CIO Dynamics

Top 10 words you need to know about hosted phone systems

You don't have to be an expert to set up a hosted phone system. It can be as simple as clicking a mouse and plugging in your phone.

But—hosted phone technology CAN seem daunting. Especially if you've only ever dealt with traditional phone systems.

So here are ten terms to help you better understand the world of hosted phone systems.

- **Hosted phone system.** Let's start with the obvious one. This is a service for which the calling platform and features are hosted at the service provider location—as opposed to in a server that resides in a closet at your office. With a hosted system, your employees connect to the system via "IP deskphones" (see below) that plug into the Internet. They can make calls to any traditional telephone. The benefit of a hosted system is that it's simple to setup and manage because you don't have to worry about equipment. It also saves you a lot of up-front money.

- **IP deskphone.** This is a phone that makes and receives telephone calls over an "IP" network, such as the Internet. That's instead of making calls over the traditional public switched telephone network (PSTN).

- **Voice over IP (VoIP).** This is a methodology and group of technologies for the delivery of voice communications and multimedia sessions over Internet Protocol (IP) networks. Which is a complicated way of saying that your voice goes over the Internet, instead of over the phone lines.

- **Mobile softphone.** This is an app that lets a smartphone make and receive calls over the business network, using the same phone number as your IP deskphone.

- **Flat, per-user monthly pricing.** This is how most hosted phone systems are priced: with a single per user, per month rate that covers all aspects of the hosted phone service. (Excluding international calls and some other fees, of course.)

- **Web-based management tool.** You manage your hosted system by logging in to an online control panel. Administrators can manage moves, adds and changes with just a few clicks. They can control all settings, including auto attendant menus, hunt group setup, and more. They can also administer multiple offices and remote users from anywhere.

- **Automated attendant.** This service performs telephone console attendant functions such as answering a call, transferring callers to specific user stations, directing callers to voicemail, etc… all without the assistance of a live attendant

- **Hunt groups.** This service rings multiple people at once to ensure no call goes unanswered. The system sequentially searches through the hunt group list to find an inactive line, and will then ring that line.

- **Follow Me.** This feature automatically forwards calls to mobile phones and other numbers, or rings multiple numbers at the same time.

- **Voicemail-to-email and fax-to-email.** This feature ensures messages get through faster. Users can save, delete and forward voicemail messages and faxes just like with any email.