

Phone System Comparison Guide



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I. Executive Summary

One of your most critical business assets – and most often overlooked – is your business phone system. Most of us take it for granted. However, it's the one asset shared by every one of your customers, prospects, vendors, and employees. Making certain your new phone system properly addresses all of your organization's internal and external needs is simply essential.

Buying a new phone system is a major decision. Business phone systems can be programmed with literally hundreds of features, offered by thousands of manufacturers and distributors. You can waste time and money comparing feature, after feature, after feature – and still not feel like you're making an informed decision.

This guide is your resource to streamline the complex process of selecting a business phone system. It will help you sort through the hundreds of options to select a reliable, easy-to-use phone system that meets your needs today and is expandable for the future. By following this guide, you will determine the phone system that best meets your business needs, today and tomorrow, and feel confident in buying a reliable phone system at the lowest total cost.

II. Introduction

At Iwatsu Voice Networks, we know buying a phone system is a **big decision** for any company. That's why we created this FREE *Phone System Comparison Guide*, which explains what you really need to know about selecting the phone system that's right for you.

If your business is considering a new phone system, and requires a reliable, user-friendly design with the functionality to meet your current *and* future needs, this guide offers an easy way to compare any phone systems side-by-side to clearly determine which one is best for your organization. These are the insider secrets that most people don't even know to ask.

III. Comparing Business Phone System Features

There are hundreds of phone features available today, especially with the industry shift toward VoIP (Voice over Internet Protocol). Many features today are easily programmed within your phone system, and may not even require the phone vendor to implement them – you can do it yourself. So, how do you compare all the systems with all the options to make the best decision?

Consider this: numerous industry studies have shown that most companies use about four or five of all the phone features available to them. That's it. So, why waste time and effort comparing features you won't use?

Instead, you should compare *how* the phone system will be used by your organization. Don't try to compare feature against feature. First, determine your requirements and understand how the new phone system will be used within your company. Then you can narrow down which features are really needed. Once you have a list of mission-critical features, you can compare that among the various manufacturers/distributors you are considering. By comparing how you will use the system (instead of doing a feature to feature comparison), you will be focused on what matters most to your company and you will not be distracted by empty functionality that you will never use.

While having the right phone features for your business is important, **accessibility** and **usability** are even more important. If a particular phone feature is difficult to use or you can't even remember how to use it, you quickly stop using it. The fact is that most employees devote very little time to learning how to use a new phone system. Therefore, the easier a phone feature is to use and access, the more likely it will be used. For example, you should identify which button(s) – and *how many* buttons – are needed to access a particular feature; don't stop at just noting the phone system has that feature.

Look for systems that are extremely simple and intuitive to operate. One-button access to features usually prevails over multi-button.

IV. Phone System Warranties

Your new phone system is crucial to the ongoing operation of your business. Therefore, reliability is essential. The latest features and functionality are useless if your new system drops calls, loses voice mail messages, and is in a constant state of maintenance and repair. Here are some industry tips that can make a big difference when considering the reliability and the total cost of your new system.

Most people think “a warranty is a warranty”; however, all warranties are not alike. There are two types of warranties – manufacturer and distributor/dealer – and the differences can be significant.

Manufacturer warranties are provided by the phone system manufacturer. This warranty usually covers the equipment only and does not cover labor. The warranty coverage varies by manufacturer; however, most are for two years. Some manufacturers have extended warranties that can be purchased at an additional cost that can extend the warranty coverage to five years or more. The manufacturer’s warranty will usually be passed on the dealer so make sure that your dealer will support the full term of the manufacturer’s warranty.

Distributor/Dealer warranties are provided by the business phone system distributor and coverage can vary considerably. It’s possible the distributor’s warranty is the manufacturer’s, simply passed along to the buyer. However, in many cases, the distributor offers a warranty that sounds “too good to be true.” This is usually because the distributor has doubled or tripled the coverage of the manufacturer’s warranty. While this may look good on paper, beware – *the distributor warranty is only as good as the distributor*. If the distributor goes out of business or can’t live up to its warranty...well... there goes your warranty.

Warranty Comparison Tips:

- Make certain you clarify exactly which items are covered under the manufacturer's warranty and which are covered under the distributor's warranty.
- Only consider phone systems from manufacturers with ISO 9001, 9002 and 14001 manufacturing facilities. These ISO standards ensure the manufacturing facility conforms to strict processes, which ensures reliable and high-quality products.
- Out-of-box failure rates (this measures how many system components fail when removed from the box) are one way to compare manufacturers. Look for low failure rates, approximately 0.0007% or less, and request documentation for the manufacturer's claim.
- Another common metric is the Mean Time Between Failure (MTBF) rate. This measures the amount of time between phone system failures. While more subjective than other metrics, it's still good information to have for phone systems you are considering. Similar to out-of-box failure rates, ask for supporting documentation for any claims made.

Know this information *before* you make a decision; it can be the difference between years and years of hassle-free operation versus a constant stream of headaches.

V. System Upgrades and Expandability

For many businesses, selecting and installing a new phone system is a major project. Telephony technology is advancing rapidly, with new milestones and innovations being reached on a regular basis. Consequently, you want to make certain you select a phone system that meets your needs today and can easily upgrade and expand to meet your business needs in the future.

Upgrades refer to system enhancements provided by the manufacturer. These upgrades usually address system operational efficiencies, etc. Look for a phone system that easily upgrades – something your business can handle on its own if you so chose, rather than requiring the manufacturer's or other third party involvement.

Expandability refers to how the phone system can grow to meet the needs of your growing company. Your company growth may be fueled by additional office locations or employees, and you'll want a system that can expand accordingly. Look for systems that provide system administration tools so you can handle any office moves, phone addition and changes to the new phone system.

While a phone system tends to be the most overlooked business asset, it can provide the most return on investment and long-term reliability for your business. Most businesses dedicate a significant amount of budget to office equipment such as PCs, which quickly become obsolete in a matter of months. Conversely, a phone system provides long-term scalability as it grows with your business long into the future, accomplished through simple feature add-ons and upgrades of the newest technology.

With a scalable phone system, you get a more cost-effective and reliable solution that enables you the flexibility to grow at your own pace, and gradually add the technology and functionality you require to stay competitive.

VI. Conclusion

While the challenge of selecting a new phone system from the hundreds of available options may initially appear daunting, it is quite manageable using the suggestions in this guide. You should capitalize on the opportunity to select a new phone system that can provide significant cost savings, and gain phone features that can give you a competitive edge.

Technology is constantly improving to provide more features with easier administration and end-user training. Below are some of the features that can improve your productivity, save time and money, and ensure you operate as efficiently as possible:

- **Unified Communications** provides “one-stop” access to all e-mail, fax and voice messages from an email client, cell phone and PDA.
- **Voice-Activated Automated Attendant** provides speech-enabled call routing, allowing you and your customers to use simple speech menu and directory selections.
- **Text-to-Speech** technology allows users to access and listen to email messages over the phone.
- **Remote Teleworker Support** allows employees to access the phone system network from anywhere in the world as if they were sitting at their office desk.
- **ACD** or Automatic Call Distribution is often thought of as a “call center” feature. But using ACD functionality can greatly improve your efficiency in call processing and customer service.
- **In-Building Wireless** technology can often be integrated into the phone system to enable you with access to calls and system features via a wireless handset while away from your desktop telephone. Beware of “aftermarket” solutions that can experience integration problems or not deliver the full feature set of the phone system.

For additional information on conducting a business phone system assessment, or any of the products and services provided by Iwatsu Voice Networks, please visit www.ivoicenetworks.com or call (877) 877-0024.

About Iwatsu Voice Networks

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