

Cloud-surfing pays dividends



By [Adam Simpson](#)

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In the never-ending search for competitive advantage, cloud-based services like a Hosted PBX business telephone system can offer business owners and managers new opportunities for cost savings and service improvements that can help strengthen their market position.

A Hosted PBX allows businesses of nearly any size to have a state-of-the-art telephone service with minimal or no investment in equipment. Much like web-based email, the technology is well established and well-known to the business community.

Freeing up working capital

With a Hosted PBX solution, the service provider "hosts" the equipment and manages the network, freeing your business from the need to purchase and maintain an on-premise PBX system. A Hosted PBX system also provides significant, long-term savings, with an impressive set of features and greatly simplified management and configuration.

It also makes it possible for employees to work from home, remote offices, cell phones or even overseas while still being connected to the same office telephone service. The technology allows for video conferencing, which makes remote collaboration more effective than ever. Thanks to the virtual nature of the service, companies looking to cut down on office and vehicle costs can easily de-centralize without customers ever hearing the difference. All employees are still connected to each other as if they were in the same physical office space.

Significant advantages

Traditional on-site PBX systems, despite their often prohibitive costs, cannot match the advanced feature set of a Hosted PBX solution. In addition to standard features such as auto-attendants with professional greetings, voicemail to email and North American long-distance calling, a Hosted PBX gives companies that use their phones intensively the ability to go deeper. With hunt groups, find-me/follow-me capability and time-based behaviors, it is highly flexible.

For call centers and contact centers, which handle high call volume, the advantages can be even greater. Advanced call queuing and skill-based routing help managers ensure the right agent always gets the call. Ongoing reporting and performance tracking is made vastly more efficient with detailed, granular reports that managers can export at any time. These reports include mission-critical metrics, such as number of calls answered and unanswered, average time to answer, average hold time and much more.

Through a user-friendly web interface, users with administrative access can easily modify nearly any aspect of the service. Modifying an on-site PBX, for comparison, is considerably more complex and typically requires a service visit from a technician.

Right ingredients

Make sure you have the right ingredients in place before you get on the cloud. Business owners considering a move to a Hosted PBX option needs to ensure they have the following to enable the transition:

- **Internet connection:** with ample bandwidth for all staff using the phones.
- **Network equipment:** At a minimum you'll need a business-grade router capable of serving multiple employees. An unmanaged switch can expand the number of available ports, if required. Most Hosted PBX providers sell or recommend appropriate network equipment.
- **Phones designed for Hosted PBX service:** Again, nearly all providers sell recommended models.
- **Power over Ethernet and battery backup:** Optional, but recommended for systems where constant phone connectivity is mission-critical.
- **Network/IT provider:** Optional. Although not required for smaller and simpler systems, or deployments on which the customer is technically capable, an IT professional can be a powerful resource in a larger build-out.

With these relatively simple requirements, SMEs can quickly start enjoying the benefits of a sophisticated telephone system without the need to make costly investments in telephone equipment.

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