



FREE SMB Advisory Guide:

The 7 Most Costly Mistakes Companies Make When Choosing A New Phone System... And How To Avoid Them

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ABOUT THE EDITOR


In 1987, Steve left his career as a CPA to take the "easy" road of starting a networking VAR. Steve, his partners and staff have worked to grow Graphtech to be a successful and profitable company serving Small Business and various niche markets in the Chicago area, including the Creative and K-12 Education markets. Graphtech has been a top performer in industry peer groups, and is actively investing to address customer needs in the area of Managed Technology Support Services. Steve has participated in various industry and vertical market affiliations, including representing Venture Tech members on the VTN U.S. Advisory Council. Steve has been a speaker at various industry trade shows for the small business, Graphic Arts and Education industries.

White Paper Discussion

The 7 Most Costly Mistakes Companies Make When Choosing A New Phone System... And How To Avoid Them.

"With so many choices, it can be very difficult to make an educated decision without spending days or weeks researching all of the vendors and options you have."

This exclusive insider's report will reveal:

- Eight critical questions you should ask any phone vendor before signing a contract.
 - How your phone system can play a role in business continuity and disaster recovery planning.
 - How to avoid getting locked into a complicated system that you can't support in-house, or expand without significant upgrade costs.
 - What features and support to demand in the basic package.
 - The single most important feature in a voice mail system; overlook this feature and you'll regret it forever.
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The 7 Most Expensive Mistakes Companies Make When Choosing A New Phone System... And How To Avoid Them


No matter which way you look at it, buying a new phone system can be a significant investment for any business.

"Today's phone systems can transform the way businesses work. Fortune 1000 companies know this, and more than half of them have converted to new IP phone systems."

It can be an even more expensive and frustrating process if you end up making many of the costly mistakes that trap buyers into:

- Paying too much for unnecessary bells and whistles and ongoing maintenance.
- Getting locked into a complicated system that you can't support in-house or expand without significant upgrade costs.
- Not getting the features you need in the base package.

Worse yet, once you've spent the time and money to install a new system, you're pretty much stuck with it and the last thing you want is an overpriced, complicated system that requires a lot of outside maintenance.





Avoiding The 7 Most Costly Mistakes When Choosing A New Phone System


"Phones have recently joined the Internet revolution, and the new rate of innovation has pushed things to a tipping point. There is more opportunity and even more complexity."

Today's phone systems can transform the way businesses work. Fortune 1000 companies know this, and more than half of them have converted to new IP phone systems. Unfortunately, these systems rarely meet expectations at midsize companies. IT directors get bogged down coordinating multiple phone companies, managing hundreds of details, and sorting through thousands of features before they even begin working on "the good stuff."

This is not a new problem. Users have ignored phone system features and regarded phone companies as expensive headaches since the first non-Bell telephone was deployed in 1968. Phones have recently joined the Internet revolution, and the new rate of innovation has pushed things to a tipping point. There is more opportunity and even more complexity. The mid-market needs a new delivery model, and phone systems are on the way out.

Unfortunately, a lot of companies get hooked into buying an overpriced, complicated phone system simply because they didn't know all of the options available to them, or simply because they didn't know how to ask the right questions when interviewing phone vendors.

With so many choices, it can be very difficult to make an educated decision without spending days or weeks researching all of the vendors and options you have. That's why we created this report; we wanted to arm buyers with a quick reference to help them make the absolute best decision when buying a new phone system.



Buyer Mistake #1: Not planning for future needs

Before you buy a system, make sure you have answers to the following questions to plan ahead for future needs:

"The phone system is one of the most mission-critical pieces of equipment at your company."

- How many new employees do you think you will hire over the next 5 years?
- Will you have remote offices or employees working from home?
- Do you think you will open other branches in the future?
- How important is how my employees answer phone calls important to my business?

Look for a system that will allow you to add new features and expand your system later on at virtually no additional cost. A good question to ask your vendor is, "If we decide to add these features later on, what will it cost us in total hardware, software, and services?"

Buyer Mistake #2: Making your decision based solely on price

"When all of the apples are the same, just buy the cheapest one." When purchasing a phone system, that kind of attitude is a huge mistake!

The phone system is one of the most mission-critical pieces of equipment at your company. If used properly, it will increase your company's efficiency and help boost your bottom line by making sure customers and business colleagues can always reach you. While there are many low-cost vendors out there, the cheaper price often comes with poor service quality, lack of redundancy, and worst of all, lack of accountability when issues do arise.

Especially in telecommunications, cheaper is not always better!



Buyer Mistake #3: Overlooking business continuity & disaster recovery


"Also, don't underestimate the value of voice mail. The last thing you want a customer to hear is, Sorry, you cannot leave a voice mail message because this user's box is full."

Business continuity and disaster recovery often means different things to different businesses. For instance, if you're a financial services firm that completes most of its transactions over the phones, you're far less flexible during an outage than an online retailer who does 95% of their business on the web. Identify what an acceptable outage level is to your organization, then use that as a benchmark to design your plan.

Some systems have built in redundancies and failovers. Know what they are and how they can be incorporated into a voice recovery plan. Built-in back-up systems for all locations are options with premise-based systems, and can be standard with most hosted providers, but to make sure a phone system vendor has embedded continuity, not just simple redundancy, they should also provide:

- Critical systems in high-end data centers (not your coat closet)
- Metrics that are REAL for uptime of different system parts (i.e. not just saying five nines, but understanding the distinction between system & location uptime for voice & data systems)
- Hot back-up for inbound and outbound calls at every location, not just redundant lines
- An If-Then plan that can be instantly updated and activated either automatically or manually
- A people-plan that includes primary and back-up contacts, and a rigorous way to keep information updated as staff change

Also, don't underestimate the value of voice mail. The last thing you want a customer to hear is, "Sorry, you cannot leave a voice mail message because this user's box is full." To avoid this all together, make sure your system has the ability to keep voicemail functioning during a power failure.



Buyer Mistake #4: Insufficient training

When making a significant investment into a new telephone system, it's essential to properly train your staff on how to use it. Unfortunately many companies overlook this step in the process, either because management assumes their staff can figure it out on their own or because the installation vendor charges extra for training.

"Look for vendors who offer training as a part of their package and/or try to negotiate it into the contract."

Proper training will allow staff to take advantage of your new system immediately and operate more efficiently and is well worth the extra time. Look for vendors who offer training as a part of their package and/or try to negotiate it into the contract. Lastly, it's always a good idea to have at least one person within your group trained on administrative functions.

Buyer Mistake #5: Paying for technical support

With any new system, you are bound to run into a few snags and have questions. Make sure the vendor provides free, unlimited phone and e-mail support at a minimum.



Buyer Mistake #6: Not buying next generation features


While you might not think you want or need next generation features such as Voice Over IP (the ability to run voice calls over your computer network to save on phone bills), web interactions, and e-mail integration, the system you buy should allow you to implement these features very inexpensively some time in the future.

"If the system you are considering requires complex infrastructures, implementations, or pricing schemes to add these features on, look for another system."

Look for a system that imbeds:

- Voicemail
- Messaging
- Automatic call distribution
- Operator console
- Call forwarding
- Call detail reporting
- Follow-me dialing
- Web based click-to-talk
- Future upgrades

These embedded features will eliminate the need to purchase these applications separately down the road. If the system you are considering requires complex infrastructures, implementations, or pricing schemes to add these features on, look for another system.



Buyer Mistake #7: Not choosing the right vendor

A telephone system is the lifeblood of most businesses. A system failure that lasts only minutes can cost thousands of dollars in lost business. You must be sure that your vendor is capable of properly supporting your business. Ask potential vendors:

"A system failure that lasts only minutes can cost thousands of dollars in lost business."

- How long have you been selling this system?
- What is your relationship with the manufacturer?
- Do you have references?
- Can I visit the site of an installation you've done?
- Do you have support available 24x7x365?
- How quickly do you respond to my requests?
- What do you charge for support?

A good vendor will guarantee your satisfaction and have a long, close history with the manufacturer they represent. They won't be afraid to allow you to talk to their existing clients, or take you on a site visit. If the vendor doesn't have good answers to these questions, chances are they could leave you high and dry.

