

How Cloud-Based Business Phone Services (Hosted PBX) Can Save Money And Increase Sales

1. What Is A Cloud-Based PBX (Phone System)?

A PBX (private branch exchange) is a dedicated phone system that helps answer and route calls that come into your company. A Cloud-Based business phone service, otherwise known as Cloud-Based PBX, provides the functionality found in traditional corporate phone systems without the need to purchase the actual phone system servers. The phone system is “hosted” by a service provider, and since it is controlled by Internet based services, we call it Cloud-Based. This means that the only phone equipment a company would need to have is the telephones themselves. The service provider can answer the calls in any manner that a company would require, and can route calls anywhere in the world. The benefits include flexibility, cost savings, improved communication with both current and prospective customers/clients, and – bottom line – increased revenues. As you read on through this document, you will fully understand the leverage and other advantages that a Cloud-Based PBX business telephony system can provide to your business.

2. How Can A Cloud-Based Business Phone Service Save Me Money On Equipment And Facilities?

Most important: there is no equipment to purchase other than telephones (which a company may already have). This can mean thousands of dollars saved upon initial purchase of the Cloud-Based system. In addition, moving, upgrades and maintenance are all free with Cloud- Based providers. With a traditional phone system you can pay as much for monthly maintenance as you

do for the total service fees for a Cloud-Based provider. Other major cost savings include facilities and IT expenses. With a phone system that is Cloud- Based on a company's premises (a.k.a "premises-based ____"), IT staff and an appropriate facility (i.e., physical infrastructure) for operations of the equipment are required. This includes electrical power, air-conditioning and security and redundant fail-safe systems for each of these critical (and: costly) components. With the Cloud-Based option, there is no need for IT staff or special facilities.

3. How Can I "Fire My Phone Company"?

Some cloud-based providers can supply you with telephones that can plug directly into your broadband internet connection. These are commonly known as "VoIP phones", or simply "internet phones". This means that you can get inbound and outbound calls to your phones without needing to use your telephone company or cable provider's services. By eliminating these service providers, your Cloud-Based phone system can provide you with significant cost savings as compared to what you're currently paying for your business telephone service.

4. How Can A Cloud-Based Business Phone System Help Me Grow My Business?

When comparing a true Cloud-Based business phone service to a cable company or phone company service, the real difference can be *saving customers*. Here are the major ways that customers can be saved:

A. Connecting To You When You Are Out Of The Office

Most Cloud-Based phone systems can route calls to you anywhere in the world. So, when a customer calls and needs to get to a company representative, they can do so on a single phone

call. This enables mobility without the need to publish alternative phone numbers. How many customers will bother to call the “separate cell phone number” for a sales call?

B. Call Recording Can Save Your Customers and Grow Your Business.

Not many companies can afford to lose business. But, that is exactly what happens when calls are handled poorly. Call recording can enable a business to be 100% sure that all sales and service calls are handled the way they need to be, every single time. This can save lost customers, lost up-sell opportunities, and lost business. With the right Cloud-Based service provider, call recordings can be sent directly to your email for long-term storage, or they can be quickly and easily played online. WHY?

C. Multi-Location Businesses Can Avoid Losing Sales

If your company has more than one location, you want to be able to handle each and every call that comes in, regardless of which location it may have been intended for. With Cloud-Based systems, it is easy to transfer calls from one location to another, and it is a seamless process for a customer to call in and have their calls picked up by a different location than the one they dialed. This can save your company sales, by making absolutely certain that every time a customer calls he or she is connected to the appropriate people.

5. Keeping Your Phone Running At All Times.

One major advantage of a Cloud-Based phone service is the ability to host your telephone service in a carrier-grade facility that can remain up and running even in a disaster. There are power, air-conditioning and security benefits that most small and mid-sized businesses, and even some large business, just do not have. There is normally redundancy for all critical systems, and active maintenance and monitoring performed on the service provider's equipment. These redundancy, maintenance, and monitoring procedures (and the infrastructure required to support

them) are cost-prohibitive for most companies. If your premises-based phone system goes down, you will lose ALL calls for hours or even days until the system is repaired.

6. What about Single-Person and Work-At-Home Businesses?

A cloud-based phone service is perfect for the single-person “solopreneur” and work-from-home business entrepreneur. It allows you to take calls in a highly efficient manner, projecting an image of professional quality service while saving your business money. The right Cloud-Based service provider can offer just as much benefit to a single employee business as they can to a large multi-location business.

7. What Is The Difference Between a Cloud-Based PBX and a Cloud-Based VoIP PBX?

A cloud-based PBX (also known as a “Virtual PBX”) is able to handle your calls in the most professional manner by routing them to any standard land-line or mobile telephone. A cloud-based PBX system is also able to route your calls to a VoIP provider, such as Skype. It cannot, however, save you money on your phone bills, unless your Cloud-Based PBX provider can also provide the actual dial-tone for inbound and outbound calling.

This is where the Cloud-Based VoIP PBX comes in. With this service, the provider will supply you with telephones that plug directly into the internet. They may also be able to provide adapters, which allow you to plug a standard telephone into the internet, or even a phone that runs directly on your computer. These phones, known as VoIP phones, can be taken anywhere there is a broadband connection. So, for example, if you are traveling to Europe, you can take your telephone with you and use it from an overseas location without incurring additional costs.

The primary difference is that you can eliminate your telephone company's bills, and can make inbound and outbound calls without limits. In addition, most Cloud-Based PBX providers will limit the amount of incoming calling time each month, charging a per-minute fee for any usage that exceeds the plan's predetermined limit. While this may work well for some companies, the option of Cloud-Based IP PBX service allows for unlimited calls to VoIP phones, while still providing the flexibility of routing calls to other phones such as mobile or standard land-line phones. There are many examples of companies that would not require VoIP phones, especially those who rely completely on mobile phones. This is why some service providers offer both styles of service plans. (CONFUSING?)

8. What Are The Differences Between Premises-Based IP PBX vs. Cloud-Based IP PBX Systems?

In the proceeding topic, we mentioned Cloud-Based IP PBX. Another option is a Premises-Based IP PBX phone system that you run at your own location. Using this system, calls are still routed to your IP PBX using your company's broadband internet connection. With this option, you would still be able to eliminate your traditional telecommunications provider, and you may still have many or all of the features found in a Cloud-Based IP PBX. You will still have to obtain the actual inbound phone numbers and outbound calling capabilities from a VoIP telecommunications provider, so there are still monthly fees and, often, per-minute fees for the outbound calling capabilities as well.

The major difference between the premises-based system and the Cloud-Based system is the requirement to purchase, host, and maintain the actual phone server(s) at your premises. This

option is best suited for companies with a full-time IT staff and appropriate physical facilities for hosting the server. However, it should also be considered that good Cloud-Based providers will constantly be adding and improving features. This will likely be more difficult for a premises-based server, unless your company has the programming staff to integrate updates and upgrades on their own. Remember, with a Cloud-Based service, you only have to provide the phones; the Cloud-Based provider handles the rest.

9. How Are Calls Answered By The Cloud-Based Provider?

The short answer is: any way you wish! You may have all of your calls answered by an auto-attendant (“Thank you for calling Acme Company. If you know your party’s extension, please dial it now. For sales press 2; for a company directory press 9; etc.”). You may also elect to have calls routed to an operator extension, and then routed back to an auto-attendant if the operator is not available to pick up the call. If it is after hours or a holiday, the calls can be answered with special greetings, advising the callers about the company’s hours of operations, or emergency calling procedures. For a single-person company, you may elect to have the caller connected directly to you, without the need to enter any extensions, or speak to a receptionist. Many Cloud-Based service providers can customize the call answering experience, making certain that your calls are answered exactly the way you want them to be.

10. How Are Calls Routed To Me Through Follow-Me Calling?

The basic routing capabilities of a Cloud-Based phone service are often handled by what is known as “Follow-me” or sometimes “Find-me” services. What this means is that, instead of your incoming calls going only to a single phone (i.e., the phone your desk), a caller can be

routed to a list of different numbers, located anywhere. This list is time and day based, so that your incoming calls “find” you based on your location and your schedule. The service can either call each number sequentially, or it can call all of them at the same time. Most good service providers include option for you to use call screening (displaying the name of the caller before you decide to accept it), no call screening (connecting the caller directly), and many other flexible options. If you have a VoIP (Internet) phone through your service provider, your calls can be routed to that phone, but they can also be routed to other land-lines or mobile phones. The flexibility is without limits.

11. What If My Local Internet Service Goes Down?

If you are using internet phones, and your local internet service goes down, you may still be able to receive calls coming into your business. This is accomplished by using Follow-me or Find-me calling features to assure that your inbound calls may be routed to another land-line or to a cell phone automatically.

12. Can I Route Calls to A Call Center Or A Specific Department?

Let’s say you need to have calls sent to a group of people rather than one person (“press 2 for the sales department”). For these situations, we would use something known as an ACD Queue. This means that the caller can wait on hold until a representative picks up the call, or the caller decides to go to voicemail. This works by calling several different numbers either sequentially or all at the same time. Other options, such as rotational call lists, may also be available.

13. How Is Voicemail Handled?

Most Cloud-Based service providers will provide an easy online interface for you to listen to voicemail messages, and will also allow you to select email addresses to which a digital recording of voicemail messages will be sent. So, in addition to the old-fashioned method of calling in to listen to your messages, you can simply click on a link on your email and the audio recording will play on your computer's speakers. You may also be able to receive the messages via SMS notifications, or play them directly on a smartphone such as a Blackberry, Android, or iPhone.

14. Can I Send and Receive Faxes Through a Cloud-Based PBX System?

Incoming faxes are generally handled by Cloud-Based service providers through a fax to email method. When you receive a fax, it will be converted into a computer readable document (such as a PDF), so that you can view them using an online interface, or have them sent to your email as an attachment. Some providers also offer outbound faxing capabilities. This is most often accomplished by installing the fax capabilities as if it were a printer. So, if you have a document open, you simply press print, and then select the fax option. In essence, instead of printing on a local printer, you're printing the document on the recipient's fax machine. It is as simple as that!

15. How Easy Is It To Set Up a Cloud-Based PBX System?

This is where the Cloud-Based services can really be perfect for companies that are not made up entirely of technical folks. The setup uses an online interface and is quite simple. You simply type in the numbers you want to use for follow-me call routing, and set up a couple of email addresses. You then call into your phone number and record voicemail greetings. With many

Cloud-Based providers, you can just click on a button in the online interface and load up greetings you have professionally recorded by the service provider, or a provider of your choosing. You may also load custom music-on-hold for your callers to hear while they wait for you to pick up the calls. Overall, the process is quick and easy, and any quality Cloud-Based PBX provider will either guide you through the process or visit your location and do it for you.

16. How Much Does Cloud-Based PBX Cost?

Most service providers charge a fixed fee on a monthly basis, and sometimes will also charge for the time used on inbound or outbound calls. Typically, a Cloud-Based PBX service without VoIP phones can start at about \$14.95 per month, with limited time included in plan. Products that do include VoIP telephones (business VoIP) generally cost between \$25.00 and \$49.00 per month per user.

17. Will A Long-Term Contract Be Required?

Unlike most traditional telecom carriers and cable companies, Cloud-Based PBX service providers typically work on a month-to-month basis, and offer a 30-day money back guarantee.

18. What If I Have A Local Or Toll-Free Number And Want To Keep It?

This can be done using a process called “Porting” for local numbers, or “Resport” for toll-free numbers. Most service providers will allow you to keep your number, and will move it to their systems. The process of moving these numbers can take between one to four weeks. In order to avoid any down-time, the service provider will normally issue a temporary number, so that you

can get your service set up and ready to go before your number is moved to the service provider's platform. This is usually a seamless transition.

19. How Do I Choose A Cloud-Based PBX Provider?

Most service providers offer a robust list of features, redundant facilities, and pricing that will usually beat the traditional options. However, there are differences between providers that may be important to you:

- Does the provider have a long, stable track record of providing reliable service to paying customers?
- Does the provider offer VoIP telephones service, with unlimited inbound and outbound calling?
- Does the provider use their own proprietary software, or are they reselling another company's platform? This can be important when you need flexibility in features, integration, and other customized services.
- Will you be locked into a long-term contract?
- Do they offer a money-back guarantee?
- Do they offer excellent customer service? Will customer service personnel be available when you need them?
- Could the provider potentially hold your phone number hostage, and make it difficult or impossible to get it back if you cancel service?

20. Conclusion

In the current economic climate, it is critical that any communications solution both improve the way that your company communicates AND save you money. These are the specific advantages of a modern Cloud-Based PBX telephone system.