



Decoding Business Phone Basics

7 Simple Terms to Understand Before Choosing Your Next Phone System

Do you feel like you need a magic decoder just to shop for a new phone system? Understanding simple terms like PBX, IVR, UC, and VoIP is essential for evaluating your options and determining what your business really needs.

Let's decode seven basic phone system terms, so you can shop for a solution and get back to business.



Private Branch Exchange

PBX

PBX stands for private branch exchange, but you'll probably never hear it called that. So, forget you even read that!

What's important to know is that a PBX is a business phone system.



A PBX takes in all of the calls your office receives from the outside world and directs them to your various employees' desks. Therefore, it eliminates the cost of leasing multiple phone lines from a telephone company. It also connects the calls from one employee to another within your office, so you don't need an outside telephone line for internal calls, which saves even more on your monthly phone bill.

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What to ask when evaluating PBX vendors?

Find out if the PBX only works with certain service providers, network equipment, and desktop phones. It's best if your PBX is interoperable with a variety of standards-based products, so you can choose the best-of-breed solutions for your business. **You don't want to be locked into working with only one vendor.**

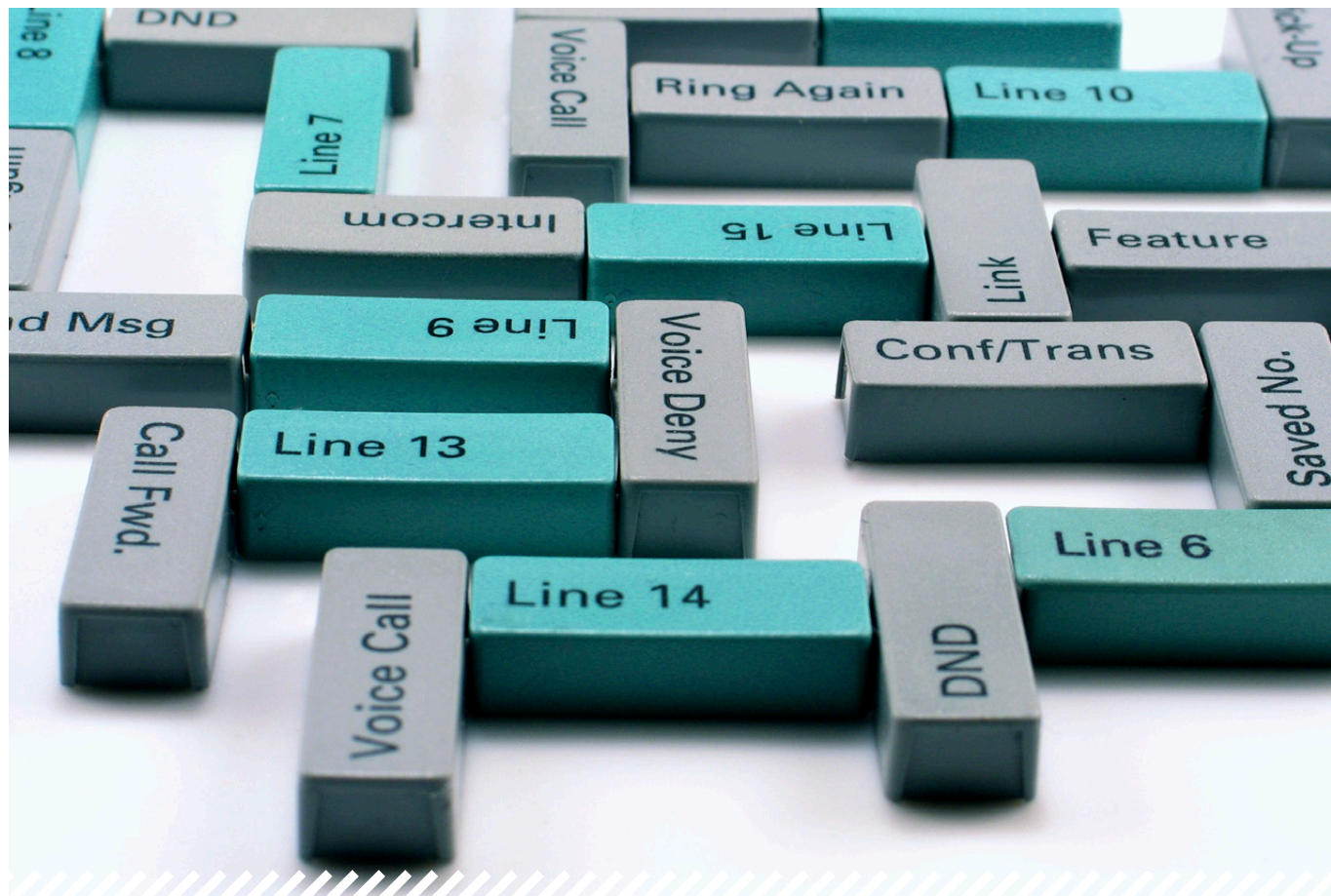
You'll also want to know about the upgrade path of your PBX. **As your business grows, you want a phone system that is flexible enough to grow with you.** Some vendors require you to completely abandon your original hardware and charge expensive upgrade fees, while others protect your investment by offering a software upgrade to your existing hardware. You don't want any surprises when you're ready to expand.

IVR

Interactive Voice Response

Interactive Voice Response is one of the most popular phone system features today. When you call a business and an automated attendant answers, "Thank you for calling ABC Distributing. If you know your party's extension, you may dial it at any time, or press '0' to speak to an operator now."

That's an IVR.



IVR saves you money by handling repetitive tasks that would otherwise take the time and attention of a human. Just think about how much you could increase office productivity simply by eliminating the need to answer and transfer calls.

What to ask about an IVR?

Ask if a vendor's PBX includes an IVR and **how easy it is to customize it** for your business. Find out if you can easily adjust the greeting for office holidays or after-hours calls by yourself or if you need the assistance of an IT person.



UC

Unified Communications

Think of Unified Communications (UC) as a PBX on steroids.

Just like your smart phone is a single device that performs many functions in addition to phone calls, a UC solution can combine your business phone system, IVR, voicemail, instant message chat, fax, conference call bridge, and video conferencing.

It can also integrate with email, web applications, social media, and business tools, like your customer relationship management system (CRM).

Most businesses are choosing UC solutions over a traditional PBX because it's a better way to future-proof their investment and keep pace with advances in technology.



Unified Communications is becoming the dominant method to facilitate efficient and productive business communications. The UC market size is expected to reach 16.5 Billion Dollars by 2015.

Global Industry Analyst, Inc.

Unified Communications also makes employees more effective, which saves your business time and money.

Here are a few examples of how UC can be used:

- Provide one interface to access email, voicemail, fax, and conference call bridges
- Reach co-workers on the first attempt using Find-Me, Follow-Me, which automatically routes calls to various locations
- Transfer calls to your mobile phone when you're on the go
- Use presence information to know when your employees are available to talk and alternate ways to communicate with them
- Locate a entry automatically in your CRM system when a person calls you to know an important customer is on the line before you answer

What to ask when evaluating UC vendors?

Get a list of the supported UC features, and ask for the cost associated with each one. A **UC solution offering the best value will include all features** for a flat rate. Most UC vendors nickel and dime you by luring you in with a low base price, but charge extra for all the most useful features your business will actually need.



VoIP

Voice over Internet Protocol

Voice over Internet Protocol (VoIP) is the transmission of phone calls over the internet instead of traditional telephone landlines.

VoIP (often pronounced "voyp") is more affordable, especially for international and other long-distance calls. It also allows businesses to reduce their IT infrastructure by eliminating the need to maintain separate voice and data networks.



Leading analysts predict VoIP adoption among businesses will continue to increase rapidly over the next few years, reaching 79% by 2013.

What to ask when evaluating VoIP for your business?

Ask your IT or network service provider if your connection speed is fast enough for VoIP. **To combine your voice and data onto a single network, you may need more bandwidth.** The cost of doing this will be more than offset by eliminating the need for a separate voice network. You'll also want to know if you need additional infrastructure other than a PBX or UC solution to take advantage of VoIP.



FMC

Fixed Mobile Convergence

Fixed Mobile Convergence (FMC) is a term for integrating your fixed desk phone with your mobile phone. Basically, it creates a seamless communication experience whether you're at your desk or on the road.



With FMC, you'll never miss an important call again. Using one phone number, customers can ring you on your desk, mobile, or home phone based on your set call rules. When you call them, their caller ID shows your office extension no matter which phone you dial from, creating a unified view of your business. Plus, you can transfer a call from your desk to your mobile phone mid-call, so you're no longer tethered to one location. All of this translates into a professional experience for your callers and allows you to work where and how you want.



What to ask about Fixed Mobile Convergence

Find out if the UC vendors you're considering offer FMC and if there is a fee associated with this feature. Ask for a brief demo on the user interface to **see how easy it is to configure the call rules for routing calls to a mobile or home phone, as well as transferring a call from one device to another.**

Many vendors say they offer FMC, but their implementation is too cumbersome for your employees to use on a day-to-day basis. Instead, you'll want an easy-to-use graphical interface, so any employee in your company can adjust their own settings within a few minutes.

BYOD

Bring Your Own Device

Once a slang party term, BYOD has been modified to reflect a growing issue for corporations.

Bring Your Own Device (BYOD) is one of the hottest trends (and biggest IT challenges) in business communications.

Your sales director loves his iPhone, but your field engineers prefer Android. No problem! The days of issuing a dedicated corporate mobile device are over. Modern UC solutions can securely interoperate across a variety of mobile platforms, tablets, and even home phones, so your employees can access business-critical applications from their preferred personal devices. When you're able to integrate with their favorite gadgets, suddenly work becomes play and productivity goes up. Plus, your employees will appreciate not having to lug around a separate device, while you save on technology infrastructure.



What to ask about BYOD?

Find out if there are additional licensing fees for BYOD access and **get confirmation of all mobile devices supported** by each UC vendor. For maximum compatibility, you'll want to listen for the big three: iPhone, Android, and Blackberry.



API

Application Programming Interface

An Application Programming Interface (API) may be one of the most important features to look for in your next phone system.

An API allows a software developer to extend the functionality of your phone system by integrating it with other third-party business applications, such as your preferred CRM (Customer Relationship Management) software. Ultimately, this means you can increase employee productivity, improve customer service, and get more life out of your phone system investment.



You shouldn't be limited to just the standard features your phone system includes. As you grow, an API gives you the flexibility to tailor your phone system to your evolving business needs. If you think of a feature that would help you save time or money by accessing it through your phone system, API access makes this enhancement possible without having to invest in an entirely new solution.

What to ask about an API?

Ask if your phone system provides API access and **what programming languages are supported**. You'll want to listen for common languages that any software developer or IT professional will be familiar with, such as PERL or PHP.





We can save your business 60 percent on your next phone system.

Switchvox is an award-winning Unified Communications system that simplifies business phone system challenges for businesses just like yours. Thousands of small businesses have already recognized the benefits of this powerful, yet affordable solution. Digium continues to win awards for this impressive system – CRN listed it as one of its 25 Products to Watch and named it a Tech Innovator award winner in the VoIP category.

If you are still considering an affordable alternative for your business, or you think it might be time to replace or upgrade your current phone system, talk with Digium. We're ready to help you improve productivity in your business with Switchvox.



Talk with a Switchvox Sales Specialist: 1-877-344-4661



E-mail us to get the conversation started: sales@digium.com



Live chat, videos, demos and more are available:
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