

Ask the right questions when making the move from copper wire

By [Peter MCrystal](#)

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South Africa boasts some pretty impressive metrics when it comes to the adoption of cutting-edge ICT (Information, Communications and Telecoms) technology. From being a late starter with television in 1976, and then only having a paltry four million landlines by the transition to democracy, the country now surprises the world by occupying the number six position globally when it comes to use of the mobile web.



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The mobile internet aside, there are now also just over 25 million 'traditional' web connections in the country. With numbers like these, I was more than surprised to see Google search results returned advertising 56k analogue dial-up connections for sale in South Africa!

In the same way that almost 200,000 South Africans are still on dial-up for reasons ranging from familiarity to the fact that broadband still hasn't reached all four corners of the country, a great number of businesses are still preferring to be constrained by their copper wire PABXs. Even though the switchboard of yesteryear is vulnerable to copper cable theft, power surges and poor cost control, they haven't yet made the transition to the Voice over IP (Voice over Internet Protocol) switchboard of tomorrow.

However, if any of those businesses are reading this article, perhaps their late adoption of IP-based telephony is fortuitous as there are several very important considerations to be borne in mind if one doesn't want to end up with a state-of-the-art white elephant.

Due diligence and caution

The overriding message is that the decision to invest in VoIP should be made with the same due diligence and exercising the same caution as one would with any other important business decision. And VoIP is a significant investment, not because of its setup cost, but because of its indirect cost through the potential negative impact it can have on productivity if approached incorrectly.

VoIP can massively increase productivity through the many software features these systems offer while at the same time reducing costs on equipment, maintenance, lines, and staffing requirements. There is also an immediate impact on the bottom line through cost savings on outgoing calls. However, for all of the benefits, the history of VoIP in South Africa is a patchy one. Installers without the requisite expertise have put in place incorrect last-mile connectivity resulting in poor call quality and leaving clients disillusioned with the technology.

Ask for proof, expect quality



Stuart Miles via [freedigitalphotos](#)

Now that the technology has been with us for quite some time, there's no excuse for business decision-makers not to ask questions and ask for proof of a VoIP installers tracker record. It's important for business owners to ask a potential installer for proof-of-concept and to ask to see their proposed Service Level Agreement (SLA) upfront.

Another important question to ask installers is if they are deploying symmetrical (same speed up and down) links with a failover, to ensure peace of mind and maximum service uptime. Fibre is recommended as the connectivity option of choice when it comes to the last

mile of VoIP deployments.

Additionally, businesses should ensure they employ the services of an end-to-end, full service, VoIP provider to ensure quick fault resolution. This will avoid the common phenomenon of finger pointing amongst multiple service providers when things go wrong.

No matter whether a physical telephone handset solution is preferred over the virtual hosted PBX solution, the VoIP installer should be willing to properly train users of either solution to avoid situations where users blame the VoIP system when user errors are being made. Finally, this also underlines the importance of the installer providing tangible after-sales service in the form of a 24/7 call centre with well-educated service agents.

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