

# 10 Tips to Find the Right SMB Communications Technology

How to use network technology to help your business work more efficiently, cut costs, improve customer satisfaction, & stay ahead of the competition.

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# The Evolving Business Landscape

And Its Effect  
on Communications Technology



The way businesses operate, collaborate,  
and service customers has changed;  
the way employees work has evolved.

Businesses must adopt the latest technologies to  
remain competitive and thrive.

# Why the Shift?

The business landscape is in constant flux—and businesses must continually evolve to communicate internally, and with customers, in the most preferred formats. For some executives, it's a task in itself to keep up with the shifting market, but understanding the causes—and business opportunities—is the first step in ensuring your organization continually competes and thrives.


Factors that drive the evolving business climate include: information growth (and overload), accelerated information flow, and advancements in technology.

# Big Data: Information Growth & Flow

Even for SMBs, available data (such as emails, customer contact information, sale information, market and competitive research, and more) has moved past terabytes into multi-petabyte ranges. IDC estimates 2011's 1.8 zettabytes of global data will grow to 7.9 zettabytes by 2015.

*Dataversity's* [The Growth of Unstructured Data: What To Do with All Those Zettabytes?](#) helps put those numbers into perspective:

- A terabyte (TB) is 1,000 gigabytes (GB) (or 1,000,000,000,000 bytes). The [Library of Congress](#)' digital data hit about 235TB in April 2011, and adds about 5TB per month.
- A petabyte (PB) is 1 million terabytes. To put it into real-world terms, think that Google processes approximately [24PB of data per day](#).
- A zettabyte (ZB) is **1 billion** terabytes. Wikipedia puts the large amount into perspective, [citing research from the University of California, San Diego](#), which reports that Americans consumed 3.6 ZB of information in 2008.



What does data really mean for businesses? **Businesses must adapt network infrastructure and processes to handle, analyze, disseminate and use data for an advantage.**

Another IDC prediction turning into reality: [35 percent of the global workforce will be mobile by 2013](#). Does this sound like your business' mobile workforce? If so, it means your infrastructure, systems and processes must be accessible, reliable and secure for networked employees and customers.

**Data overload, accelerated information flow, and advancements in technology** can be clutch or a crutch to your business' future. The Economist's 2011 report, [Game Changer: How Companies Are Responding to a Fast-Changing Business Environment](#), cites these causes for the shift, among others. And in terms of how businesses respond, the report's key findings show:

- Businesses have taken more time to reach critical business decisions—**48%** surveyed say decision-making time has increased in the past 5 years.
- Only **39%** of executives think they're making sound decisions when it comes to a response to change.
- Frontline employees are the best sources for information on emerging business opportunities and threats.



## How can you support your business through the evolving market?

For many small- or medium-sized businesses, it's about affordable technology that can enable a mobile workforce, provide access to the most up-to-date information anywhere and from any device, and grow with your company.

**SMBs are moving toward the cloud, and hosted IP telephony is an area where businesses can start the move with immediate impact.**

Hosted communications technology provides enterprise-level services and functionality at an affordable cost. It lets small- and medium-sized businesses operate with centrally managed communications that also show professional service for staff and customers.

Additional business benefits of hosted communications, as they relate to the market drivers above, include:

- **Business continuity and growth planning.** As your business grows, advanced IP-phone systems can scale and integrate with future systems.
- **Business intelligence and data processing.** Technology advances with the rate of change—necessitating a hosted, adaptable solution.
- **Efficiency and productivity of collaborative workforce.** Access to communications and social business data mean employees can collaborate from anywhere.
- **Enterprise features at an SMB cost.** Provide staff and customers with a professional experience each time they call—from incoming call management to CRM integration, the end-to-end experience is quality, at an affordable price.
- **Improved availability to customers for better service.** Answering systems that follow your representatives through their day, from desk to cell, give customers anytime access.
- **Reduced total costs of ownership (TCO),** in terms of op-ex vs. cap-ex. Reduce capital expenditures with hosted IP-phone systems. Pricing based on services, service level agreements (SLAs) and number of users save SMBs overhead technology and maintenance costs.
- A completely managed or outsourced communications solution **keeps your business focused on its area of expertise,** rather than aspects of IT administration.

Now that you know why the cloud is the answer to better SMB communications management, let's examine what to look for in a solution.





# Find the Right Communications Tech for Your Business

10 Tips for finding the technology  
that will make your business grow.

For many small- and medium-sized business owners, it's clear that cloud-based communications technology can move organizations forward. However, the **telephony market continues to evolve at a rapid pace, and choosing the right communications service provider can be daunting.**

The following 10 tips are meant as a guide and discussion starter for finding the right communications technology for your business.

# 1 Identify Business Needs, Pain Points & Opportunities

Hosted telephony has the potential to improve business operations, processes and strategy, and therefore, upper executives need to be involved in the decision-making process.

First, align your management team in terms of business needs, challenges and opportunities. For example, is your business working to grow and retain its millennial workforce, who demands greater mobility and CRM technology? Do service personnel need more seamless transfer and coaching phone systems to provide a better overall experience for customers?

Once identified and prioritized, it will be easier to work with a telephony provider to meet challenges and opportunities with the right solution.

# 2 ■ Assess Your Current State of IT

Assess your business' current technologies, licenses, network usage and end users. Do employees have the right technologies to match responsibilities? Is any existing business hardware or software nearing the end of its lifecycle?

In regard to communications technology specifically, identify your business' average amount of internal, local and international calls per month; consider the amount of inbound vs. outbound calls as well.

Knowing what technology profiles and assets your business starts with is the first step toward improving them. Assess your current state of IT to ensure telephony solutions integrate with existing systems, and support your company's IT roadmap.

# 3 Compare Options, Features & Costs

What are the benefits, risks and costs of on-premise telephone or PBX systems, compared to hosted PBX (or hosted telephone) systems? For example, a few cost considerations are compared below:

On-Premise IP-PBX Costs		Hosted IP-PBX Costs	
+	-	+	-
Potentially lower ongoing costs; no risk of fee increase.	Higher setup and installation costs; unknown long-term maintenance costs.	Lower setup cost; no maintenance costs.	Potentially higher ongoing service provider costs; greater dependency on vendor, and its VoIP technology.



Other features to weigh include the range of features or options available, level of control or management needed, and technology implementation and maintenance needs.

Hosted phone system providers can supplement internal resources to take full advantage of capacity, security, access and more. Also consider business planning, network availability, security, compatibility, licensing, management and overall trust when choosing a virtual phone system partner.

# 4 ■ Identify Your Business' Technology Roadmap

Look for a provider that wants the same things you do—a partner who cares about where your business is heading, and providing the right technology to take you there.

Choose a telephony partner that asks questions outside of IP-phone systems alone. Your partner should **want to know the inner workings of your business**, including the challenges and opportunities outlined in Tip No. 1.

From there, he or she can show you **how telephony trends of IP-based communications, mobility and converged networks can impact and drive your business.**

# 5. Build to Scale

Will the hosted communications technology you choose last? Will it scale with your business?

Consider the following when comparing options:

- Does VoIP technology integrate with existing equipment?
- What are installation processes, and what's to expect in terms of technology and network maintenance?
- Does your contract account for easily adding or removing users? Does adding or removing a line cause downtime to overall systems?
- What security options are included with setup or as add-ons? As your company grows, protecting hosted data becomes more critical.

# 6. Know Your Network

What is your current network load and available unused bandwidth?

Knowing what bandwidth your business operates will help you make an informed decision when comparing providers and provider offerings. Ensure providers can meet your business' networking demands, and that you trust the infrastructure or data centers supporting provider solutions.

Based on current usage and future needs, your business may require a simple digital subscriber line (DSL), or dedicated circuits from 3M bps to 100M bps. Ensure that your hosted communications provider promises quality of service (QoS) on its connection, and details network promises within its SLA. In turn, your business will experience the crisp voice quality and reliable internet connection operations demand.

# 7 Compare Comprehensive Reporting, Centralized Management Options

Offer trial accounts to your IT staff, office admins, and/or top sales personnel who'll likely be using the communications system most. See if there's a preference in regard to usability, and ensure that the chosen system meets all management and reporting needs.

When testing, be sure to also consider:

- Incoming Call Management: Are calls distributed to the right personnel? Is the process improved for the caller?
- Centralized Management and Control: Is the user dashboard easy to navigate, and does it provide the information that matters to your business upfront, with details and advanced analytics readily available?
- Usability: Is the system easy for personnel to manage and use? Will the onboarding process be an easy transition, or do you risk unhappy customers along the learning curve?

# 8. Understand Support & Services

Will you have a single point of contact for technical support, software fixes, etc.? Are service fees additional or rolled into monthly packages?

Ensure every question your business has about service and support is detailed within your telephony solution provider's SLA. A thorough SLA accounts for maintenance and add-on expenses that may arise.

# 9 Ask for Referrals & Customer References

Ask for 5-10 recent, comparable customers you can contact about quality of service and support. Red flags may arise if the provider does not have a list of customers willing to speak on behalf of the company, or if existing customers have complaints about the system.

When you connect with a current or past customer for reference, ask about:

- Installation and the onboarding process
- Overall feedback from staff
- Quality of service and support
- Uptime and availability
- Surprise fees
- Any wins or must-have features for improved business operations

# 10 ■ Review Contracts, Lock-In & Costs

Check the details of top providers' SLAs to ensure service expectations are detailed. You may even have your legal or financial advisors read through to make sure you're clear on details of the agreement before signing. A great provider will walk through an SLA with you to discuss questions or explain features if needed.





# Hosted Communications Technology Adoption for SMBs

For many, the challenge is not in convincing businesses that hosted communications technology is the next step, it's mapping out a solution that actively takes your business communications to the cloud.

# Law Firm Adopts Hosted PBX System When Electric Storm Knocks Out On-Premise PBX

Following is the story of how one small business improved operations with a hosted PBX system from Nexogy.

When an electrical storm knocked out [Cuevas, Ortiz & Goldstein, P.A.](#)'s on-premise PBX, it left 30 employees without desk phones. Also, it meant that clients were calling in without reaching voicemail boxes—just unanswered rings.

Nexogy had used the firm's legal services for its business, so Cuevas, Ortiz & Goldstein knew who to call for communications consultation.

Because this firm had a high-speed internet connection, **Nexogy was able to install 30 IP phones in less than 4 hours and enable operational, billable attorneys.** The fully hosted phone system was operational less than 24 hours after the firm lost its on-premise PBX.

Now, the firm benefits from a centrally managed, hosted PBX system, which means it's built with the advantages of **enterprise-level redundancies and disaster recovery (DR) planning** that a 30-person firm may not be able to afford otherwise. Another perk — its hosted VoIP solutions offer out-of-service conditions (OOS), which transfer calls directly to a professional's mobile phone while away from the office or during internet or power outages.

Nexogy recommends that all of its clients have redundancies like OOS conditions set up from the start—**ensuring all calls are routed to cell phones or landlines in the case of a disconnection.**

A favorite feature of the law office is that attorneys or administrators can track and monitor all calls, including the exact time the call was made or taken, its duration, notes and more through a personal web portal. It's an efficient way to streamline reporting minutes of client calls. **This is also a great feature for sales teams, customer service reps, and others that need to track and report call details.**

Regardless of the industry or phase in your business' journey to the cloud, network technology can **help your business work more efficiently, cut costs and improve customer satisfaction**—keeping you ahead of the competition.

Manage information growth (and overload), accelerated information flow, and advancements in technology to drive your evolved business climate.

# About Nexogy

[Nexogy](#) is a complete telecommunications provider that gives small- and medium-sized businesses the power to manage all of the communications from anywhere, at any time. It's been providing communications services to thousands of businesses since 1999, bringing new technology to your desktop and device, matched with outstanding support and customer service. Nexogy is a trademark of LD Telecommunications, Inc.

# A customized telephone system, designed just for you.

Nexogy works closely with you, every step of the way, to implement a solution that meets your unique business communication needs.





# Big business communications services, at affordable prices.

Nexogy offers the following telecommunications services, and more:

- [Advanced Phone Systems](#)
- [Basic Business Lines](#)
- [Broadband Connection](#)
- [Virtual Fax](#)
- [Visual Voicemail](#)
- [SIP Trunking](#)
- [International & Toll-Free Numbers](#)
- [Web Conferencing & Video Collaboration](#)
- [Hosted IP Video Surveillance Services](#)
- [Hosted Call Center Solutions](#)

# About the Author



Carlos Lahrssen is president and CEO of Nexogy, as well as founder, president and CEO of LD Telecommunications, Inc., Nexogy's parent company. Lahrssen is an industry fan, follower, and advocate — staying ahead of the latest telecommunications trends and technologies. He specializes in architecting customized VoIP applications.

Read more of Lahrssen's [recent blog posts](#), or connect on [LinkedIn](#) and Twitter ([@lahrssen](#)).

# Thank You!

We hope you enjoyed 10 Tips to Find the Right SMB Communications Technology. For more information, check out the Nexogy [hosted communications technology blog](#), or connect with us on [Twitter](#), [Facebook](#), [LinkedIn](#) or [Google+](#).

Or, to discuss your business' hosted communications technology, please call 1-866-NEXOGY2, or visit [nexogy.com/contact-nexogy](https://www.nexogy.com/contact-nexogy).