Yeastar

Small Business Phone System
BUYER'S GUIDE

What every small business need to know
when selecting a business phone system

How to Use This Guide

Buying a communications system is no small feat. It's a long-term investment. Whether your are starting a new business or need to upgrade your exiting phone system, it's important to find a right solution that meets your organization's requirements and will grow as your needs change.

This guide provides you with essential information and tools so you can know the basic business phone system knowledge, understand your available options, things to look for, and gain valuable insights on how to evaluate your purchase to find a right solution that will save you money, time, and effort.

1. The Basics

Business Phone Systems have come a quite a long way in the past 50 years. Before we jump into your available options and must-consider elements, it's important to understand how a modern business phone system works in the first place. Without that basic understanding, you'll find yourself struggling to see the difference between the different phone system options. Read and gain insight into the sequential innovations of business phone system - which led to all the efficiency we enjoy today.

How Business Phone System Works?

• PBX — Your Telephone Operator for Business Communications

A modern business phone system often works with a PBX (Private Branch Exchange), the telecommunications system within a company that manages your call flows and auto-routes calls based on pre-configured rules. With a PBX, when a caller reaches your company, he/she can be directed to his desired extension automatically without your staff having to intervene, greatly enhancing business efficiency.

In Your Office

PBX

Voice Provider
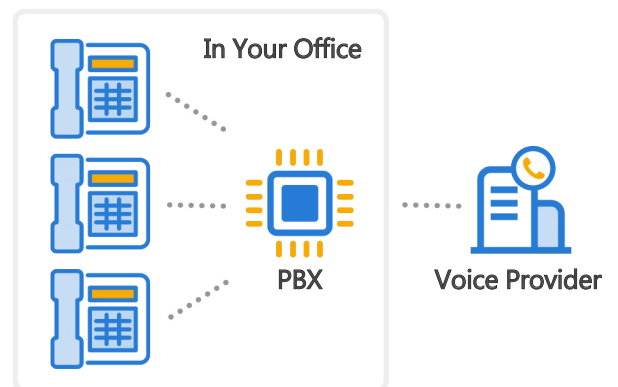
• VoIP — The Revolution of Internet-based Phone Service

When PBX first came out, generally known as analog/legacy PBX phone systems, businesses had no option but relying on traditional phone lines to communicate. And only very limited telephony features were available to leverage at that time. Yet the emergence of internet-based phone (VoIP) technology has changed the game.

VoIP (Voice Over Internet Protocol) is an IP telephony service that converts your voice into digital signal, allowing you to make and receive calls directly from a computer, a VoIP phone, or other data-driven devices. Such IP technology has made advanced telephony features like Unified Communications possible and brought about the next-generation VoIP-enabled PBX phone system for companies to skyrocket business communications in regards to reduced call costs and improved efficiency.

Increased Mobility

VoIP-enabled Phone System

Lower Call Costs

More Features
(UC, Multiparty-calling, Call Parking, Ring group, Call Monitor)

• Unified Communications — Ride the Wave of Next-level Communications Efficiency

The advent of of VoIP technology also ushers in an entirely new paradigm for business communications and collaboration - Unified Communications (UC) - where a unique feature set of communications capabilities are combined into a single integrated platform, enabling business to communicate team in entirely new ways, at a lighting fast pace.

An UC-capable business phone system can come in handy in various scenarios. By integrating telephony, conferencing, text messaging, cloud sharing, presence, clients (both desktop and mobile) and more capabilities into one, it enhances business cost-efficiency and productivity in an unprecedented way.

Bolstered Team Collaboration

Enable voice, instant messaging, file sharing, presence and more in one single platform to shorten team communications runaround time, empowering real-time brainstorming and project discussion session.

BYOD-Stay Connected Anywhere Anytime

With dedicated computer desktop and mobile client integration, turn your own devices into fully-featured office extensions. Stay connected and remain productive whenever and wherever.

Better Customer Service

Integrate business-critical system like CRM with your phone system to unfold your customer profile upon a customer call and enhance customer interaction and satisfaction.

Slashed Costs

Consolidate a slew of paid tools into a single, all-inclusive communication platform, reducing the additional capital investment on different 3rd party applications and streamlining business resources management.

2. Understand Your Options

Small business phone systems generally come in 2 types: traditional landline systems and VoIP-enabled phone systems. And VoIP-enabled phone systems can be further divided into two types according to the deployment method - on-premises VoIP Phone systems and Hosted VoIP PBXs (Cloud Phone Systems).

Below is a quick rundown of each type of phone system, so you can get a basic understanding of your options, the pros and cons, and how each will impact your business.

• Traditional Landline System

Typically supported by a local or regional phone company, traditional landline systems are analog-based and use physical PBX hardware boxes. They run over the Public Switch Telephone Network (PSTN) and physically connect phones via the telephone company' s copper wiring.

⊘ Pros:

·Reliable, time-tested solution with longest history.
·Usable during power outages unless you're using a
 cordless device.

⊗ Cons:

·Not capable of many modern-day phone system features
·Has limited options for add-ons, most of which cost extra.
·Landline systems are being phased out by phone
 system providers.

Best For:

Businesses already purchased landline services, has in-house IT staff to maintain the system, and with little requirement for advanced telephony features like mobility extension, unified communica-tions, video calls, etc.

・On-premises VoIP Phone System

An on-premises VoIP phone system is one where the PBX hardware is kept on-site in your server closet. Instead of physically connecting to the PBX with copper wiring, phones connect to the PBX over an office' s Local Area Network (LAN), often leveraging the same Internet connectivity that your office computers do. Besides the VoIP line (SIP Trunk) supports, some on-premises VoIP PBX can even incorporate traditional phone lines (ISDN, PSTN, GSM) without relying on other devices, offering greater cost-savings.

⊘ Pros:

- ・All equipment is housed in your business. You get full control.
- ・Local direct connectivity with the gateway and traditional lines.
- ・Additional VoIP benefits: reduced call rates, rich advanced VoIP functionality, increased mobility, scalability, etc.

⊗ Cons:

- ・Higher upfront costs but with zero or only little recurring fees
- ・Need to maintain and manage the on-site hardware

Best For:

Small businesses wanting the functionality of a sophisticated phone system at a reasonable price and want to take full control over their system and access the equipment at all times. Additionally, on-premises systems are better suited for businesses with regulatory or compliance requirements that may be difficult to meet in the cloud.

・Hosted PBX or Cloud Phone System

Hosted PBX or Cloud Phone Systems take the form of software or web application and work with the help of an Internet connection. They don't have a physical PBX system. Instead, a virtual PBX hosted on the cloud keeps their engine running. If you want the best of the maintenance-free small business VoIP systems as well as have a toehold on the future, cloud phone systems are ideal.

⊘ Pros:

- ・Lower upfront costs and greater future scalability
- ・Your provider shoulders all the maintenance and update
- ・Greater mobility with rich office phone functionality readily accessible anywhere with Internet connection

⊗ Cons:

- ・Potentially higher costs for ongoing services
- ・Vulnerable to slow and unreliable internet connections

Best For:

Growing businesses on a fixed budget that don't have an IT staff to operate and maintain PBX hardware. Also good for businesses that want quick access to new phone system features or have multiple locations and want their system all in on one platform.

3. Choose A Right Solution

Choosing a right phone system for your business is a huge undertaking, especially for small business with limited budget and resources. There a certainly handful of things you should consider to get yourself on the right track. This part outlines six most important components to consider with practical tips, plus an intuitive comparison table of different phone systems - as a checklist to save you time and effort.

• Features

Do the phone system offers what your business really needs?

Modern times call for modern solutions. Make sure your phone system can keep pace with technological change. And aligning the features available with your business needs is crucial. If critical telephony features like IVR, conferencing and call recording are missing or cost extra, then the product may not be the right solution.

Consider the following features to stay ahead of competition:

✔ **Call Management :**
basic features like Call Routing/ Forwarding/ Recording, IVR, Queue, emergency number and Time Condition should be equipped to support business core tasks.

✔ **Mobility :**
allow employee devices to be integrated with your phone network. In most cases, desktop and mobile softphone app are provided to support on-the-go and remote workers.

✔ **Unified Communications :**
outfit your team with instant messaging, conferencing, presence, CRM integration, etc. in one single platform to empower greater team collaboration.

• Ease of Use and Management

Do you have extra IT resources for the phone system management?

If you do not have dedicated IT resources, think of a phone system that is easy to setup, use and manage. Quality small business phone systems, either cloud-based or on-premises, will make configuration and maintenance simple with web-based intuitive administration panel. Ideally, with a top-rated phone system, you can make changes (e.g. adding extensions for new users) within point-and-click configuration in minutes and without relying on professional IT resources.

Look for these features in a phone system to ensure that the keepup requires minimal efforts:

✔ Web-based Control Panel (Online Portal)
✔ Event Notification (Instant Alert)
✔ IP Phone Auto Provisioning
✔ Remote Management or Managed Services

• Future Expansion

Can the phone system scale or upgrade to support changing business dynamics?

A phone system will slow you down if your communications technology cannot keep up with business demands, like adding users, the opening of new office locations, and potential 3rd-party business application integration. Consider how your business may grow in the coming year. If there is potential for rapid growth, you will need to consider how this will impact your purchase.

Consider the following features to stay ahead of competition:

✔ **System Scalability: Cloud vs. On-Premises**
Hosted VoIP solutions (Cloud PBX) are typically adaptable in scale to keep pace with your business growth while most premises-based system has limited maximum capacity. If you decide to go with an on-site PBX system, consider to purchase a larger appliance than is initially needed to accommodate your growth.

✔ **Potential Integration**
Regardless of the option you select, make sure it has the broadest possible integration. This will allow you to add or remove components as the need arises through software that ties together all on-site and cloud-based resources.

•Redundancy

Will minutes or hours of phone system downtime incurs huge loss to your business?

Foul weather can arise at any time, wreaking havoc on business communications systems that lack robust disaster recovery solutions. This is especially problematic for organizations like emergency response centers, which need to stay up and running at all times.

Identify the potential risks and make sure that your new phone system comes with disaster avoidance/recovery solution for fast failover during unexpected internet, server or power outrages.

Following are 4 common business phone system failover solutions you should consider:

✔ PBX Hot Standby

This solution is typically for on-premises PBX systems, where two identical PBX servers run simultaneously. The backup server would mirror the functions of the primary PBX system, and take over automatically and almost instantaneously if the primary system fails.

✔ Geographic Redundancy

For cloud phone system, look for a provider that has geographically dispersed data centers that provide failover in the case of a natural disaster.

✔ 4G LTE Failover

When fixed-line broadband is not available or internet outrage occurs, 4G LTE network and SIP trunk can provide businesses with an essential telephony and Internet continuity option.

✔ System Auto-backup & Restore:

Any server or power outrages would risk data loss. Make sure your phone system data (e.g. call logs and call recording files) can be backed up periodically and automatically.

•Cost and Investment

Does the new phone system budgeting make sense for your business?

If you're wondering how much a new phone system will cost your company, there are 3 components you should consider to get a basic hint: initial costs, total costs of ownership, and existing infrastructure integration.

✔ Initial Costs and Total Cost of Ownership

Hosted VoIP solution and On-premise Solution generally call for different payment models. Consider whether CapEx or OpEx is the right budgeting approach for you.

Phone System Type	Hosted PBX System	On-premises Phone System
Budgeting Approach	OpEx	CapEx
Characteristics	• Low upfront cost • Typically charged as a monthly fee per user	• Higher upfront costs • No, or only very little, recurring monthly feea monthly fee per user
Total Cost of Ownership	Mostly based on your years of system usage and capacity requirement.	Hardware + Implementation Costs

✔ **Existing Infrastructure Integration**

Can your existing infrastructure be incorporated to the new phone system so as to achieve the best cost-efficiency , all the while saving you from integration troubles? Make sure to consult with your potential providers and see if the following devices can be preserved to save costs if you have any:

✔ Existing PBX system
✔ Phone Sets (Analog phone & IP Phone)
✔ Cabling or any type of trunks
✔ Gateway(s)

• Implementation and Support

What will it take to get started with a new phone system?

Before you make your final pick, press your possible vendors on their support services and deployment-phase challenges. This will steer you clear about the onboarding process and after-sales service you can get.

✔ Is there a trial period or demo unit so you can sample the system without commitment?
✔ How long will deployment take or what kind of support can you expect during setup?
✔ What resources, training videos, and documentation are available to help you get onboard?
✔ Once you're up and running, who will take care of you?

A Comparison Table of Different Business Phone Systems

Phone System Type		Hosted VoIP (Cloud)	Traditional Landline
Deployment	On-site Hardware	Cloud-based	On-site Hardware
Features	Capable of modern VoIP features	Capable of modern VoIP features	Obsolescence leads to increasing incompatibility with modern features.
Costs	CapEx OR CapEx + OpEx; Higher upfront costs; Lower or no monthly rate; Call rates are lower or free.	OpEx; Lower upfront costs; Monthly subscription fees; Call rates are lower or free.	CapEx;Heavy upfront costs; Heavy license and maintenance contracts;International calls are expensive.
Scalability	Have maximum system capability. Some systems are easily scalable with telephony modules.	Simple to scale. One system easily accommodates adding locations.	Scaling requires additional hardware investment.
Mobility	Support accessibility with Internet connection.	Support accessibility with Internet connection.	You are tied to your desk with a landline
Maintenance	Low and easy maintenance.	Your provider takes care of your system update and maintenance.	Maintenance has to be done by a technician onsite.
Control & Customization	You have full control of every details.	You have limited accessibility to the server. But you have control over call routing, voicemail to email, IVR, etc.	You have full control but this might need the help of professional IT personnel.
Security & Redundancy	Security is in your hands. Greater personal control over your data.	Security and backups taken care by your vendors.	Secure and stable with landline connectivity.

4. Dig Deeper for Better Insight

This part outlines the common concerns you might have when choosing a business phone system, and steers you clear with expert insights in regards to answers and possible solutions.

Q:I've had a traditional landline system. Do I get disadvantages of keep using it?

Traditional landline systems are time-tested solutions and boast a high-level of reliability. But the problem is that new options are no longer built, which means that new technology is rarely being developed for landline systems. Whilst you can still have plenty of useful features such as call transferring, intercom, and call queuing, these add-ons require extra charge and can quickly escalate in costs. Besides, as traditional landline systems increasingly losing support, finding experts to service this type of systems will become more and more difficult.

Q:Can't my employees and I use our mobile phones for business purposes?

It is definitely possible if you're investing in a VoIP system for small business. Using a VoIP system that offers softphone application like Yeastar Linkus will allow you to turn your mobile devices into fully-featured office extension. You can reach your office phone functionality and remain productive anywhere.

Q:Can remote employees access a business phone system?

Cloud-based VoIP systems for small business give users the freedom to take and make business calls from anywhere. On-premises VoIP systems typically allow for remote extension registration and offer plenty of mobility features for users to remain productive remotely.

Q:I have multiple locations. Does it matter if I have an on-premises or a cloud-based system?

While both on-premises and cloud-based system support organization with multiple locations, Cloud-hosted systems make it simple by building an online centralized system that can be reached anywhere. It worth noting that some on-premises PBX systems also offer easy remote extension registration and multi-site solutions. For examples, Yeastar S-Series VoIP PBX's Multisite Interconnect feature allows business to interconnect several on-premises PBX servers within minutes without the need of port forwarding, breezing you through the provisioning process while allowing for a seamless multi-site communication experience.

Q: I want to integrate my phone system with some of my software applications, is that possible?

It is definitely possible if you're investing in a VoIP system for small business. Using a VoIP system that offers softphone application like Yeastar Linkus will allow you to turn your mobile devices into fully-featured office extension. You can reach your office phone functionality and remain productive anywhere.

Q:Can I transfer my existing phone numbers to a new phone system?

Yes. If you're switching from an analog phone system to a VoIP PBX system, you can still keep your traditional phone line with the help of VoIP gateway while enjoying the benefits of the modern VoIP technology. If you're switching your telecom service providers, from a traditional or VoIP service provider to another VoIP service, ask the provider for the Number Porting service.

Q:With cloud systems, is there only a monthly fee, or are there other costs I should be aware of?

There are some upfront costs with cloud-hosted phone systems. You most likely will pay for IP phones, which range from $50 to $600 each. In addition, some providers charge setup and training fees.

5. Evaluate Vendors

Questions to Ask Your Potential Suppliers

There are certain key questions to ask a potential provider, to make sure they have the right solution and right services for your company. Here's a quick summary of what you should be looking forand questioning.

Capability to look for	Description	Questions to ask your supplier
Features	Get an understanding of features available and align them with your business needs.	Do you offer basic features like call recording, conference calls, voicemail to email, etc? Do they cost extra? What UC features is included in your plan? How easy is it to manage and set them up? Do you have a trial period or demo unit before purchase?
Mobility	If you have certain amount of on-the-go workers, equip them with mobile app (softphone) for them to stay productive anywhere anytime.	Do you offer a mobile app (softphone spp)? Is it available on iOS, Android, Windows, or Mac? What are the full list of features available on the App? Does the mobile app cost extra?
Costs	Understand what you should pay for and be sure there is no hidden charge.	What are the full costs breakdown? Are there maintenance, licensing, and upgrade costs?
Uptime & Failover	Ensure that you have a backup plan in case of any system or server outrages.	What happens if there is a disruption in service? Do you have any backup options if there's an Internet outage? How many data centers you have (for a cloud-based solution)? How long does it typically take to get back up?
Deployment	Faster implementation means more time for business.	How long will deployment take and when is the go-live date? Any plug-and-play hardware or auto provisioning tools available?
Upgrade & Maintenance	Knowing what after-sales support you can get is vital.	Can the system be expanded to fit my growth and how? What resources are required to maintain/upgrade the system? What level of support services can I get? Is there any options?

6. Compare and Shortlist Your Options

This worksheet summarizes the basic information you need to collect to better understand your business needs, as an useful tool when you're creating your vendor shortlist.

1. Understand Your Current Situations

Your number of users and mobile workforce?

Your existing lines and potential trunk requirement?

Your current infrastructure that need to work with the new system?

You have sufficient IT resources in place?

2. What capability or features should your new phone system fill in?

Call Management features	☐ Call Routing	☐ Call Forwarding	☐ Call Parking
	☐ Attended Transfer	☐ Callback	☐ Speed Dial
	☐ IVR (Auto Attendant)	☐ Queue	☐ Ring Group
	☐ DND (Do not Disturb)	☐ Find Me/Follow Me	☐ DID & DOD
	☐ Music on Hold	☐ Custom Prompt	☐ Distinctive Ring Tone
	☐ Caller ID	☐ Blacklist/Whitelist	☐ Time Condition
Business Features	☐ Call Recording	☐ Call Monitoring	☐ LDAP
	☐ Voicemail	☐ Voicemail to Email	☐ SMS to Email/Email to SMS
	☐ Intercom	☐ Paging	☐ Phone Provisioning
Unified Communications	☐ Mobile App	☐ Conference	☐ Video Call
	☐ Instant Messaging	☐ Group Chat	☐ File Sharing
Solutions	☐ Mobility	☐ Remote Office	☐ Multi-site Solution
	☐ Failover/Redundancy	☐ SMS Service	☐ Managed IT Services
Integration	☐ Call Center	☐ CRM	☐ Hotel PMS
Others			

3. Mark Down Your Top Phone System Needs (features, painpoints, solutions, etc.)

1-	4-
2-	5-
3-	6-

4. List Your Potential Vendors

A-

B-

C-

5. Compare Vendors on Each Categories

Category	Vendor A	Vendor B	Vendor C
System Type			
Features			
Mobility			
Scalability			
Integration			
Uptime & Redundancy			
Deployment			
Upgrade & Maintenance			
Tech Support			
Pricing			
Problems			
Other Notes			

Talk to an Expert

We trust this Buyers Guide is useful in your journey to understand and evaluate business phone system. If you have more questions or wish to explore small business phone solution further, we're here to help. Get a free consultancy with our representatives at sales@yeastar.com.

Why Yeastar

Trusted for 13 years by 1000,000 customers worldwide, Yeastar is the leading provider of SME PBX System, including on-premises PBX Phone System and Cloud PBX Platform.

Designed to help small and medium-sized business make a giant leap in efficiency and cost-savings, Yeastar PBX System comes with robust Unified Communications capability and empowers modern workforce to communicate, collaborate, and connect from any location, on any device. The top-notch technology and the innovative design of Yeastar phone systems have set the pace for small business communication and helped thousands of companies elevate efficiency many years down the road.

For more information: www.yeastar.com

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