

# 10 Point to Consider In Your VoIP Choice



Written by:  
John Campbell

“...not graduated your telecom system into an IP (internet Protocol) system then you are at a big disadvantage compared to your competitors who have done so.”

If your SMB has not graduated your telecom system into an IP (internet Protocol) system then you are at a big disadvantage compared to your competitors who have done so.

But Owen Linderholm in VoIP News ([www.voip-news.com](http://www.voip-news.com)) points out there are some things you will need to be aware of before you sign on with the system of choice.

1. What is the contract termination policy? Can I get out early and what penalty is there? Unfortunately, providers and particularly their sales teams will often try to lock you into long-term contracts. This is common practice throughout the communications industry and you probably can't avoid it, but do your best to remove arbitrary and excessive early-termination penalties.

2. What startup costs are there beyond setup and equipment fees? Besides advertised and quoted basic equipment, what else will I REALLY need? Do I need to buy phones? Will extra servers/cards/add-ons be needed beyond the base cost to actually meet my usage requirements? It's easy to get sucked into a good-looking deal with switching and PBX equipment priced at attractive points like \$1000 – but that is often for a minimal configuration and you find out later that you need add-on servers or cards or other extra equipment – and don't forget phones – some quotes will include them and some won't.

3. What day-to-day usage costs are NOT covered by my service plan? What are the rates for international calls for example? Make sure there aren't add-on fees for important features – some providers charge more for conference calling, others for different forms of long-distance, still others for some of the

advanced features. Make a quick model of your actual communications usage and ask about all the items on the list so you can forecast prices accurately.

4. Can the system as it comes handle outbound and inbound faxes easily? Can I just plug a fax machine in or do I need special equipment? Faxing is a hidden gotcha of VoIP. Many older systems can't handle

faxes. Others require a special faxing module. The bottom line is that just because you have a phone line with VoIP it doesn't mean you can plug a fax into it. Make sure you're covered.

5. Do I need add-ons or extras to handle old-style analog phones I already have or that remote or branch offices already have installed? This is an issue that can save you some money. If you have offices that already have extensive modern but analog phones, some provider systems will work with them as transparently as with more advanced SIP and VoIP phones. That can save you as much as a couple of hundred dollars per phone.

6. How does the system handle remote and mobile workers – whether temporary or permanent? Will the experience be the same for a telecommuter in a rural area as it is for someone at head office? How about when I'm on the road? Are there any services or features to handle that? Obviously if you don't have mobile or remote requirements this isn't a concern right now, but in time it may be and if you DO have remote and mobile employees then you need to find out what the provider can and cannot do for you. Some providers can handle any mobile or remote phone almost as easily as an extension in the main office. But others cannot. However, creative solutions might save you money even over going to a system that can handle remote employees. For example, getting a single line for a remote employee on a different plan and then using your system's call-forwarding features might end up being more cost-effective.

7. If I estimate my requirements wrongly and need a major upgrade, what will that cost me extra above if I had made the estimate correctly to begin with – in other words, what are the additional costs for upgrading? There isn't too much you can do here – underestimating requirements is going to be a problem no matter what. But you can minimize the pain with a provider that is willing to work with you and that provides good service.

8. How do you guarantee your Quality of Service? If I have issues how do I get support, who do I contact and how fast will it happen? When there is a complex issue and my network equipment supplier, my broadband supplier and you are all pointing the finger at each other, will you

step up to solve my problem? These are all questions to ask the provider directly. If they can't more than satisfy you in this area then look elsewhere. Your communications system is vital to your success – so don't put yourself in a position of being held hostage by an incompetent provider.

9. What about emergency services – do you provide full 911 or E911 services? Will dispatchers know my location automatically? How about remote workers? This is a flat-out requirement that many VoIP providers don't like to talk about. If they don't have a solution right now, they ought to have one in the pipeline. And that leads us to the last question...

10. How do I know you are going to be around in two years, let alone three? Communications in general is an industry of consolidation and aggressive competition. Find out if your provider is stable and make sure your contract is binding even if your provider gets acquired by another.

What is the best way to ensure all of these bases are covered? Enlist the services of an experienced and independent telecom consultant.

John Campbell is a Strategic-Partner with Schooley Mitchell Telecom Consultants, North America's largest independent telecom consulting company.

[john.campbell@schooleymitchell.com](mailto:john.campbell@schooleymitchell.com)

902-435-4578

[www.schooleymitchell.com/jcampbell](http://www.schooleymitchell.com/jcampbell)