

## PRACTICAL GUIDE IS YOUR BUSINESS VOIP-READY?

It is now widely recognized that Voice over Internet Protocol (VoIP) has the power to drastically change the way businesses communicate. This article will bring you up to speed on the basics of VoIP, thus allowing you to assess whether VoIP would be a viable tool for your business.

### ➤ WHAT IS VOIP?

VoIP, also known as Internet Telephony, enables you to make calls using a broadband internet connection instead of the traditional phone line. VoIP converts voice signals into digital signals, and then re-converts these on the other end.

You may use VoIP through 1) a telephone that is directly connected to your computer, 2) through a device like a Blackberry or Pocket PC, or 3) through your regular telephone with a special adapter. VoIP allows you to choose special features, such as “nomadicity,” which enables you to access any internet hotspot with your mobile VoIP device. This feature is especially helpful for travelling businesses.

### ➤ WHAT ARE SOME OF THE ADVANTAGES OF USING VOIP?

To evaluate whether VoIP is a good option for your business, please consider the following questions:

- Do you already have a high-speed internet connection?
- Do you regularly make expensive long distance or international phone calls?
- Do you run a small business where phone bills are a major portion of overhead costs?
- Do you prefer to carry your number with you when you travel?
- Do you regularly utilize features such as conference calls, choice of area code, voicemail, or caller ID?
- Do you live outside France, but require a local French number for your business?

If you answered “yes” to at least one of these questions, it is highly likely that a VoIP phone service would suit your business. Installing a VoIP service may even help you save 90 percent of your company phone bill.

VoIP offers other advantages besides savings. With many VoIP plans, you can talk for unlimited amounts of time, or with multiple people at the same time, for no additional cost.

Finally, VoIP handles more than just voice technology: You may also use it to transfer images, video, and text along with the voice. For example, you can speak to a client while simultaneously sending files or even using a webcam. Because VoIP promotes efficient use of bandwidth, it is considered a “greener” way to communicate.

## ➤ WHAT ARE SOME OF THE DISADVANTAGES?

**Voice Quality:** Because VoIP technology must compress, transmit, decompress, and deliver voice signals in a short amount of time, any slowness in your connection could affect the quality of the call. But if you have a good broadband connection, quality hardware, and a good VoIP service provider, you should not encounter any echoing or static.

**Bandwidth Dependency:** VoIP depends on your broadband connection. If the connection goes down, so will the phone line.

In corporate settings, multiple users utilize bandwidth for various data and communication needs. VoIP use can be tricky because it is difficult to predict whether there is adequate bandwidth for a quality international call. A good way to combat this problem is to cut down internet use while using VoIP.

**Power Dependency:** VoIP is completely dependent on the electric power supply, so any power interruptions would disrupt calls.

**Emergency Calls:** VoIP service providers are not legally required to offer emergency 911-type services. The European Commission has preferred to encouraging market players to incorporate such services, rather than imposing strict regulations. As a result, some VoIP providers have started to offer emergency public calling services. Check with your provider to see if emergency calling is available.

**Security threats:** Security breaches have not occurred too frequently, but they are nonetheless important to note with care:

- **Identity and Service Theft:** Through eavesdropping, a third party can obtain names, passwords, and phone numbers. This allows them to steal your VoIP service, as well as important business data.
- **Vishing (VoIP Phishing):** Third parties may send voicemail which appears to be from a trustworthy source, such as a bank. The visher asks for confidential information such as passwords and credit card numbers. Vishing is a growing problem, and many counties have begun to adopt regulations to curb it.
- **Viruses:** VoIP software can be vulnerable to worms and viruses.
- **SPIT (Spamming over Internet Telephony):** Spammers may send voicemail messages carrying virus and spyware to thousands of IP addresses. In the future, providers must develop more voicemail space and better management tools to combat this problem.

## ➤ WHAT ARE SOME POSSIBLE SOLUTIONS?

Some of the disadvantages negatively impact the core of VoIP service. However, many may be prevented through the adoption of the relevant legal tools. The major disadvantage generally associated with VoIP is security threats. Nevertheless, the security of information can be ensured through the adoption of rules limiting the type of data that employees may circulate over VoIP. Such preventive measures shall provide you with control over the use of the system and increased security.

Moreover, quality VoIP service often depends on the contract established between the client and the service provider. A well drafted agreement will permit you to clearly outline the responsibilities and obligations of your provider regarding the quality of the system to be installed. Such an agreement may also outline the provider's responsibilities and

obligations to properly maintain the system as to avoid security threats and quickly intervene in the event of fraud.

➤ **FURTHER INFORMATION**<sup>1</sup>

*We hope this general information has been helpful. If you have further questions regarding legal regulations on VoIP, please contact us and we will be happy to assist you.*

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<sup>1</sup> Link to European Commission's Official VOIP Statement:

[http://ec.europa.eu/information\\_society/policy/ecomms/doc/info\\_centre/commiss\\_serv\\_doc/406\\_14\\_voip\\_consult\\_paper\\_v2\\_1.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/information_society/policy/ecomms/doc/info_centre/commiss_serv_doc/406_14_voip_consult_paper_v2_1.pdf)

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