



BLACK BOX

The business guide to phone systems

Find the right business phone system for your needs

Do you even need a phone system?

Now, perhaps more than ever before, communicating effectively with customers is crucial to business success.

While ten years ago your landline was the heartbeat of customer communications, advanced technology and digital services are now taking over. Almost everything we do as consumers, from ordering new clothes to paying bills, can happen over the internet. So why not your business calls as well?

But before we get into that, I know what you might be thinking:

"Who calls a business anymore, anyway?"

You'd be surprised.

According to a 2020 Zendesk report,

66 per cent of customers prefer to communicate with a company via phone, with only 28 per cent preferring chat or messaging.^[1]

People still like to talk – the difference is what we use to make and receive business calls: landlines are out, voice over the internet is in.

^[1] - <https://www.zendesk.co.uk/blog/zendesk-customer-experience-trends-report-2020>

However, as it's often the case with new technologies, making sense of it all is not easy, especially for smaller businesses. But do not fret – this eGuide will give you all the information you need to choose the best phone system for your business.

We will look at:

- Breaking down the telecom jargon
- Old-school vs new generation phone systems
- The best choice for micro businesses and sole traders

Jargon buster

Before we explore the different options for your business phone system, we need to understand some of the terms that will come up in your search.

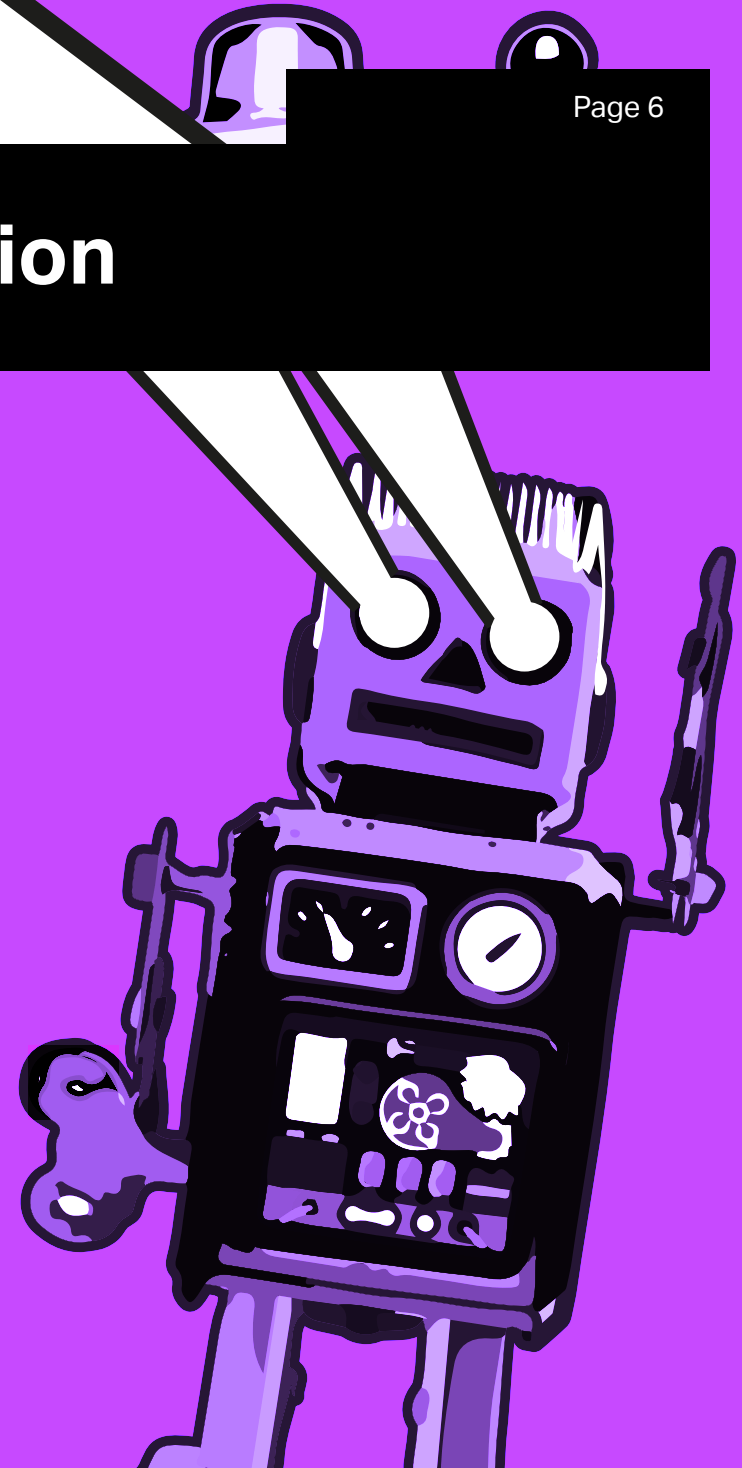
Public Switch Telephone Network (PSTN)	The public telephone network, made up of copper wires and owned and operated by BT Openreach.
Integrated Services Digital Network (ISDN)	A solution to transmit both data and voice over a digital line using the PSTN.
Voice over Internet Protocol (VoIP)	A broad term to refer to alternative solutions to PSTN to transfer voice calls in the form of data over the internet. Often also referred to as IP Telephony, Internet telephony or Cloud-based telephony.

Private Branch Exchange (PBX)	A private telephone network used by a business to make calls and control how they flow into the building. It allows employees to share phone lines without having to purchase individual lines for each person. It can be traditional, on-premises IP or hosted.
Session Initiation Protocol (SIP)	A solution to connect an existing PBX to the VoIP system.
Over the top (OTT) communications	A class of real-time communications solutions that operate over the Internet, rather than the PSTN or traditional telephone network.
Key Telephone System (KTS)	A basic multi-line business phone system, typically used by smaller organisations. Essentially a phone unit with multiple buttons used to transfer incoming calls to specific users within a business.

Old-school vs New Generation

If it wasn't clear enough by the way we use our phones, the world of telecoms and communications is changing rather quickly. Ten years ago, a landline would've been the most obvious (and only) choice to make and receive business calls.

Today, the debate between the old-school landline and the new, shiny VoIP system is hotter than ever.



Landline

This traditional choice uses analogue systems to transmit voice over copper wires on the PSTN. While traditionalists will praise landlines' reliability over 'fickle' internet connection, truth is that the age of the PSTN is truly over. Not only are legacy landlines expensive due to line rental costs and setup fees, but they will soon also become obsolete.

From September 2023, businesses will no longer be able to purchase any ISDN and PSTN-based solutions, and from 2025, BT Openreach will shut PSTN down completely.

So, if you're looking to get a new phone system, you should steer clear of PSTN and ISDN, as they will soon be outdated anyway.

It's time to bid farewell to your old landline – the only option is moving forward.

VoIP

Simply put, VoIP uses a company's existing internet connection to transmit voice calls. When it was first introduced, this solution seemed like a dangerous choice, as it completely relies on the quality of the internet connection to guarantee stable calls.

Nowadays, the speed of most broadband is fast enough to negate any problems around call quality.

VoIP telephony is a simpler option than it sounds, requiring a lot less hardware than legacy systems.

It is delivered by OTT applications to which new features are added regularly, it gives your business more flexibility and it can be used on a variety of devices – from desk phones, to mobiles, tablets and computers.

What are your options for VoIP?

On-premises VoIP

On-premises systems rely on a PBX housed at the business location and that is managed by an in-house team.

The PBX is connected to the internet and enables the business to make and receive calls using SIP Trunks.

Best for:

Larger businesses that prefer to have complete control over their phone system and have the capabilities to support it. Additionally, businesses that have recently invested in a PBX or are restricted by compliance requirements.

On-premises VoIP

Pros	Cons
Full control of the service	High upfront costs
Make the most of existing hardware	Requires extensive tech support
Customisable depending on requirements	Difficult to introduce new features and upgrades
Call quality is not dependent on internet connection	Requires hardware such as a PBX and desk phones
	Tied to hardware location

Cloud-based VoIP

In a cloud-based system, there is no physical PBX at your office, instead it's housed and handled by the provider. In this instance, the business usually pays a monthly fee and lets the provider deal with maintaining and upgrading the PBX technology.

Best for:

Smaller businesses that don't have the IT resources nor budget to invest in an on-premises PBX.

Additionally, businesses with various locations or that are not tied to an office and need the flexibility to make and receive calls wherever they are.

Cloud-based VoIP

Pros	Cons
No upfront costs nor hardware	Support strictly dependent on provider
Minimal onsite equipment	Little control over the service
Easy to scale and upgrade	Call quality is highly dependent on the provider's hosted service
No need for in-house staff to maintain it	
Flexibility to use it anywhere, at any time	

What system should you choose for your business?

A cloud-based phone system is without a doubt the best option for businesses that don't require multiple lines, or extensive features to conduct their business. It is easy to set up and use, requiring no additional IT resources and no upfront costs – making it an affordable option for even the smallest business.

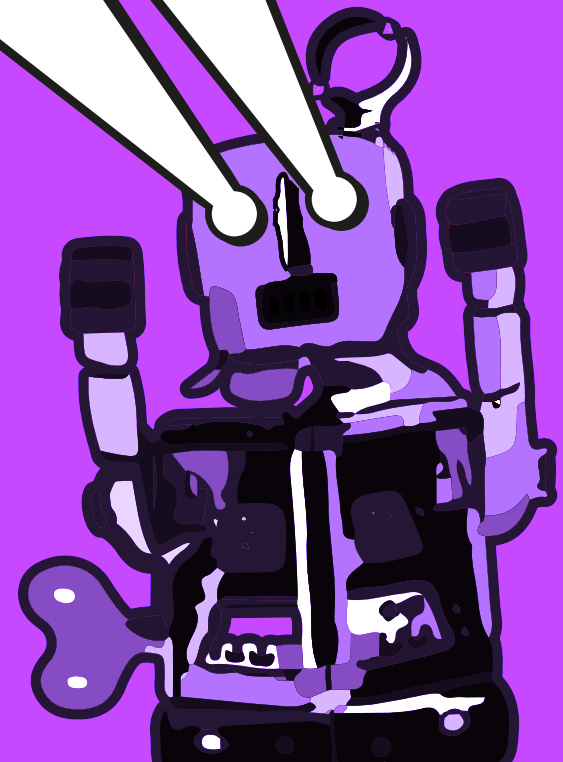
Depending on your needs and available devices, a cloud-based phone system can be easily used on your mobile phone or laptop – ensuring you can make and receive calls wherever you are, rather than where the phone is ringing.

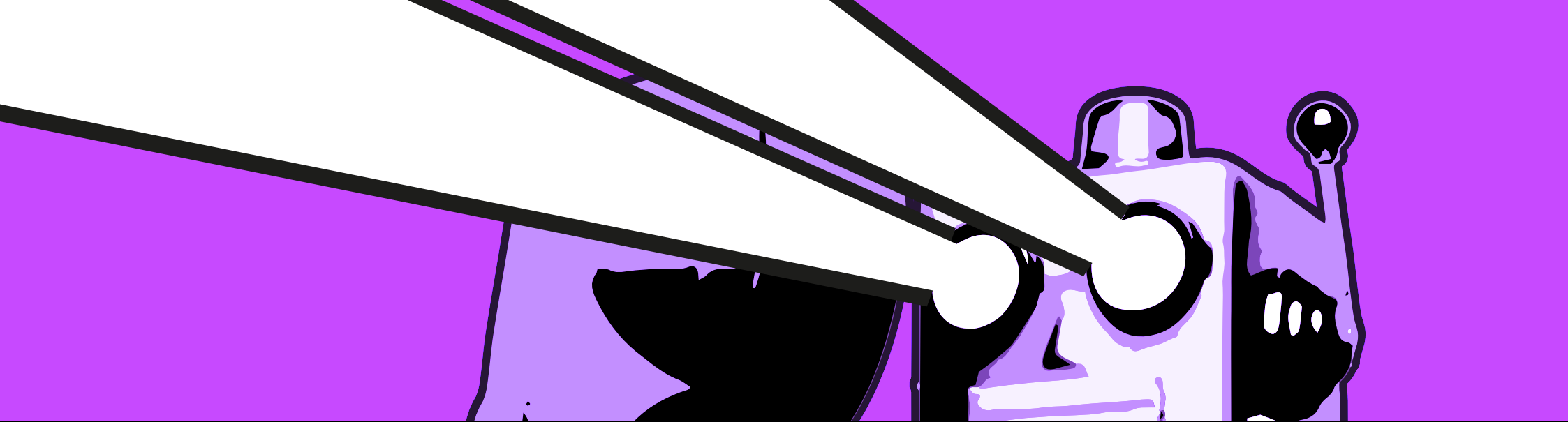
You won't be tied to your desk to talk to your customers, you can be available anytime, anywhere – you'll just need an internet connection.

If you still prefer to stick to your faithful analogue phone, in most cases that won't be an issue – you'll just need to get an adapter to connect it to your broadband.

A cloud-based phone system can also provide more features than a traditional landline, such as email notifications for missed calls or out of hours options, enabling you to handle calls more efficiently through an easy-to-use and familiar interface.

Last but not least, this solution will lower your costs in the long run, removing the need for additional line rental costs and expensive upgrades and maintenance costs.





Save time and work smarter with a cloud-based phone system.

Get in touch to find out more about what we can do for your business
and how we can help you succeed.

URL: blackbox.com
Phone: +44 118 965 6088
Email: sales.emea@blackbox.com

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