



WHITE PAPER

SMB Business Telephone Systems— Options to Ensure Your Organization is Future Ready



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Here is a quick fact you may not know. The U.S. Census estimates that of the roughly 8 million employer firms in the U.S. in 2008, roughly 6 million employed 1-99 employees, with almost 1.4 million with 10-99 employees. Looked at from the perspective of business phone systems, as opposed to lines in use, this means the majority of systems are owned by small to medium (SMB) businesses. What you also may not be aware of is that the installed base of business phone systems has never been older than right now.

What this says is that many if not most SMBs are using phone systems that are incapable of leveraging such things as the Internet, integration with mobile devices, access to Unified Communications (UC) capabilities, and reduced costs from things like SIP trunking and easier adds, moves and changes. In short, your antiquated communications system is not optimized for your future success.

The challenge SMBs face, particularly at a time of financial as well as competitive challenges, is determining the best path forward. How does one get the features and functionality required to be successful in a world that operates in real-time, everywhere, all the time and where the competition is only a click away, yet do so in a manner that does not break the budget and allows for a smooth migration to whatever the future holds?

This paper aims to help SMBs make smart decisions about their communications needs. It will discuss:

- The need for migration and the availability of options
- Creating a checklist for consideration and evaluation of products and vendors
- Purchasing options

The need for migration and the availability of options

Let's face it! You do not need an education about how fast the technology world is changing every aspect of work. This includes from where it is done, by whom, and what needs to be involved in terms of people, technology and processes. Added pressure comes from the fact that real-time has become the only time. Standing pat technologically is no longer an option.

You probably own a smartphone and maybe even a tablet. In addition, your younger employees as well as yourself have expectations about using multiple communications channels—IM, chat, mobile apps, unified communications (UC), presence, location, voice over IP (VoIP) social media, the cloud, and a host of collaboration tools—on personal devices and in ways that are seamlessly and securely integrated into your work environment. Many interpret the bring your own device (BYOD) to work phenomena as replacing the need for phone systems. Actually, the reverse is true.

BYOD necessitates rethinking what your phone system is and how it can be made pivotal as part of the “Infostructure” (information and communications hardware, software and services) that enables business process optimization and ultimately your success. It is not necessarily about replacement but rather augmentation and enhancement.



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This is true equally if you are part of the fortunate few who are jumping from having 1-6 employees and have completely maxed out the lines of your existing consumer-grade system regardless of its age, or if you just wish to be state-of-the-art and following best practices. You need to migrate to the future, but in the context of what you need now and can afford in terms of a scalable and extensible solution, you need a system that will continue to grow with your needs over time and support that growth as your customer and partner relationships change. You need a solution that can mitigate the costs of: adds, moves and changes, maintenance, electricity, communications network services, and the need for full-time IT professionals. It should also be a solution that lets you leverage innovations from the service providers as well, such as SIP trunking, which can cut monthly phone line costs versus older technologies such as T1 lines by a substantial amount. You need a system that supports this technology even if you are not implementing it tomorrow.

The good news is that change can and should be your friend. Better news is you have options. Your challenge is to get educated on the questions you need to answer in order to find a solution and partners you can trust to get precisely the new capabilities that meet your unique needs.

Preparation is key

Knowing that you need to change with the times, the adage “know before you go” is applicable. You need to be prepared to ask the right questions. Don’t be afraid. The following should not take long. It requires only your ability to ask good questions and document the answers. The way to get started is:

Do an inventory of what you have: This means not just number of lines used, phones and their features and phone types, but finding out from the users how they use the system, the phones and for what purposes.

Know what things cost: This should include fixed and variable costs. Try and figure out an expected return on investment (ROI) and even a projected total cost of ownership (TCO). And don’t forget to include leased lines etc. in the equation.

Learn about all of the features available on new phone systems: Make sure you look at all of the pain points with your current capabilities and understand how new capabilities will address them and can improve business efficiency and effectiveness.

Determine a “must have” set of capabilities: These are ones that can empower all of your employees and meet the needs of specific mission critical jobs. Whatever you will evaluate should be multi-channel, and future ready from headcount, feature, scalability, security and risk mitigation/cost perspectives.

Make a “wish list”: You don’t know unless you ask, “can your solution...?” and “how much would that cost?” You may be pleasantly surprised.

Look for case studies and customer references: You will need to know not just about reputations but also such things as warranties, and some details about services and support such as the



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number of certified techs who provide support and how long it takes for the trouble resolution services. This will facilitate creating a short list of vendors to engage.

At the end of the day your preparations should give a view on: your budget and a perception of the overall value you currently have, wish to receive and are willing to pay for and in what time frames; a list of questions about how various features and functionality not only improve operations but mitigate risks and costs; expectations about the type of vendor support and accountability you require; and, those check lists of must haves (see below) you would like and how they can fit your budget.

Checklist: attributes for a system that will growth with you

You are now ready to start a conversation with vendors about the attributes in a solution you must have or want. It must be noted that no one size solution fits all. Below are five key questions to ask about what any solution should offer if you wish to be state-of-the-art:

1. Will it allow you to migrate at your own pace, which includes support for analog, digital and IP endpoints?
2. Is mobility, in building and cellular, supported?
3. Is there support for SIP trunking connectivity? You may not need it now but you absolutely will. In fact, it has been estimated that SMBs can save up to 70 percent over the cost of traditional telecommunications services so this is worth investigating.
4. Is there seamless and robust support for popular Unified Communications (UC) and various collaboration and business process automation applications?
5. Does the system support call center solutions? You may not have a full-blown call center but having the ability to support multi-channel interactions with your customers must be a priority.

Plus, there are other technology questions you need to have answered. These include whether a premises-based or cloud-based one is right for you. It also includes working with potential vendors on thinking through what phones to keep or replace, why and when. And, it means evaluating technology deliverables in the context of promised ROI and TCO and accountability criteria.

Panasonic is a leading provider of communications solutions for SMBs. It is instructive to look at the feature set of their KX-TDE100 as an example of what you should consider in a new or replacement system. I would argue these are table stakes.



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Must Haves	Panasonic TDE100	
Analog, digital and IP endpoint support	Max Analog Proprietary Extensions	24
	Max Single Line Telephones	96
	Max Digital Proprietary extensions	128
	Max SIP extensions	128
Mobility integration	Multi-Cell Wireless Compatible	Yes
	Maximum Cell Stations (Antennas)	32
	Maximum Portable Handsets	128
SIP trunking	Max CO Lines	128
	Max Analog CO's	96
	Max VoIP (H.323) trunks	32
	Max VoIP (SIP) trunks	64
UC and apps integration	Open Source Operating System (OS) and certified interoperability with popular platforms and apps for SIP implementations	
Call center feature capabilities	IVR, Automated Attendant, Voice Mail, an integrated application for call grouping and routing, ensures the right person takes every call.	

The importance of all of the five elements cannot be over-emphasized. It starts with the realization that the world is rapidly going all Internet Protocol (IP). You need a system that leverages what IP connectivity delivers in terms of access to UC and collaboration capabilities and the reduced costs from SIP trunking. It also should bridge the gap between the phones, features and services are optimized for and enjoy. You do not want to fix something that is not broken, but rather make it work better if possible.



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What is important in looking at the table is that it goes to the point about bridging the old and the new. All phone types are supported making formulation of a migration strategy easy. There is state-of-the-art feature functionality in support of all employees as well as executives and system administrators. And, integration with the Internet (for taking advantage of VoIP and SIP trunking to reduce costs), wireless integration, and full support of the features you have always liked and rely on such as voicemail, speed dialing, and critical call answering and routing capabilities, etc.

What is also important is that as an SMB executive, even if you are not technologically proficient, you now have a great place to start in terms of knowing what your and your team should be asking.

Avoiding sticker shock, finding your comfort zone

Finally, it is important to understand that the options you have relate not only to technology choices, but also to all of the vehicles available to you to get the solutions you need that can fit your unique financial circumstances. It is more than likely that a great solution is going to have outstanding ROI and TCO, and may take only a few years to literally pay for itself. However, in the SMB market, because of the fluidity of SMBs in terms of their growth characteristics and concomitant frequent changes in office locations and the number and locations of remote employees, leasing systems and phones rather than purchase is common.

This is a main attraction of dealing with vendors and their ecosystems that along with great technical solutions and support can offer a lease or lease/purchase plan that fits your needs. It is also a big attraction for looking at the cloud and hosted solutions with an eye toward having the flexibility of adopting as your circumstances change, and technology evolves.

The goal must always be to find the best solution that from a technology perspective optimizes your business operations now and provides a sensible and adaptable path forward. It is also about staying in your comfort zone financially without sacrificing on the price and performance you need. As Panasonic likes to say about the value their solutions for SMBs can deliver, they are leaders in customizable solutions for the SMB market and ready for whatever the future may bring.

Customization, reliability, technology and financial flexibility, support and value. That is a checklist that should serve you well as you consider how you wish to leverage communications for your competitive advantage.



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Additional Resources

Interested in a different type of solution, such as open-source or hosted? For more information about SIP for SMBs including hosted and open source solutions, how to get started and the value it delivers, check out:

► [SIP \(Session Initiation Protocol\) for Beginners: What is it, What it can do for You](#)

► [SIP Solutions, Determining What is Right for You](#)

Interested in incorporating video conferencing? For insights on how to incorporate fully-featured high definition and fidelity video and multi-functional real-time video and collaboration into your organization, check out the following whitepapers:

► [Why HD Video Conferencing for SMBs and Why Now](#)

► [Practical Considerations of Implementing HD VC](#)



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