



# **Countdown to Satisfaction: Top Considerations in Choosing a Hosted VoIP Provider**

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**Practical Guidance for Purchasing Hosted Voice Solutions**

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## Practical Guidance for Purchasing Hosted Voice Solutions

As more companies adopt Voice over IP (VoIP) communications, hosted solutions are an increasingly popular choice, enhancing VoIP's inherent cost savings over traditional telephony with the added convenience of fully managed services. Industry statistics show that more than one-third of companies adopting VoIP are choosing hosted services – a number that will almost certainly increase as more companies become aware of this cost-saving, feature-rich and scalable alternative to traditional phone service and expensive equipment.

However, choosing a hosted VoIP provider is not without an element of risk. The service delivery method will largely determine the quality of the voice call, as well as create a positive (or negative) experience. This brief whitepaper provides best-practice guidance, in a "countdown" format, for small and medium businesses (SMBs) considering hosted VoIP services, to help ensure their satisfaction with the hosted VoIP solution they choose.

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## Countdown Issue #5: Network and voice quality

Many providers offer hosted VoIP services targeted at SMBs. But not all providers are alike, nor is their service.

Many hosted VoIP providers tout a high-quality voice experience, but they neglect to inform potential customers that their voice traffic is quickly handed off to the public internet, where it is susceptible to jitter and packet-loss – which translate into echo and static that make for a distinctively low-quality call experience. In investigating potential providers, SMBs should look for quality indicators including:

- **Private Secure MPLS Network:** The provider should carry voice traffic on its own private network, to guarantee bi-directional voice quality. As noted above, MPLS networks carry voice traffic over a private network, insulating calls from the unpredictability of internet performance.
- **Offers QoS (Quality of Service) with Dynamic Bandwidth Allocation:** The provider should guarantee a high level of QoS, utilizing dynamic bandwidth allocation to ensure that voice traffic gets priority over any data traffic, thus minimizing any packet loss. QoS capabilities are native on MPLS networks.

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## Countdown Issue #4: Cloud-based, fully managed services

Premise-based phone systems that require each phone to be individually programmed are fast becoming a thing of the past. Instead, phone features can now be delivered via the “cloud.” This means that the service provider is hosting voice features in its network, such as simultaneous ring (follow me), call forwarding options, and music on hold. In addition, it is now possible to integrate calling with popular applications like Microsoft Outlook and Salesforce. Cloud-based delivery provides numerous benefits including:

- **New features and capabilities delivered transparently, via the service provider’s network,** instead of being programmed into each phone. Easy online access is provided to manage users and features.
- **Ongoing benefits from technology innovation without the ongoing capital expense.** Feature delivery is incumbent on the service provider, therefore businesses can focus on their primary business not their phone system; and can take advantage of the latest features without having to worry about working with a PBX vendor to upgrade their existing phone system.
- **Business continuity if physical facilities are damaged or destroyed.** Critical capabilities such as auto attendants and voicemail are still available in the event of business disruption because they are in the cloud. In addition, all traffic to a specific location can be easily forwarded to a different location, as necessary.

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*“Hosted solutions delivered over a managed MPLS network, offer important QoS and security features not found with “bring your own bandwidth” solutions.”*

– Robin Gareiss,  
Nemertes Research

## Countdown Issue #3: A turnkey solution that is easy to administer

Hosted VoIP solutions require equipment installation at each location, such as IP phones and other minimal customer premise-based equipment (CPE). The provider should offer customers the option of installing the equipment themselves, or sending a certified technician to do the job. Having phones and CPE equipment professionally installed ensures that your phones will be working when the installer leaves the site.

Once the system is up and running, management should be easily handled from a single point, internally. A simple online portal should be available, allowing an administrator to quickly execute moves, additions and changes. Employees should have access to their own portal for easy individual phone configuration. Ideally, everything else, including security, bandwidth utilization and network monitoring, is handled remotely by the provider.



## Top Issue #2: Advanced security services—without additional customer premise equipment

Because SMBs rely on the free flow of voice and data communications, they need assurance that they're safeguarded from security threats such as viruses and spam, and protected from network outages. The provider should therefore:

- Proactively monitor the network: The service provider should support and proactively monitor its data, voice and security services on a 24/7 basis from multiple redundant Network and Security Operations Centers. Dedicated support and infrastructure ensures that the network services perform to their maximum potential, and customers receive the best possible technical support available.
- Deliver network-based security: The service provider should provide a comprehensive managed security services suite delivered in the cloud. Components – all of which are managed and maintained by the provider should include:
  - Managed firewall
  - Intrusion protection
  - Anti-virus/anti-spyware
  - Anti-Spam
  - Web filtering
  - Personal protection suite for individual users



## Top Issue #1: Service, service, service

The chosen provider should deliver more than just a high-performance, highly secure converged voice and data network. It should be focused to meet the service needs of SMBs, and have a customer orientation that goes beyond offering all customers a “cookie cutter” solution.

While large carriers do sell hosted services to SMBs, their real focus is on large enterprise businesses. In addition, there are many small “boutique” hosted service providers who deliver a Bring Your Own Bandwidth (BYOB) model, which does not provide the benefits of an MPLS network, and network-based QoS and managed security services. Further, they typically have a self-installation model, leaving it up to the SMB to install their equipment.

### Key criteria to look for include:

- An Enterprise-grade solution that scales: Look for a service provider that offers converged voice and data services to take advantage of efficiencies and cost savings. Beyond that, look at the service model. Does the service provider offer a true turnkey solution? Do they offer the equipment, service, and support for the entire solution, including professional installation? Does the service provider offer network-based managed security services? How extensive is the provider’s MPLS network (if they have one)? Do they offer QoS assurances?
- Provides professional services, including project management: It is highly desirable for the provider to have a national professional services organization that has strong, dedicated expertise in technical issues, service delivery, change management and project management. A smooth deployment is essential, particularly for an SMB whose IT organizations are typically under-resourced.
- Offers flexible access and feature options: SMB customers should be able to choose the type of internet access that their location requires, along with flexible feature and calling packages tailored to the needs of the individual user. Look for providers that include unlimited local calling and features like hunt groups and voicemail. Some providers charge separately for these, which can significantly add to the monthly bill.

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## MegaPath delivers hosted VoIP services designed for SMBs

In addition to single location businesses, MegaPath Duet Hosted Voice is the ideal solution for businesses with multiple locations. This enterprise-grade, cloud-based IP phone service connects all of a company's employees into one unified phone system with the same business features in every location. Available nationwide, MegaPath Duet Hosted includes either T1 or SDSL internet access and leverages MegaPath's dedicated, award-winning MPLS VPN network and network-based QoS to provide crystal clear voice quality and call stability.

In addition, MegaPath's hosted VoIP solution costs up to 50% less per employee than a traditional PBX or key system, and offers far more essential business features. Designed to meet the needs of any size business, MegaPath is the only service provider offering a true turnkey hosted solution utilizing its data, voice, and managed security services over an advanced MPLS nationwide network.

**For more information about how MegaPath can meet your company's needs for hosted VoIP services, please visit [www.megapath.com](http://www.megapath.com).**



**1-877-MEGAPATH • [www.megapath.com](http://www.megapath.com)**

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