



Getting a New Phone System?

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The process of determining the best phone system for your organization can be a time consuming exercise, but it requires your due diligence. If you choose the wrong system, it can result in not only a significant loss of money, but have negative long term consequences in terms of business operations if you're stuck with a system that doesn't meet your business needs.

The person selling you the phone system should be accountable for making you comfortable with your purchase. They should answer every question you have and provide business terms that makes you comfortable. Here are 8 questions you should ask a phone system vendor before you sign the agreement.

Question 1: Due Diligence

Why is your phone system better than the competition's?

Be sure to ask the sales agent why their system is better or more suitable for your needs than the competition. You may already be aware of certain differences and similarities so determine if they can highlight others. They probably have more expertise in this area than you and should be able to educate you on what you don't know.

Question 2: Features

Does this phone system have (specific features) and is there an extra cost associated with getting those feature?

You'll need to know the type of features you want in your phone system before you begin talking to a vendor. They may suggest additional valuable features that you hadn't considered. Once you identify all the key features, determine if there are any extra associated costs. Vendors vary greatly when it comes to what's included in the package and what's considered an add-on to the service. For example, some providers offer a variety of different phone types that are considered add-ons to the service. You may end up being able to get the same phones somewhere else for less. In addition, certain features, such as voice mail, might seem like they would be included but are actually considered add-ons and come at an extra cost.

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Question 3: Compatibility

Is this system SIP-based (Session Initiation Protocol) and is it compatible with other technologies?

SIP is a signaling protocol used for establishing sessions in an IP network and it is now the protocol of choice among VoIP users. SIP works very well with Internet applications and with a SIP-based system. You have access to a host of innovative services, including: voice-enriched e-commerce; click-to-call on Web pages; instant messaging with buddy lists; collaborative, multi-party, multimedia conference calls; and more. Ensuring that your phone system is SIP-based can save you a lot of headaches over the long term.

In addition, you want to ensure that your phone system can be integrated with the other technologies you use, such as Microsoft Outlook for email and sharing calendars. Tell the sales agent about the other current or future technologies you may be using, both in your office and remotely and have them explain compatibilities and issues.

Question 4: Scalability

Can this phone system scale as my business grows and will there be extra costs when we do expand?

If you are planning to grow your business by opening new locations, build new departments or other expansion activities then make sure your phone system is going to be flexible enough to make those changes with you.

For example, do your employees change desks or move locations frequently? Are the phone lines and phone numbers easily transferable? Ask the sales agent to share examples on how other clients' business needs changed over time and how their particular phone system adapted to those changes.

Question 5: Speed and Capacity

How many data centers do you have and where are they located?

Let the sales agent know where and how your phone system will be used, such as whether it will be used mainly for local or international calls. Your phone system provider needs to have adequate data centers placed in enough locations to ensure that geographical distance is not a hindrance to speed and efficiency.

Negotiating a phone system deal?

Here are 8 Questions to Ask

Question 6: Referrals

Can I talk to 2-3 of your current customers about how they like the phone system?

Ask for references. If they can give you two or three from customers who are happy and willing to share their experiences with you, then that's a good sign. And more often than not, these reference customers will be up front with you about their experiences. Bear in mind that no system is perfect and if the reference had some issues then ask how those issues were fixed. Also remember that sometimes the customer themselves create the issue due to faulty understanding; negligence, etc. so take any negative comment with a grain of salt.

Question 7: Customer Support

What kind of service and support will I get for both installation and on an ongoing basis?

If problems arise, you'll want to know who you can call and when they'll be available to help you. You don't want to get into a situation where you sign a contract and then your vendor is totally unavailable. The level of service and support is another aspect to buying a phone system that can vary widely among vendors. This is something you want to be clear about before you sign your contract.

Question 8: Terms – Contract and Pricing

What will this cost me and what if I need to make a change?

When all of your quality and feature questions are addressed, you'll naturally want to make sure the price and contract terms work for your business. With phone systems changing rapidly and a lot of competition in the market, you should be able to avoid getting locked into a long-term contract. Also, be sure to ask about cancellation and return policies – sometimes you won't be aware of certain issues until your team starts to actually use the phones. You want to make sure there's a way to get out of a contract if lack of service or functionality warrants it. In addition, as with the first question, have the sales agent explain why they charge the way they do and how their pricing beats the competition.