

Moving Offices: Cloud PBX could be the answer to your business telephony problems

Could an office move really be as easy as #123?

Moving offices can bring with it all manner of headaches for a business; everything from the actual budget of the move to the new stationery you need to organise and the list of suppliers/authorities you'll need to inform; you may even have to go through a 'consultation period' with your staff and deal with potential redundancies. And of course, a critical element is your phone system and what's going to happen with this when you move.

You highly dependent on your business telephony systems and transitioning this to a new location can be an extremely daunting process.

You're likely to have many concerns; what will happen to my existing phone number, can I take my phone number with me when I move? How much disruption and downtime will there be? What internal resource will we need to allocate to the move? What about hardware, and of course, the cost?

But it doesn't have to be painful. If you are using a Cloud PBX system and plan your move properly you can ensure that at least your telecoms will make a smooth transition to your new location.

Below we look at some specific areas and compare the two scenarios; moving offices along with a traditional PBX system compared to moving offices on a Cloud PBX.

1. Number requirements

Traditional PBX: You'll need to think about where you are moving to, and whether you want to keep your existing telephone number(s). Sometimes even with a very local move you may not be able to keep your number or you may struggle to add new number ranges. If you are moving out of the exchange area then you're not going to be able to keep your numbers with a traditional PBX system unless you are prepared to pay for call forwarding for the lifetime of the contract.

Either way you'll have to order new lines and number ranges and you'll need to plan this at least two weeks in advance. Make sure you're also prepared for the significant set-up costs and ongoing rental costs that will be incurred.

Cloud PBX: There will be no changes required to the numbers used to contact you and the move is completely transparent to your customers and suppliers. What's more if there are changes in your work groups due to different office configurations.

2. Technology Issues

Of course, you'll need to think about the technology and connectivity that will be in place in the new premise. With a Cloud PBX though you have the benefit of only having to consider one network rather than two - the data network.

Traditional PBX: You'll need to replicate the same number of ISDN/copper channels for the new premise (or increase the number if you're making the move in order to support business growth. You'll need to liaise with a traditional telecoms provider for the line rental and installation. Installation will take 14 working days on average but again this can vary. Be aware there may be additional time needed for cabling, site surveys etc.

Cloud PBX: Having already ported your existing numbers to the cloud platform there's nothing more to do; simply set up your new LAN/NBN, plug in your phones and off you go!

3. Hardware requirements

Traditional PBX: You'll need a physical server/comms room in which to house everything; you'll have cables running from the comms room to each phone. You'll need to physically move the PBX from the old office to the new location, the server will need to be reinstalled, have new cables laid down and get everything correctly patched in.

Cloud PBX: You won't need to worry about additional cabling beyond your LAN, you'll just need to make sure you've got the correct number of sockets and phones to plug in and you're all set. Or instead of physical phones, many businesses are now opting for softphones instead and simply purchasing USB headsets. This means that users have access to their extension & IM/Presence wherever they are; in the office, at home, or even the coffee shop!

4. Future requirements and growth

If you are moving because the business is expanding then you will most likely know what you are using now and what you need to scale up to in terms of the number of lines and channels. But also consider the future needs of the business and where you might be in 5 or 10 years' time.

For example, might there be a shift towards home-working? If you're having to physically move an on-premise PBX system might now be a good time to consider the cloud if you haven't already? Might you need extra features that aren't available through traditional PBX systems? How about additional lines and number ranges?

Traditional PBX: Scaling up will involve ordering more ISDN/copper lines; so be sure to factor in the lead times involved in this as well as the cost of installation and rental. You'll probably end up over committing too in terms of what you actually need as ISDN lines have to be bought in set bundles (ISDN2 or ISDN30). Scaling down on a traditional PBX can be quite tricky as you'll most likely be tied into a contract based on a set number of lines.

The traditional offering of calls and lines is often not enough to effectively service the needs of the 21st century business. If you want to acquire a new number range when you move or further down the line then you'll also need to check with your provider to see if there is enough capacity. If you need to order new lines to be installed, make sure you leave at least 90 days to order new lines from your telecoms provider.

Furthermore, if you need to add users or capacity you may need an upgrade license from your PBX/switch vendor which is likely to be a significant capex cost.

Cloud PBX: You can easily and simply turn on new extensions as and when you need to activate them. It's simple, cost effective and instantaneous. If you've got seasonal peaks then you can flex up and scale back down again without any bother.

5. Planning Time

If you know in advance that you're moving offices on a certain date then do communicate this with your existing suppliers, key customers and the relevant authorities. Sometimes we don't have as much time as we'd ideally like in these situations.

Traditional PBX: You're going to need at least two months, possibly longer as there are so many factors to consider. Communicate with your suppliers at the earliest

opportunity so that you're fully aware of the timescales involved. Factor in time for potential outages and down-time when you make the transition.

Cloud PBX: If you're already using a cloud PBX then your move will be simple as the transition won't require any hefty legwork at all. You can just plug in your phones in the new office once your LAN is set up.

6. Manpower and resource

Will it be a staggered move or will you move everything all at once? When will it happen? How much down time will there be? If you're a Monday-Friday operation then it makes sense to schedule the move for a weekend? What is 'off peak' for your business? You could install everything new and then test the systems before then finally just moving the people over?

Traditional PBX: As there's physical kit to move, you'll need to schedule manpower to do this. It's often down to the IT team to manage this task out of hours. This is something that you'll need to plan for in terms of the people required and the time this 'lift and shift' operation will take. To minimise risk, it's common for businesses to adopt a phased approach to the move. However, this poses a challenge in terms of controlling the DDI calls and which location these are delivered to during the transition phase. But it's highly unlikely that you'll have enough flexibility to control different DDI numbers. You should be able to divert for the main number but you'll need to carefully coordinate this with your telecoms provider and agree a switchover date.

Cloud PBX: The only consideration is ensuring that your data network is up and running – then plug in your phones and they will work.

7. Testing

It's imperative that you test everything before getting your people in. Once the desks and furniture/equipment is all in and you've either moved the old phones or invested in new technology, you need to test that all of the numbers work. Test any hunt groups and DDI numbers, check the routing is all correct and calls are all ending up in the right place.

Traditional PBX: All this needs to be done out of hours by your IT/technical department.

Cloud PBX: Simple and straightforward - with cloud you could go as far as to ask the users to bring their own phones from the old office and plug them in themselves!