

TELEPHONE SYSTEM BUYER'S GUIDE



<http://www.pilohousecomm.com>



<http://bestbusinesstelephone.com>



<http://twitter.com/pilohousecomm>



<http://companies.to/pilohouse/>



<http://www.linkedin.com/companies/pilohouse-communications-llc>

A business phone system is one of the most important purchases your business can make. The telephone is often the easiest way to reach your customers, clients, and partners. It should also be the easiest way for them to reach you. You don't want your important business callers to be routed incorrectly, disconnected, or faced with a bewildering array of automated options.

Evaluating your Needs:

Before you can compare systems or choose a vendor, you should consider and understand your needs carefully.

The 2 Top Things to Consider:

1. System Size
2. System Type

System Size-

Number of Extensions - Extensions are needed for every device within the company that connects to the phone system. Most of the extensions will be for telephones. However, fax machines, credit card terminals, modems, and any other equipment that requires a phone connection must also be tallied.

Number of Lines - Also called trunks, lines indicate the total number of outside phone lines used by the company.

Even if an office phone system can handle your current phone traffic, you should be sure that it can also handle your *future needs*. The ideal system should be able to handle expansion in a very cost-effective manner. PBX systems allow you to increase capacity by adding new cards that increase the total number of ports available; some key systems are expandable by simply adding another cabinet identical to the first. For planning purposes, inquire about how much it will cost to add more extensions.

System Type-

There are 4 major types of phone systems available today:

1. Key System
2. PBX
3. KSU-Less
4. VoIP

Key System - This type of phone system uses a central control device called the key system unit (KSU) to provide features that are not available with ordinary phones. For example, a central unit typically allows users to make calls to another in-office extension, and prevents other users from accidentally picking up a line that is being used. Modern key systems also come standard with most features a business would expect – but in some cases they are less customizable.

PBX - Most PBXes come standard with all the features you might want. In addition, they are totally programmable, so they can support the most complex implementations. You'll pay a premium for this flexibility, but in many cases the price difference between PBX systems and less adaptable solutions will be smaller than you might expect.

The term "*hybrid*" is often used to describe commercial phone systems that resemble both key and PBX systems. Both key and PBX telephone systems require professional installation and maintenance. All outside telephone lines must connect to the KSU or PBX cabinet, as well as all inside extensions.

KSU-Less System - For a much lower initial investment, KSU-less phones are designed to provide many of the features of smaller commercial phone systems in a decentralized manner. The phones themselves contain the technology necessary to allow them to communicate with each other without requiring a central cabinet. Because they are so inexpensive, KSU-less systems are not usually sold or supported by telecom vendors – you will need to do the shopping, installation, programming, and maintenance yourself. And they are also more susceptible to “crosstalk,” a problem in which separate conversations bleed into each other. With hybrid key systems dropping so far in price, KSU-less systems present more risk than they are worth for most businesses

VoIP - There is much confusion regarding what a VoIP system is. There are VoIP carriers, like Vonage, that sell VoIP dial tone, this can be used with a single line telephone such as the one you might have in your home as well as connecting to a Key or PBX system listed above. The phone system itself can be IP or Digital or a combination of both, if the manufacture supports that variation of a “hybrid” system. There are many reasons why you might want to utilize VoIP technology and it's best to speak with a knowledgeable dealer to discuss your needs.

Evaluating your Quotes:

In order to make sure you are evaluating apples to apples there are several things to consider:

The 5 Top Things to Consider:

1. System Reliability
2. System Functionality
3. System Scalability
4. Know what you are getting
5. Extras

System Reliability –

- What is the published Mean Time to Failure of the product?
- What are the warranty options?
- How long has the manufacturer been in the telephone business and are they a stable company?

System Functionality –

- All phone systems come with hundreds of features, you should examine how your phone system will be used. Limit your feature search and evaluation to only those options that will improve the workflow in the office.
- Ask about productivity enhancing applications.
- Can you make simple changes on your own?
- Does Unified Communications make sense for your business?

System Scalability –

- To ensure future growth and investment protection the system should provide for universal slots and expansion cabinets so that adding as you grow does not become a major reinvestment.
- What is the migration strategy of the products?
- How are upgrades and growth protection handled?

Know What You Are Getting-Demand Line Item Pricing –

- Don't accept a quote with a one line vague description of what you are getting.
- You should know exactly what parts and quality of each that you are buying for.

- Ask what is included with the installation.
- Is it customized to your unique business needs or a generic installation?
- Will there is a project manager that you can go to with questions?
- End User training is vital to getting the most out of your new system. Ask how training is handled, especially for your receptionists.

Read the fine print- make sure everything you need is included so there won't be surprise billing later. Sometimes unforeseen things happen, but with a detailed, itemized quote you can protect yourself.

Extras -

- Wiring- if this is a new location you will need wiring done, perhaps for voice and data. It's more cost effective to have one vendor run all the cables. A note, if you have your electrician run the voice and data wires you will probably incur additional costs from your phone vendor to terminate and put jacks on the wires, typically electricians do not do this, that is why their price is usually less expensive.
- Messaging on hold- most systems are MOH ready, but if you'd like a customizable solution you will need to ask for it.
- Battery Backup-In case of a power outage your phone system will be inoperable unless you ask for a battery backup. Ask how long a battery backup will keep your system running in case of power outage? A UPS is generally a lot more money and doesn't keep the system up for a very long time.
- Digital Cordless/Wireless phone-If you have workers that are mobile within the office space, you might want to consider these mobility options
- IPSoftphones- If you have employees that have a need to work from home ask about IP phones and secure remote access solutions, they are not just for large corporations.

Evaluating Vendors:

Virtually all office phone systems are bought through vendors who handle not only the sale but also the installation and programming. As a result, finding a reliable business phone vendor can be the important part of the purchase, since any phone system you choose needs to be properly installed for optimal performance.

The 3 Top Things to Consider in a Vendor:

1. Reputation of the Vendor
2. Service and Support After the Sale
3. Total Cost of Ownership

Reputation of Vendor -

- Get references from the prospective vendors, and ask how they evaluate their own work.
- How many years of industry experience do they have?
- Ideally, the brand you are considering should be the vendor's best or only product line. Knowing that the vendor is committed to the line, you can be assured of a long-term source for service.
- Did the vendor ask about your business needs? You know your business better than anyone.
- Ask for a product demonstration. Test the system before you buy. Pictures and feature charts are insufficient for a purchase that will be used extensively by every person in your office. Some areas to assess: check how phones feel in your hands, see how easy it is to access extensions and voicemail, and evaluate phone and speakerphone quality.
- Will the work be done by vendor's employees or subcontractors?

Service/Support After the Sale -

- What kind of on-going support does vendor provide?
- What is vendor's customer satisfaction rating?
- Does vendor offer maintenance options?

Total Cost of Ownership-

- You should consider not only the upfront cost of the system, but also the ongoing costs.
- What are dealers rates for moves, adds and changes and maintenance costs after the warranty period. Some dealers will sell a system initially at a loss to get the business only to overcharge customers after the fact.

- Some dealers do not account for a complete custom installation and will add charges after the contract is signed for project management and training and customization of our system.

Use the enclosed checklist to help evaluate solutions and vendors so that you make sure you are comparing apples to apples.

The Bottom Line:

The purchase of something as vital to your business as your communications system should be done with great care. There are many solutions that may look similar:

- look for a stable manufacture that has a large market share
- look for a vendor who will use their own certified technicians to install and maintain the product
- look for a vendor with a good reputation and references.

For most small to medium sized business this purchase is not a commodity - the proper installation, training, and the on-going service and maintenance are more important than the upfront price.

Buyer's Business Phone System BUY