

VoIP comes of age - business-grade quality, scalability and functionality

Organisations that still doubt the suitability of Voice over IP for business must have missed the final act, in which VoIP grows up, gets the girl and drives off into the sunset in smoking hot yet reliable wheels.



Today, IP solutions can offer enterprise-grade reliability and crystal clear voice quality at lower cost than traditional analogue telephony, and businesses are increasingly taking advantage of VoIP's unmatched features and scalability without sacrificing quality.

Whereas the technology underlying traditional analogue telephony has not changed much since it was invented, IP-based voice has made aggressive functional and quality advances and overcome many of its past barriers and misconceptions:

- Quality enhancements - A critical development has been VoIP providers' increased use of private IP networks and VPN technologies. Most free or very low-cost VoIP services deliver voice via the public Internet, giving providers little control over the quality of bandwidth. As a result, quality issues abound, including garbled calls, delays in dialogue, latency and jitter. Private IP networks and VPN technologies, on the other hand, enable prioritisation of voice versus data traffic, ensuring reliability and a high-quality voice experience.

- Functional enhancements - Cloud-based PBXs offers several functional advantages over wired telephony and site-based PBXs. Voice packets can be traced from origination to destination, allowing **unprecedented trouble-shooting and monitoring**. A cloud configuration allows PBX providers to offer a fully-managed service with end-to-end monitoring - down to individual handsets!

Low cost of ownership - A fully-managed cloud-based solution further gives smaller businesses access to **high-end features, seamless upgrades and a lower cost of ownership**, with relatively little capital outlay.

Businesses with a changing work force, multiple locations or a steady stream of new locations can use cloud-based PBX services to good effect to **provision new sites or users, or make changes with the minimum of effort and cost**.

For the more established business with multiple branches, integrating phone systems across the locations in a cloud setup reduces provider relationships to **one vendor**, offers an end-to-end managed service and **eliminates inter-branch call costs**.

Calls between IP-connected office locations are simplified with **extension dialling**, setting the cloud PBX apart from wired telephony. **Find me/follow me, remote office, simultaneous ring, and unified messaging** are other essential tools enabled by cloud PBXs.

As cloud PBX's continue to evolve, their future is as the centre point of **unified communications** (integrated communication services such as instant messaging, telephony, videoconferencing, call control and messaging).

How to buy quality

Different VoIP providers offer different services, integration and technologies. This can be confusing, but the following questions will help you determine if a particular offering is a fit for your specific needs and requirements as concerns quality and reliability:

- Based on our needs, do we require a vendor with a private IP network, or is a best-effort service delivered over the public Internet sufficient?
- Do we need to continue using our current key system or PBX, or do we want a fully-hosted solution where the provider is responsible for PBX equipment, maintenance and upgrades?
- What are my long-term communications needs that I should consider before making a decision on which provider to use?
- Can the service provider remote-manage my on-site equipment (phones and routers) easily and without service interruptions?

Choose benefits carefully

VoIP, whether cloud-based or on-site, is a powerful tool in your business arsenal, providing a scalable, flexible business communications option with advanced features and integration options. This has impressive business benefits over a traditional phone system - without sacrificing quality.

The trick is to find a provider that offers the best fit with your particular business needs.

For more information go to www.euphoria.co.za.

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