

Check list for a new phone system.

Questions you need to answer before you start the process of buying a new phone system. This will allow you to figure out what you need in your new phone system. It may also help you decide what you want and what might be possible in a new phone system.

- _____ First decide how many lines you need?
- _____ Will the fax and /or credit card machine use a line attached to the phone system?
- _____ Do you have an alarm that uses a phone line?
- _____ Do you have any other device that uses a phone line? Like a modem or elevator?

What type of service will you get from your phone company? This will affect the interface card used in the new system.

Typical services are

- _____ Traditional CO lines, these are sometimes called POTS lines.
- _____ T-1 lines with a channel bank. The channel bank converts a digital T-1 line to individual analog lines.
- _____ T-1/ PRI based lines going directly into the phone system.
- _____ SIP trunks via broadband

How many phones do you need and what kind?

- _____ Onsite digital, this is the traditional phone you see on the desk, it comes with a varying number of programmable function buttons. They come in a variety of sizes from 7 to 92 buttons, with as many as 220 buttons for an operator console.
- _____ Onsite VoIP, Voice over Internet Protocol phones are similar to the traditional phones but communicate with the control unit via VoIP over a computer network. This will open up new features using VoIP technology as they are developed.
- _____ Offsite VoIP, the same as the above but programmed to operate from off property.
- _____ Softphone VoIP is a software package that installs on a computer and operates as either an on or off property phone.
- _____ Wireless phones are similar to cordless phones but are much more powerful because they use VoIP to communicate with the control unit. This allows wireless phones to operate more like your desk phone with built in features like hold and transfer. They can also give greater coverage of your facility.

Now that you know how many phones and what type you need decide what size phones you will need for each user.

- _____ Operator phones will allow the operator to view all lines and extensions for usage. This allows the operator to view whose phones are busy. These phones may also have up to three Add on Modules with up to 64 buttons each.
- _____ Executive phones will have more buttons for greater flexibility in usage, typically 21 to 42 buttons.

- _____ Power users will need smaller phones on average typically 14 to 32 buttons.
- _____ Other users who only need to make and take phone calls, not handle them can use smaller phones typically 7 or 8 buttons.

Do you have an application in your office? Computer telephony Interface CTI is software that runs on a computer and talks with your phone system to provide added functionality.

- _____ PC based operator console, just like it sounds your operator can answer and handle calls with a click of the mouse.
- _____ Contact management software, this provides screen pops for customer information based on caller ID.
- _____ Call center software, all the reports you could want about extension and line usage in real time.
- _____ Call accounting software, this is useful when you need to bill for phone calls.

Do you want Voice Mail and how will it be used?

Voice mail has 2 parts, one provides a mailbox for users on the phone system and the other can answer calls then direct them to the appropriate destination day or night.

Who will need a voice mail box?

- _____ How many users will need a mail box on the system?
- _____ How many users will need a voice mail to email feature? This sends your voice mail to your email as an attached .wav file. This provides long term storage for voice mails and gives you one place to check your messages.
- _____ How many users would benefit from faxes delivered directly to them? Faxmail sends your fax to your email as an attached .tif file.

How will you answer incoming calls?

- _____ Will you answer incoming calls with a live person?
- _____ Will the auto attendant answer incoming the calls?
- _____ If your calls will be answered by the auto attendant what is your incoming call volume?

Do you have multiple locations that would benefit from the ability to call and/or transfer calls from one location to another? This feature can also reduce long distance cost between offices or allow all calls to be delivered to one location and distributed to the appropriate location.

Do you have the correct cabling for the phones you want? Traditional Digital phones need cat-3 cables and VoIP phones need cat-5 cables.

- _____ If you choose traditional digital phones do you have existing Cat-3 cable at each location you want a phone?
- _____ If you choose VoIP phones do you have cat-5 (computer network) cable at each location you want a phone?
- _____ Some VoIP phones come with a pass through port, in this event do you have a computer with network access at the location you want each phone? Keep this in mind if you decide to go with VoIP phones, you will want to ask the vendor if their phones have this feature?

_____ All VoIP phones require power to work. Some only plug into an electrical outlet; others can use Power over Ethernet (POE is power delivered over the cat-5 network cable) or they can plug into an electrical outlet. Be sure you know if the phones you are considering have the POE feature. If they do your network switch needs to have this feature. If not you will need an electrical outlet near each phone. If you are plugging into a wall outlet you will also need a UPS for each phone or when power goes off the phone will not work.

Power back-up, most vendors offer battery back-up as an option. These units can keep your phone system running during short power outages. This is also money well spent, it is better to have the UPS hit by a power surge than your phone system. If the UPS is dead you can un-plug your phone system and plug it directly into the wall outlet until you can replace the UPS. Also look for C.O. line surge protection. This prevents a surge from coming in via the phone lines.

Who will be installing your new phone system?

This one sounds easy but is not. There are a lot of good technicians out there that might not be a good vendor for you. Conversely there are many good business people who do not have the technical knowledge to set up your new phone system efficiently. You want to look for someone who offers both. Here are some things you can look for.

First are they authorized dealers for the brand of phone system they are offering?

Are their technicians certified by the Manufacturer and can they get factory support if required?

Do they stock replacement parts locally or do they order them as needed?

How long is the warranty and what does their warranty cover?

How long have they been in business?

Ask for and call on their references.