it can be confusing when deciding what exactly your company needs and from where to obtain it. Are you even comparing apples to apples?

Some hosted phone system companies still leave you with an incomplete solution. The actual telephone hardware is often left out of the provider's service offering, leaving you on your own to acquire the best phones for your system—and often with a large bill for costly telephone equipment. One of the big advantages of hosted phone systems is supposed to be that you don't have to bear the capital expenses that you would otherwise face in an on-premise deployment. But, the phones themselves can cost hundreds of dollars each—and that adds up quick. A hosted phone offering that also provides you with the telephone hardware is the only true "no capital expenditure" offering out there and may also give you the additional financial advantage of not having to maintain or upgrade that telephone equipment. There are plenty of hosted phone system vendors available, but there is a very short list of providers that give you a complete phone system, calling plan, and web portal management system on a secure network without any capital expenses or the need for in-house IT support.

You simplify your business' communications by unifying your necessary services through one vendor. Another major differentiator and a major feature that is lacking from many providers is additional value-added services such as Internet access for those needing broadband service, as well as secure data networking and encryption. By buying all of these services from one provider, you ensure that all these systems work cohesively. By buying from separate vendors, you run the risk of having one or two features not work properly due to incompatibility with your previously installed features, and instead of simplifying, you have now complicated your business' communications system. The most versatile providers offer all of these as core or optional services.

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A hosted phone system should also include system upgrades and simple administrative tools for routine maintenance that eliminate the need for a maintenance contract. While most providers do offer administrative tools, not all of them are easy to use, and they may come with a steep learning curve. If you choose the right services, these tools upgrade the middleware between you and the host and allow you to simply and easily keep your system up to date, which helps you operate more efficiently and can deter problems. Because all of the technology is hosted on the network, major upgrades and changes are done remotely and transparently with little to no interruption to your business' service.

Furthermore, it's important to look under the hood at the provider's network to see the level of redundancy that is built into it. You need to have a dial tone at all times, and you shouldn't have to worry about how that happens. A reliable provider will have a fully redundant network to ensure that your network uptime is guaranteed.

Many of the features that enable a hosted phone system to simplify communications also allow it to be a cost-efficient option for your business. And in a hyper-competitive, global business environment, a company needs every advantage it can get—and it needs to devote its energy to its core business instead of putting time and energy into figuring out how to get the phone system to work.

BECOME MORE COST-EFFICIENT

Costly telephony solutions present a problem to up-and-coming, yet cost-minded small- and medium- sized businesses. The initial capital required for equipment, personnel to maintain that equipment, and equipment upgrades is often more than a business can handle. By opting for a hosted system, your business reaps all the benefits of the top technology in telephony while still leaving a considerable amount in your bank account. That's because the only on-site equipment you might need to purchase is the telephones, although some plans even include the telephones as part of the service package. This option is often overlooked, with some buyers assuming—incorrectly—that they have to purchase their phones. A sophisticated phone capable of handling all of the features may run hundreds of dollars, and in an office with 50 or 100 workstations, that's a lot of capital expenditure in what is supposed to be a cap-ex free proposition. An advantage of a provider that offers the phone equipment as part of the package, in addition to the cost advantage, is that you can be assured of getting the right type of phones for your service and a maintenance plan for the phones should they be defective or break.

Everything else, including the intelligent people who fix the problems and perform upgrades when necessary, is hosted elsewhere. There is no capital required for a hosted phone system, and yet it allows your business to compete with businesses that have invested tens of thousands of dollars in on-site phone systems.

Another aspect of a hosted telephone system that makes it so cost-efficient is the administrative tools that allow you to perform routine maintenance, eliminating the need for expensive maintenance contracts. Moves/adds/changes with an on-premise, self-managed system takes staff time and requires a manager to place a call to an IT staffer that doesn't have the time, and the result can be significant delays that can negatively impact productivity. In considering a hosted system, take a close look at the administrative portal to determine how easy it is for your own in-house, non-IT staff to make routine adds or changes. Don't be shy about asking for a live demonstration or documentation on how the system will handle your everyday needs.

While a hosted phone system receives major upgrades remotely, small routine maintenance actions keep the system running smoothly. With a hosted system, you don't have to worry about signing a contract and paying hard-earned money to someone to perform these simple acts that you or your staff can easily handle. Should the system encounter a problem, it is fixed remotely at the hosted location, which means no paying a technician to make a service call, who shows up when he/she gets around

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to it, takes all day to fix the problem, and interrupts your business. But, how do you know you're saving money and how much? One feature offered by some hosted phone system companies is all charges for your chosen services arriving on one easy-to-read bill. The bill you receive may even provide a detailed breakdown of activity and charges down to the site level. Some companies even include graphs to indicate exactly where your communications dollars are spent, which allows you to fine tune your telephone requirements quickly and decisively.

In addition to the bundling of services from one provider, even more options exist to custom fit your hosted phone system to meet your business' unique needs.

INCREASE FLEXIBILITY AND SCALABILITY

Every business is different. And every business owner knows that every business day is different, which is why the increased flexibility of a hosted phone system is an alluring attribute. One of the many services provided by vendors is a web portal on which you can make changes as you need them. This web portal allows you to administer and program the system remotely without needing an IT staff member to hover over your shoulder. You are in charge of your business, so you should be in charge of the tools you use to make that business run better and faster. Adding features and adding new lines no longer requires a trip to the wiring closet and complicated provisioning. Get a new phone, plug it in, and go to your personalized web portal to log the addition, and you're done.

Most hosted phone systems allow you to do that by providing all the potential service options in one location, giving you the ability to make changes whenever necessary. Be careful; not all web portals are created equal. Make sure the provider you are considering gives you tools that are easy to access, use and deploy for both administrators and end users. Many vendors provide dozens of features from which you can customize your phone system to meet your needs. Many vendors offer various Internet access and data networking options that respond to your communications needs in real time. So, you can see immediately if the changes you made are working or if there are still more tweaks to be made.

Naturally, one concern is whether call quality will be equivalent to that of legacy phone services. Because the Internet is by definition a best-effort service, a combination of high-bandwidth and compensating technology must be in place to provide that quality of service. There are many ways to access the network using hosted phone systems, including via MPLS and via the Internet. MPLS, or multiprotocol label switching, is a quick and reliable way to transmit high speed data and digital voice on a single line. It assigns priority to voice lines, which allows you to determine the importance of incoming communications. This is beneficial when real-time traffic is given preference over data packets. Some service providers also allow you to access the service via the Internet. There are two common options—you can get your Internet connection through the same service provider as your phone service or through some other company altogether.

Remote and off-site options are increasingly becoming popular, including those programs for employees who telecommute, which give your organization the ultimate in flexibility. Common features like find-me/follow-me and softphones that let you make and receive calls from any location or deploy virtual extensions to other physical phones outside of the network break down the physical boundaries of the office.

Besides the ability to connect with other physical telephones, the softphone is a "virtual" telephone deployed on any computer or laptop regardless of location. Softphones don't require telephone hardware—all you need is a headset plugged into your laptop and a broadband connection. This feature allows employees to work remotely while still being in touch with clients and co-workers.



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Call coverage and find me/follow me features allow you to determine how calls are handled and where calls go when left unanswered. You can adjust a hosted phone system to route the calls to voicemail, a co-worker, an auto-attendant, or to another phone altogether. Many vendors provide auto-attendants, which effectively handle inbound callers by providing a menu of prompts encouraging callers to select the option that routes calls to user extensions and company directories. These flexibility options mean better customer service for your clients while ensuring you never miss any communications again.

Even if your business never moves out of the office, there are options to facilitate better communication. A feature called Hot Desking allows employees to move from phone to phone, from office to office, while performing functions as if they were sitting at their desks. This feature also works in different locations as well. So when you would like to move an employee's desk from one side of the office to another, there are no system changes. The employee simply sits down and pushes a few keys on the phone, and that phone is now his with the same functions and features as before. The flexibility of such a feature means your business can expand the options of where it can do business to any location.

Another flexible feature of hosted phone systems is its scalability. When your business grows, you may need more phones. With on-site phone systems, adding phones may mean new equipment. All too often, adding one phone pushes a system into an expensive upgrade. With a hosted phone system, all it takes is one quick phone call to your vendor and your new phones are sent to your office. When they arrive, you plug them into your existing network, set them up through your web portal, and the phones are ready to use that day. Because the technology is hosted elsewhere, there is minimal setup and time loss when increasing phone capacity. Gone is the agonizing decision of when to time the upgrade of more phones in order to minimize the disruption to your business.

While the flexibility, cost-efficiency, simplification and scalability of a hosted phone system is alluring, perhaps the most beneficial feature is one you pray you will never need to use.

HELPING YOU AVOID DISASTERS

Many business owners prepare for contingencies such as competition, a slow market, and a down economy. But have you ever considered natural disasters such as tornadoes, hurricanes, floods, fires, or other devastating acts of nature? Of course you're insured against such occurrences, but have you given thought as to what would happen to your business after one of these disasters? The fact is, with each day that passes after a disaster, the likelihood that your business will recover diminishes significantly. Without the ability to connect with your employees, partners and customers immediately—whether your office is accessible or not—revenue losses could be insurmountable. Clients will expect to be able to reach you and will feel relief when you answer the phone. You may have clients who reside in areas that are not damaged and while they may understand your predicament, it will still negatively affect your business if your phones are knocked out for a long period of time.

But, with most hosted phone systems, you don't need to worry about being unreachable after any kind of disaster. Because the phone system is housed on the vendor's secure network, you can access your phone system through any computer or laptop with an Internet connection from any location. The web-based portal on which you select features and make changes should enable you to forward calls or redirect incoming traffic to another branch location, even a home or cell phone. You can also use the softphone feature provided by your vendor to ensure business survivability. These unique aspects of a hosted phone system allow you to continue your business obligations by maintaining the level of customer service to which your clients are accustomed. This capability should be part of your own disaster preparedness plan, giving you the ability to redirect calls in the event of an emergency from anywhere in the world.



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Aside from natural disasters, there is also the concern of manmade disasters such as accidents and fraud. There are several possible levels of security in a hosted phone system, and you should check to see which ones your vendor offers. Many companies offer services directly without using a third party access point. The fewer number of people involved means fewer cracks into which security may fall. However, even with third-party access providers, you are using IP addressing that sends your information encrypted in order to deter fraud. In addition, a secure network is monitored and managed 24/7 by network professionals who are skilled at identifying and eliminating any attempts at fraud. With secure password protection on your end and skilled network monitoring on the vendor's end, fraud should be one less concern when running your business.

HOW BROADVIEW NETWORKS CAN HELP

Broadview Networks has been serving customers on its hosted phone system platform since 2005 and was named a Top 10 VoIP Service Provider by Infonetics Research for three years running. In fact, Broadview Networks owns the platform, which means no third-party vendor to run new code requests through and an added level of security since there is no vendor between you and your service provider. With over 60,000 stations operating across the country, Broadview Networks has the expertise and experience to be your top choice for hosted phone systems.

Broadview Networks offers its OfficeSuite™ technology, named Product of the Year by Unified Communications Magazine, as the best option carrying many of the prized features of a hosted phone system. OfficeSuite™ offers VoIP, which routes calls over private IP networks, enabling the service provider to manage the call from end to end. Broadview's network uses multi-protocol label switching (MPLS), a standards-based technology that allows OfficeSuite™ to categorize traffic based on priority; i.e., voice is given a higher priority than data, and calls are routed accordingly. Essentially, your business gets rid of its T1 line and transfers all of its telephony concerns to OfficeSuite™. The features found in OfficeSuite™ reflect the current needs of business professionals like you who wish to remain relevant in their fields without the capital and maintenance costs associated with such a sophisticated phone system.

A COMPLETE SYSTEM

OfficeSuite™ boasts many of the features that appeal to small- to medium-sized business owners, like a complete phone system, calling plan, and a web portal management system, all on a secure private network to guarantee quality and reliability. All of these features are accessible through the Internet thanks to cloud technology. OfficeSuite™ eliminates the costs surrounding installing and maintaining such a feature-rich telephone system and offers all of the features mentioned in this report in addition to around 40 others. Some features of note are:

• Hot Desking

Employees can move around the office and even between locations. This feature works well for employees who telecommute or provide on-site work. From any location, the employee can log in and use OfficeSuite™ services as if he or she were sitting in the office. If you happen to be in another office when your call comes in, you can pick up the phone in that office and still receive your important phone call. You have to see it to believe it!

• Web Portal Management

Selecting the features that best support your business is common, but receiving real-time feedback as to whether your choices were optimal is one great feature offered by OfficeSuite™. Log onto the Internet and the web portal management system, and you can tailor your choices to match your needs among the over 40 features available. Features include the ability to program the buttons on your phone,

FEATURES TO CONSIDER WHEN CHOOSING A HOSTED PHONE SYSTEM PROVIDER

It is important to identify the features your small- or medium-sized business will utilize and benefit from when comparing features offered by different hosted phone system providers. Many of the features mentioned in this report are offered by Broadview Networks' OfficeSuite™ Hosted IP System.



determine where you wish incoming calls to be routed, and select voicemail features, all in a user-friendly interface.

• *Call Coverage*

Determine how incoming calls are handled and where to send unanswered calls. You can send the calls to voicemail and then receive notifications and messages through email or on your smartphone. Or, you can send the calls to another co-worker, an auto-attendant or even another phone altogether. Auto-attendant features include multiple-level menu prompts to encourage incoming callers to select the right option to address their concerns. Three-way calling is an option, as is a Web and audio conferencing.

• *Automatic Call Distribution (ACD)*

ACD is fully integrated with OfficeSuite™ and allows you to distribute and prioritize incoming calls, develop customized hold treatments and implement advanced call center options. This is a newer feature offered by Broadview Networks for businesses that want the call center features of a large company without the expense of on-site equipment or additional IT support.

• *Click to Dial*

Click to Dial is a Microsoft Outlook plug-in that allows users to interface directly with their OfficeSuite™ phone system and Outlook's contact manager. To dial the phone number of one of your contacts, simply click a button and the phone system immediately opens a line, activates the speakerphone on your OfficeSuite™ desk phone, and calls the contact selected.

• *Softphone*

Softphone is a PC-based phone that can be used with any Internet-connected PC with a microphone and speakers, anywhere. Softphone offers the same features as your office phone, including caller ID, extension-to-extension dialing, voicemail and three-way calling, anywhere you travel. Softphone is invoiced with your OfficeSuite™ system, making it an even more streamlined feature. This is especially helpful for those times when you have to be away from your desk but cannot be away from your duties.

• *Mobile Twinning*

Mobile Twinning allows calls to ring simultaneously on an employee's desk phone and cell phone. This ensures that important phone calls will not be missed and prevents employees from playing "voicemail tag" with business contacts and clients. Studies have shown that most calls are missed simply because the intended target is down the hall. Prevent this bad timing by turning on Mobile Twinning in your OfficeSuite™ web portal or even program a button on your phone to enable or disable the feature. Once a call is answered using Mobile Twinning, the call can be switched to the other phone option without any time lag.

Broadview Networks' OfficeSuite™ cloud-based phone system, with its ACD and Mobile Twinning features, allows you and your business the worry-free, cost-efficient communications solution necessary to provide excellent customer service and grow your business to the highest level possible.



Don't wait another minute. Visit www.broadviewnet.com/officesuite and view a video demo outlining all the excellent features described in this report. Then, call Broadview Networks at [1-800-405-2200](tel:1-800-405-2200) to arrange for a live demonstration.