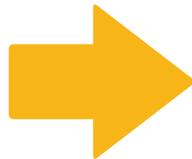# SWITCHING TO
CLOUD COMMUNICATION

GRYPHON
CONSULTING

(301) 789-1029
nextiva@gryphon-consulting.com
www.gryphon-consulting.com

6 Key Considerations

Switching to Cloud Communications: 6 Key Considerations

There are a lot of possible reasons why you may be looking to switch to a new phone system. Your old one might cost too much or be too troublesome to operate and maintain. You might not have enough flexibility. Your system may not be reliable enough. Or, it might not provide you with the features and capabilities that you need in today's competitive business climate.

We know that the thought of switching phone providers can be intimidating. There is an enormous number of factors to consider before taking the leap to cloud communications, including cost, features, and technical complexity. The impact of each factor varies, depending on what kind of system you're moving from. In short, when it comes to switching phone systems, nothing is simple or straightforward.

Focusing too early on which provider and kind of system you're going to change to can be counterproductive. A more useful approach is to clarify first just what you want to get out of the switch. Once that's done, you can start comparing specific systems. This guide offers some points to consider to help you reach a promising end result.

6 Key Considerations

1. Why You Want to Change

A good way to start is by clarifying why you want to change your business phone system. There is a lot of conventional wisdom about the benefits of a hosted, cloud-based phone system. The result is a set of predictable reasons for switching to the cloud. But some of the reasons may not be particularly relevant or even valid in your case. So it's necessary to examine each to see whether it applies to you.

For example, the most common rationale for switching from traditional to cloud-based systems is cost savings. One big source of savings is the cost of internal calls between a company's branches. With a cloud connection, your calls will travel for free over your corporate IP network rather than at long distance rates over the public switched telephone network (PSTN). This can cut your phone bill by 50% or more. It is particularly useful if you have a lot of branches, and even more so if a lot of them are overseas.

But the savings might not be as big as you expect. If most of your employees work in one or two locations, your inter-branch phone bills may be relatively small. Another possible source of savings is that some cloud systems include somewhat cheaper outbound calling. Whether or not these save you money depends on the price you're paying currently. In fact, traditional carriers are offering increasingly competitive packages in order to keep their business customers.

It's more than just cost though. These days, in fact, the main reason businesses change from a traditional system to a cloud-based system is for the extensive suite of features. Capabilities and functions once available only with large, expensive corporate phone systems are cheap with a cloud provider. Now all companies can take advantage of advanced calling features. This is the other side of the cost coin: even if you don't pay any less for a cloud system than for a traditional system, you get a lot more for your money.

Moving from any premises system to a hosted cloud system doesn't have to be expensive. You don't have to buy, operate, or maintain expensive equipment in your building. But, if you've already fully paid for your existing equipment, changing to something else may cost you more. Nextiva's system is compatible with most companies' existing equipment, allowing you to keep your current devices. This can save a significant expense, depending on the number of your employees.

6 Key Considerations

2. Flexibility vs. Control

Any cloud-based system is more flexible than a traditional phone system. Administrators and users alike can interact with the system through web browsers or client software, such as the Nextiva Toolbar. This lets administrators, for example, change user permissions and other settings through graphical interfaces. And, it lets users similarly change their personal settings, click to make calls, and transfer calls by simply dragging and dropping.

With traditional systems, administrators and users have limited options. Administrative changes often involve a command-line interface, while dialing is limited to a phone's keypad. In short, they lack the kind of convenience and ease of use that users of modern electronic devices have come to expect.

Hosted cloud systems are more flexible yet. Managers can add and drop users almost without limit, and can change features and permissions for individual users almost instantly. There is no need to upgrade premises hardware, and no worry about paying for more capacity than you need. In short, you can have a phone system that fits your exact needs.

3. Incremental Change or All at Once

Buying a new phone system can be expensive. If you're opening a new office or facility, of course, you don't have any choice. All you have to do is choose the best system for the money. If you already have a system in place, it becomes more complicated. You may not have written down or fully paid for the old one. And if you have, you might not be ready to purchase a new one.

For some companies, it might seem to make sense to move to a new system bit by bit. The financial commitment would be far smaller – or at least, far less immediate. You would be able to give fancy new features only to those who really need them, and keep everyone else on basic voice service. It might seem like the best of both worlds.

The technical challenges of moving to a premises-based cloud system can be daunting, which is why many companies choose a hosted provider like Nextiva. Instead of requiring an entire new system, you will only have to worry about porting. You can transition some of your existing numbers into the new system, while keeping some on your old system. You would then have two methods of delivering calls to and from the PSTN. You will end up dealing with two entirely different service providers during this time, which could certainly be a recipe for frustration.

6 Key Considerations

4. Your Infrastructure

Cloud-based telephony runs over your IP infrastructure. Thus, you will have to understand how any phone traffic will affect your network's performance. You'll also have to make sure your phone service will work properly on your network. Nextiva offers a VoIP Readiness Assessment for customers to test their network strength before they make the switch.

With a hosted cloud system like Nextiva, your incoming and outgoing calls will all be traveling over your broadband Internet connection, or perhaps over a dedicated IP connection. This connection will likely have considerably less bandwidth than your internal network. Thus, you will have to ensure it can support the level of calls you anticipate adding. Overloading your connection will be bad for both voice calling and your existing applications.

It can be tricky to calculate the amount of traffic involved, however. Calls between internal extensions may go out to the hosted IP PBX and back to the neighboring desk via your broadband link. This means internal calls can consume two calls' worth of Internet bandwidth.

More important, voice traffic is highly intolerant of delays or inconsistencies in the delivery of IP packets. Thus, you need to ensure that the connection involved can ensure the quality of service (QoS) that voice calls require. For hosted VoIP, the key is a router with built-in QoS capability. Keep in mind, not all QoS routers are the same. You'll need to make sure yours is certified to work with you provider's network, or get one that is.

5. Emergencies and Disasters

The traditional telephone network is bulletproof. It delivers calls over dedicated copper wires. It reliably routes emergency calls to the appropriate local agency. It also works even when the power is out, because it has its own power supply. Cloud-based phone systems, by contrast, work in a variety of ways. With hosted service, calls may come in over the public Internet or over managed or private IP connections.

This raises a complex set of issues. In general, it is up to your service provider to ensure connectivity to emergency services. But the specific methods will vary according to the specifics of your service. Nextiva offers failover redundancy in case of disasters to eliminate any potential loss of service. Without this, you may end up keeping a conventional phone line or two. This will let you communicate as necessary not only in the case of local emergencies, but also in broader disasters.

6 Key Considerations

Your ability to make calls on a traditional phone connection during disasters that knock out electrical power will vary according to multiple factors. If your calls come in over the Internet or private IP connections, they rely on the power of your building. If that goes out, it's good to have battery backup. But there is no guarantee that the provider of your IP connection will have power on its end. Nextiva has multiple data centers in several locations to combat this risk and maintain the most seamless connection possible.

When the disaster turns out to be lengthy and your hosted cloud phone provider does not have failover redundancy in place, the tables turn. Because cloud-based systems are not tied to a specific piece of physical equipment, it is not tied to a physical location. Thus if, for some reason, you can't work from your own building, you can use your cloud system elsewhere as long as you have an Internet connection. This lets you take advantage of all the features and functions of your office system even if you're no longer in your office. In such cases, cloud phone systems have a big edge over traditional voice service.

6. Overall Cost
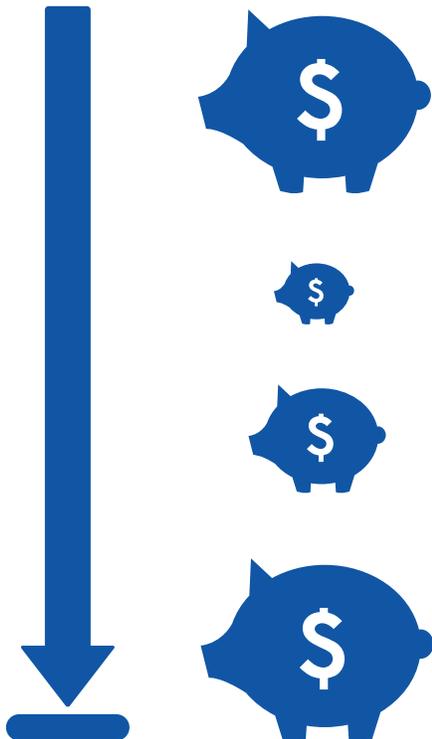
By now, it's clear that a myriad of factors contribute to the overall cost of cloud based phone systems. If you're planning to switch, you need to consider all of these factors. Here is a summary of key points to keep in mind, including a few that were not covered in the previous sections:

- Hosted cloud service requires less upfront spending than premises-based cloud systems or traditional systems.

- Moving to a hosted cloud system can require you to buy new softphones if your current ones are not compatible. It is likely that you can keep your existing phones and use them with analog adapters.

- Hosted cloud phone providers have lots of different ways to charge for service. Depending on your specific circumstances, each would have a different impact on your overall costs. Nextiva's service requires no startup fees and is charged on a monthly basis.