



Connaught

CONVERGED SOLUTIONS



Buyer's Guide to Telephony



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Introduction

Managing telephony services within a business can feel overwhelming in a world with increasing options and changing technology. The upsurge of remote working and the increase in business utility bills means that managers like you are now expected to deliver more, with less resource. With a wide spectrum of telephony technology on the market, you need the information to make the right decision, based on the needs of your company and its stakeholders.

Here's the question. In today's complicated climate, is your telephony solution helping you grow and compete or is it holding you back? This guide will help you decide if it's time to make a move.

You'll discover:

- ✓ How to choose a product
- ✓ How to choose a supplier
- ✓ The telephony traps to avoid



How to choose a product

With so many different options available, there are two key steps to choosing the right product for you:

Work out what you already have

Current telephone connection

The best way to know how future-proof your telephony services are, is to determine whether your organisation is using ISDN or VOIP (Voice over IP) lines.

ISDN lines are voice and data lines delivered through copper lines, whereas VOIP services (also called cloud or hosted telephony) are delivered over the internet.

Unlike VOIP telephony, ISDN telephony has an expiry date, due to the move by BT to switch off all copper lines by 2025. This rollout has already begun, with exchanges across the UK no longer making adjustments to customers on copper lines.

If you're looking for telephony that can grow and adapt with your business, cloud-based communications will be the right choice for you.

Broadband connection

The key to VOIP telephony is a steady and reliable internet connection. With voice and data delivered online and hosted in the cloud rather than in physical cabinets on your premises, it's key to know that your broadband connection will support the telephony you're looking for.

BT Openreach are enabling the move from ISDN to internet telephony by rolling out fibre broadband networks to the UK.

To get the best from VOIP, you will need a secure and stable broadband connection, so make sure you check this.

Where are your staff based?

Do you have multiple sites which need to be connected? If you have colleagues working from different sites, consider a solution with a presence feature to enable colleague visibility and availability. Tools such as instant messaging and video conferencing built into your telephony solution will also be valuable resources to have included in your package. Sites can also benefit from continuous direct dial numbers, meaning that separate offices can have related extensions to group them together easily for you and your callers.

Do you need remote working capabilities? If you need your staff to have access to homeworking, VOIP features such as softphones (which enable you to access your telephony from your laptop anywhere you have an internet connection) and mobile applications will be essential for your team.

Develop a telephony profile

Although it might sound basic, it can be really helpful to sit down and establish how your telephony is working (or not working) for you.

If you have access to reporting functions, you can do this by downloading call statistics to show how many calls are made and received, by whom and at what times. These can be essential to help distribute staff and organise hunt groups.

If your telephony service doesn't currently offer reporting functionality, the following questions can help you build a profile of your telephony:

- Roughly how many outgoing calls are being made, and are these chargeable?
- Roughly how many incoming calls are being received and are these being answered in a timely manner?
- Are callers waiting for a long time, and what is their experience whilst this wait is taking place?
- If a call is unanswered, are callers able to leave a message and who is responsible for monitoring this?
- Do you have groups of staff, who answer incoming calls together and provide relief cover for one another?



Work out what you need

Once you have built a telephony profile for your business, you will have some understanding of what you are looking for in a new solution. It can be helpful to separate these into the following categories:

Administrative

Looking at your telephony profile from the last step, you should now be able to answer the following questions:

- How many handsets do you need? If you have staff that are remote working, you may find that softphone and mobile app functionality can mean that a handset is not required if they have access to a headset and internet-connected computer.
- What specification should handsets be?
- Handsets used in reception areas will require more detailed functionality than other areas across the business
- How many concurrent calls do you need to be live at one time?

Cost and budget

With the cost of living rapidly rising, budget is more of a concern than ever for purchasing managers looking for top value telephony.

One bonus of VOIP services is that, because calls are delivered over an internet line, outgoing calls tend to be free for most cloud-based options. This can help bring costs down, especially in organisations who make lots of calls, such as schools, surgeries and sales departments.

Another consideration will be whether it suits you better to make payments upfront for new equipment to enable lower monthly payments or whether you will need the cost of equipment spread over the course of your telephony contract to avoid initial outlay.

Customer experience

Functions such as auto-attendants (where callers choose options to be directed to the right department), position-in-queue announcements and on-hold messaging greatly improve customer experience, and result in less frustrated, more satisfied callers when call volumes are high.

Voicemail features, such as editable messages informing callers of office hours or line closures also give customers clarity, and voicemail-to-email services mean that these are easily managed so that messages aren't missed.

Integration

The ideal telephony solution will fit seamlessly in line with the systems you are already using. This is why it's important for buyers like you to look at whether they are able to be integrated with essential programs such as Microsoft Teams, Microsoft 365, iOS and Android.

This type of integration will enable your telephony system to show you and your team's availability, and connect your address books and directories without excessive data entry, which saves time and keeps everyone better connected. The connection of real-time communication, such as instant messaging, with non-realtime messaging (e.g. emails) can offer a unified communications solution for you, your staff and your customers.

Management information

The best VOIP telephony services offer a combination of qualitative and quantitative call reporting functions which allow you to download, analyse and report on the performance of your telephony and the people using it.

Qualitative tools, such as call recording, enhance staff training, indemnify against claims and issues, and offer safeguarding support for your management team.

Quantitative reporting, whether realtime (such as wallboards to show current call statistics) or in depth (such as automated reports or full queries which are compatible with Excel, Power BI or Tableau), can allow you to present call statistics.



How to choose a supplier

Demonstrations and explanations

VOIP telephony can be a minefield of jargon and technical terms, which can be overwhelming when all you want to do is connect your business with your customers.

The best suppliers will take the time to meet with you to explain the process of implementing a new telephone system. You should be able to access demonstrations and use trial handsets to really be sure that you are getting the right solution for you.

If at any point you feel like you need further information, your supplier should be available to explain in a straightforward and accessible way.

Service delivery experience

The growth of cloud-based communications has led to a rise in suppliers claiming to offer the best solution for your needs. Be wary of companies who cannot demonstrate that they have the experience of successfully implementing these solutions in businesses similar to yours. Telecommunications suppliers should have access to case studies to show this, and there's no substitute for experience in an ever-changing communications market.

Sub-contractors

Another question to ask a potential telephony supplier is whether they use subcontractors to install their telephony solutions. Whilst there can be benefits to outsourcing certain functions (such as HR or IT), having a telecomms supplier who directly employs, trains and manages their technical staff shows that they take full ownership of prioritising expertise and knowledge of these subjects inhouse. It also means that the administrative staff for your supplier will have access to diaries and be able to contact engineers in the event of any issues without any third parties.

Maintenance and support

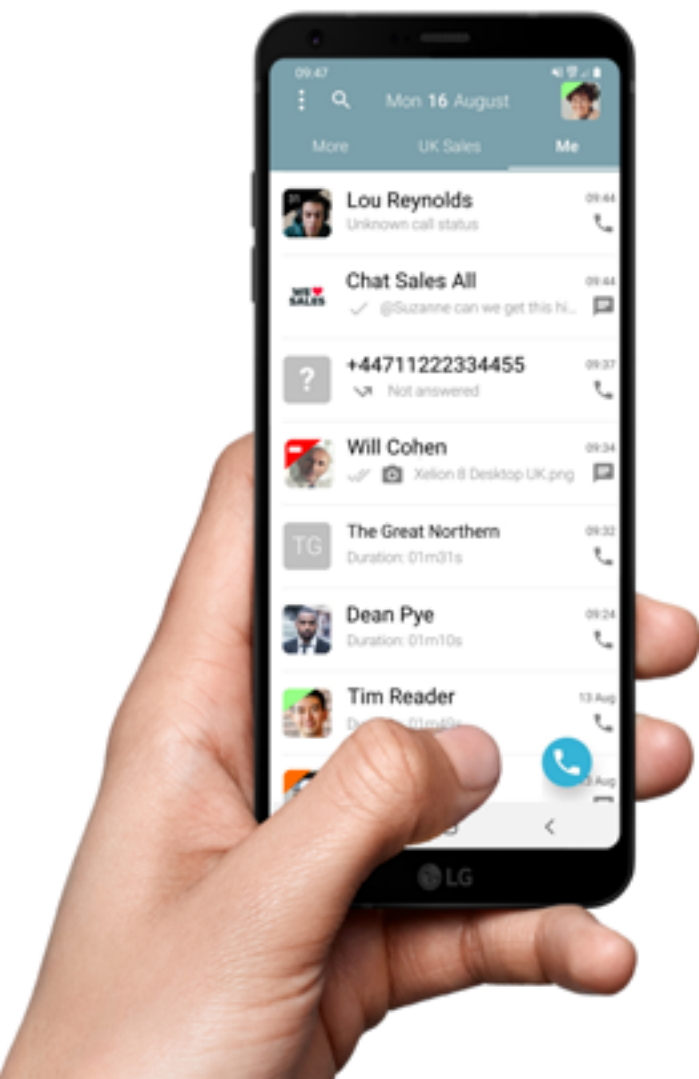
Unless you have the time, interest and skillset to fully self-manage your telephony system, it is essential that you choose a supplier who can offer you ongoing support, training and maintenance following install.

Lots of telephony solutions offer impressive benefits and full functionality, but without any additional support. These systems often incur large charges for changes, assistance and callouts once installed, so this is an important element to clarify before signing any contracts.

Suppliers who offer drop-in access to engineers, free rollouts of updated software and how to guides will offer you far more value long term than those who don't.

Clarity

Having all of the information upfront from your supplier is key to remaining in control of your telephony solution. You should choose a supplier who will give you all the details of what your contract contains, upfront, from the first day to the end date. Ask your supplier how renewals are handled, what is included in your monthly charge and what falls outside of the contract, so you don't end up with any unpleasant surprises. Beware any large price initial discount deals, as these might lead to large price hikes later on whilst you're locked into a long term legal arrangement.



Telephony traps to avoid

- ✘ Avoid cheap-looking VOIP deals where all features are bolt-ons (this makes your bills much higher in the long run)
- ✘ Make sure you know what's included in the package and how costs may change over the term of the contract
- ✘ Don't wait until 2025 to upgrade from ISDN (the cost to switch nearer the time may increase, and increased demand and urgency may cause availability issues)



How can we help you?

If you'd still like help to navigate the world of business communications, Connaught can help. Get in touch and we will give you clarity and control over your telephony solutions.



Connaught Converged Solutions

Protecting and connecting our customers for over 35 years

0800 652 7681 | enquiries@connaughtld.co.uk | www.connaughtltd.co.uk