

Desk Phones or Softphones? It Depends

A Quick Guide to Different Needs in Different Scenarios



Today's work environment poses a complex reality. Depending on what type of workers you have and what kind of seating arrangements they are in, the organization's needs for phones may vary. It may very well be that certain workers need softphones and headsets while others will need desk phones. And it is also likely that there will be a need for a mix of the two. In this guide, we present various scenarios that organizations will likely encounter and which type of phone may be more relevant in those scenarios.

Different Scenarios May Require Different Types of Phones

So, which way do organizations go? Soft phones, Desk IP Phones or a mix of the two? In order to better understand, it's important to first to analyze employees' needs:

1. Sitting arrangements of employees

Depending on the sitting arrangements of your workers, the needs may vary.

- **Workers in the open space** most of the time will require high level headsets with noise cancelation because of the noisy environment surrounding them. In such a case, you will use the headset either with a soft phone, desk phone or both, depending on your needs. "Hot desking" in the open space environment where workers may need to share phones is becoming an increasingly popular phenomenon. These workers may prefer to have their own personal headsets for hygienic reasons.
- **In common areas**, a desk phone is required because many people are using the phone and a more robust and solid platform is needed.
- **In a single-person office**, the most convenient communication method may be on a speaker phone, rendering the desk phone the best option.
- **In a shared office space**, using a speaker phone may bother the other person in the room. However, the choice remains whether a soft phone or a desk phone would be more appropriate and headsets can work with either option.
- **Road Warriors** by definition need to have headsets and softphones as the desk phone isn't portable. Headsets for these workers will be sturdier, will have better noise cancelation and acoustics but will also be more costly.



2. Type of workers

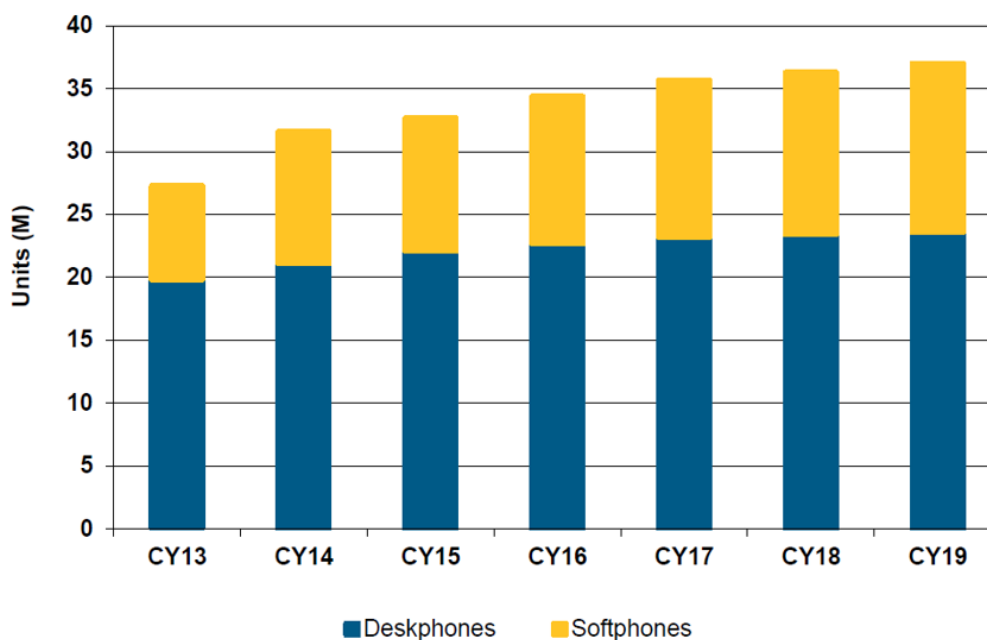
- **High turnover workers** – If your work staff tends to turnover relatively quickly, you may prefer a desk phone to reduce costs as new employees typically won't accept used headsets, while desk phones may be cleaned and transferred easily.
- **High Tech Savvy vs more Traditional or Young Guns vs Silver Foxes** – For the most part, the younger and more high-tech savvy your workers are, the easier they will adapt to new technology. You may want to offer these younger workers the choice of a desk phone or a soft phone. However, for the more traditional workers, desk phones are the path of least resistance.

This human factor is a very powerful argument for the desk phone and market trends point to the fact that desk phones are still the preference of most workers and their employers. According to Michael Brandenburg, a senior Frost and Sullivan analyst, “despite the marketing and the promises of savings (of soft phones), the majority of enterprises are sticking with the desk phone.” Brandenburg's colleague at Frost and Sullivan, Alaa Saayed, says that the end users are the major driver in maintaining the desk phones and their resistance to softphones is stronger than the potential financial savings appeal to the IT and finance departments.

A recent IHS (formerly Infonetics) Research report confirmed the trend in IP Phones. While softphones are definitely catching on and are on a modest upward trend, desk phones too, continue to hold steady if not slightly rise. And in any event, desk phones for the foreseeable future will continue to have more than double the market share of softphones.¹

Diagram 1 - Desk phones vs Softphones, IHS Research

Worldwide IP Phone Market Size and Forecast



¹Enterprise Unified Communications and Voice Equipment Quarterly Worldwide and Regional Market Share, Size, and Forecasts: 3Q15, Infonetics Research, December 7, 2015

- **Consumer facing vs back office** - Consumer facing workers such as bank tellers or medical staff, lawyers, etc. rarely would want to face their customers wearing headsets. If your employee is in the back-office with no interaction with the consumer, then please see the first section for the discussion about whether a headset or a desk phone is more appropriate.



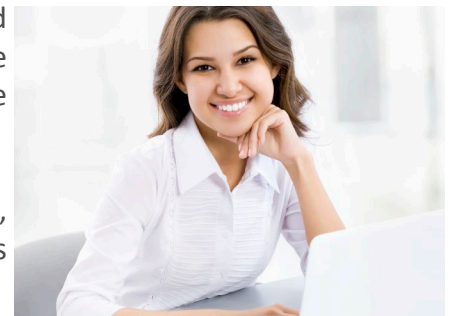
- **Production Floor** - (warehouse, factories, assembly lines) - these type of workers need a robust phone, and need to notice and hear the ringing of the phone while working in a noisy environment, sometimes without a desk. In this scenario, the desk phone is pretty much the required choice.



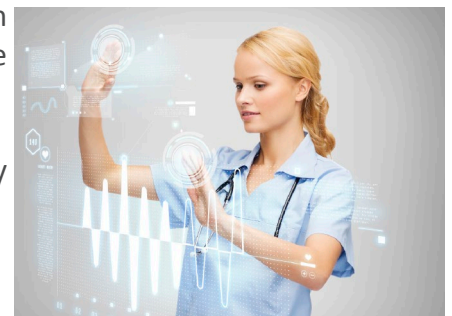
- **Executives** - enjoy the bells and whistles and shiny buttons, bigger (biggest?) screens and Boss Admin capabilities and high quality speakers. These can be found only on the desk phone.
- **Managers** - May not need all the gadgets on the Desk Phone, but most probably will require a desk phone with a sidecar and speaker capabilities to have conferences in their rooms.



- **Receptionists** - May or may not use headsets but they do need a robust device, one not dependent on the soft phone or the PC availability. So a desk phone is the likely choice for these workers.
- **Secretaries** - In addition to the needs of the receptionist, secretaries will enjoy the benefits of Boss Admin capabilities that they can gain only from the desk phone.



- **Workers requiring shared lines (Nurses station, retail)** - When the shared line appearance is required, desks phones are the only choice.
- **Employees who need speaker phones** - These workers will enjoy the benefit the speaker phone capabilities of the desk phone.



Technological Advantages of the Desk Phone

The above analysis demonstrates that in many scenarios there is no clear cut favorite between desk and soft phones, while in certain situations there is an obvious choice.

Decision makers will need to take a good look at their organizational needs, the makeup of their workers, where they are located and how they function, in order to implement the most cost effective and efficient phone solution for their organization.

However, what is clear, both based on the existing market trends and the objective scenario-based needs described above, the desk phone will be the phone of choice in many situations.

With that in mind it's important to note that desk phones offer many unique features that make them very powerful and attractive. These include:

- **Manageability**, zero-touch pre-defined installation platform, remote updates/configuration, with the ability to control all IP phone operations from a centralized location on-premises or in the cloud and configure groups of IP Phones according to the organization's customized needs. IT can easily control the quality as the IP desk phone is a dedicated hardware that is not affected by other activities on the PC/laptop. This is unlike the situation with the softphone where users complain about problems caused by shared allocation of resources when there is no real option for IT to assist. Also, with VoIP desk phones, it is easier for IT to control the network bandwidth and prioritize IP dedicated to voice.
- **No hidden costs** - there are typically no hidden costs to deploying a desk phone, while there can be hidden costs for soft phones including: upgrading the PC, upgrading the NIC to support QoS, upgrading the headset to change from RJ9 to USB
- **Audio Quality**, dedicated voice device, dedicated voice processing HW not sharing resources (PC network and CPU)
- **Durability**, less susceptible to being dropped, stepped on, left in pocket and sent to the washer
- **Reliability**, sturdy manufacturing
- **Availability**, always available – shifting control on a PC renders making and answering calls on a soft phone less easy
- **Survivability**, if the PC is unavailable, a desk phone call will stay connected and new calls can be made
- **Resiliency**, using AudioCodes One Voice Resiliency (OVR) for the Skype for Business environment or Cloud Resiliency Package (CRP) for other Cloud services or IP PBX, IP Phones use the SBC/GW as a proxy to ensure downtime survivability and can terminate the calls to a PSTN or SIP trunk upon service outage.
- **Security**, Separate VLANs – for security as well for Quality. Calls can be encrypted with TLS/SRTP
- **Simplicity**, simple 4 digit dial or speed dials instead of an uncomfortable search on a desk phone
- **Continue Working During Power Outages** -The desk phone will always be connected to the UPS so there is no fear of losing the ability to receive and place calls during a power outage. Desk phones consume about 1.4W to 2.45W as compared to a single workstation (PC and Monitor) which consumes some 200W, translating into powering 80 desk phones for every workstation.
- **Desk phones aren't dependent on Operating Systems** while softphones will be competing with other applications for resources that can adversely affect audio quality. Additionally, limited bandwidth and QoS settings from the PCs NIC port can cause latency and jitter affecting audio quality.
- **No one is taking the desk phone home**

If You Are Considering IP Desk Phones, Consider AudioCodes

If you are considering IP desk phones for your organizational needs, the AudioCodes 400 Series should be considered seriously as it offers compelling advantages. The 400HD series of IP Phones includes a range of easy-to-use, feature-rich products for the service provider hosted services, enterprise IP telephony and contact center markets. Based on the same advanced, field-proven underlying technology as our other VoIP products, AudioCodes high quality IP phones enable systems integrators and end-customers to build end-to-end VoIP solutions.



To learn more about AudioCodes' 400 Series IP Phone offering, [click here](#).

To learn more about AudioCodes' Managed IP Phone solution, [click here](#).

International Headquarters

1 Hayarden Street,
Airport City
Lod 70151, Israel
Tel: +972-3-976-4000
Fax: +972-3-976-4040

AudioCodes Inc.

27 World's Fair Drive,
Somerset, NJ 08873
Tel: +1-732-469-0880
Fax: +1-732-469-2298

©2016 AudioCodes Ltd. All rights reserved. AudioCodes, AC, HD VoIP, HD VoIP Sounds Better, IPmedia, Mediant, MediaPack, What's Inside Matters, OSN, SmartTAP, VMAS, VoIPerfect, VoIPerfectHD, Your Gateway To VoIP, 3GX, VocaNom, AudioCodes One Voice and CloudBond are trademarks or registered trademarks of AudioCodes Limited. All other products or trademarks are property of their respective owners. Product specifications are subject to change without notice.

V.1, 04/16

Contact us: www.audiocodes.com/contact

Website: www.AudioCodes.com