The Business Owner's Cloud Phone FAQ

Unsure about how cloud phones differ from legacy on-premises phones, and why you should move your business phones to the cloud? We've assembled and answered some common questions that business owners ask.

On-premises phone system	Cloud phone system

HOW DOES A CLOUD-BASED SYSTEM SCALE WITH MY BUSINESS VS. AN ON-PREMISES PHONE?

Requires a server called a private-branch exchange (or PBX). Some are scalable (you can add more capacity) and others simply will not scale beyond a certain number of users. In some situations, you have to purchase phone lines in modules, e.g., you buy capacity for 12 users when you only need 9 lines.

Scales with your business, so you are never paying for users you don't need. You purchase service for the exact number of users you have. Adding a new employee is as simple as ordering service and plugging in another phone.

TAKEAWAY
Look for a provider with no long-term contracts so the provider has to earn your business every day.

CAN MY BUSINESS DEPEND ON THE CLOUD? HOW RELIABLE IS IT?

Shuts down when the power goes out or the phone lines are disrupted—your customers get a busy signal. Not very reliable. They're also subject to whatever disaster strikes your office location, e.g., fire, flooding, severe weather, or theft can render your phones unusable or offline.

Runs on your provider's network, which should have multi-region datacenters and built-in redundancy that ensures an outage in one server or datacenter doesn't bring the whole system down. Electricity or internet outages may impact your office's phones, but not the cloud phone system, which in the event of an outage would reroute calls to your mobile phone. In that regard, they are highly reliable.

TAKEAWAY
Look for a provider that offers financially backed service level agreements with uptime as high as 99.999% (which means less than 26 seconds of downtime per month). So long as you don't settle for anything less, your business can definitely depend on cloud reliability.

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IT SOUNDS COMPLEX. HOW DO I SET IT UP, AND WHAT'S INVOLVED IN TRAINING?

Usually requires a specialized technician to install, set up, maintain, and make changes. And you'll have to schedule the service, which can take weeks. Employees may be given a phone system "cheat sheet" that tells them how to transfer calls, conference someone in, and so on.

Is easy to implement and usually doesn't even require a visit from your vendor. Every phone is shipped to you with simple instructions for how to plug them into your existing internet connection. And support agents or your IT partner can talk you through how to use the online dashboard to configure phone numbers, assign call forwarding, and more. The process takes just hours, not weeks.

TAKEAWAY
Look for an easy-to-use cloud phone system whose provider offers 24/7 support that's been certified for quality by a third party like J.D. Power.

HOW IS A CLOUD-BASED SYSTEM PRICED?

Usually requires annual contracts and additional charges for feature changes, moving or adding lines, maintenance, and more. Plus, you have to pay the phone company for phone lines and long distance.

Is priced on a flat monthly fee per user and generally includes local and long-distance calling. Business features like voicemail, call forwarding, conferencing, video, and other communication features are all included in the cost.

TAKEAWAY
Be sure to ask your cloud phone provider if they require a time-based contract or if they charge you for the phones themselves—if they do, walk away because others don't.

HOW MUCH DO I NEED TO WORRY ABOUT CALL QUALITY OVER THE INTERNET? LIKE STATIC, ECHOES, AND CHOPPY AUDIO?

You shouldn't have to worry about this at all—your provider or IT partner should run network tests and pre-qualify your network before any kind of deployment to ensure call quality and clarity. Cloud phone system call quality should be as good as that on land lines.

TAKEAWAY
Since cloud phones rely on your internet connection and network setup, you'll want to look for a provider that rigorously tests your network (e.g., does a multi-day vs. a 15-second test) for bandwidth and redundancy and advises whether it should be upgraded to support voice calls.

WHAT'S THE BIGGEST BUSINESS BENEFIT TO A CLOUD PHONE SYSTEM?

"Biggest" depends on what matters to you. But cloud phone systems in general are more affordable, more reliable, and easier to set up than on-premises phones. They also scale with your business more flexibly and deliver communication and collaboration features that your customers and employees are used to having on their mobile devices. Last, they are usually integrated with a mobile app that gives your employees the ability to make and receive business calls from their mobile device, so connecting with customers or other employees isn't dependent on employees sitting at a desk all day.

TAKEAWAY
Consider a cloud phone solution from a company that delivers fully unified communication and collaboration features like chat, video conferencing, and screen sharing. You'll be glad you did even if you don't use the features right away.

WHAT HAPPENS TO MY EXISTING BUSINESS PHONE NUMBERS IF I SWITCH? AND WHAT ABOUT 800 NUMBERS?

You keep your existing phone numbers when you change phone systems. Moving phone numbers is called "porting." Porting local phone numbers takes about 2-4 weeks depending on how quickly your current service provider responds, and porting toll-free numbers typically takes about 1-2 weeks. There is usually a bit of overlap time where your phone numbers are active on both services.

TAKEAWAY
Make sure you follow the provider's instructions for a smooth number porting experience.

ELEVATE: THE EASY, RELIABLE, AND AFFORDABLE BUSINESS PHONE SOLUTION

Elevate is a leading cloud-based business phone system from the cloud communications provider with 20+ years' experience delivering quality cloud services to over a million users. Elevate delivers integrated conferencing, screen sharing, team chat, file sharing and backup, and more, with the desktop and mobile apps that keep you connected no matter where you are or what mobile device you're using.

Whether you're in the office or remote, Elevate seamlessly integrates all your communication tools—desktop phones, mobile phones, and computers—into one manageable solution oriented around your employees' needs and workstyles.