



The Value of Unified Communications for Businesses

Unified communications is all about having all the tools you need — from calls and faxes to video conferences — under one roof. It can help business become more efficient while also allowing for faster connections and more collaboration.

So what types of unified communications applications are best for businesses? IDC found two main types: cloud-based voice over Internet protocol, or VoIP, and premises-based VoIP.

Cloud-based systems — also known as “hosted communications” live in the “cloud,” or a group of data centers managed by a provider.

Premises-based VoIP, on the other hand, comes with equipment that’s housed in your business. The following is a more detailed comparison of the two unified communications applications.



Unified Communications Application Comparison

	Cloud-based VoIP	Premises-based VoIP
Where is your data stored?	Voice data bounces between your VoIP phone and data centers that are geographically dispersed so they can back each other up. The redundancy minimizes service interruptions or outages and keeps your data protected.	All equipment is housed in your business, not in off-site data centers..
What happens if you need to make a change?	The unified communications provider can adjust settings for the change, or, even have a web-based interface where employees can make changes for their job and you maintain oversight.	Your business has complete control over maintenance and configuration of servers, hardware and software. Because of this, it's best to have an in-house IT expert, who would be able to access and change settings at any time.
What about price?	Cloud-based VoIP has a low setup cost and operating expenses. Maintenance is included in your cloud-based plan.	On-premises VoIP requires an upfront capital investment, though your business would own the phone system, hardware and software associated with it.
Which is right for your business?	Because cloud-based VoIP is conveniently scalable, it is perfect for businesses anticipating quick growth or decline, location changes or seasonal shifts in staff.	Try premises-based VoIP if your business has highly customized configurations and security protocols.

The value of VoIP is clear, but knowing which provider is less so. Maybe you've written down a list of potential providers and are wondering how to pare it down, or maybe you just don't know where to begin. Here are some go-to questions you should be asking each VoIP provider.

- What features are included in the VoIP package?
- Will there be additional costs?
- What maintenance and support are included?
- Do you have to sign a contract?
- Does the provider offer training for you and your employees?
- Will the provider port the existing phone numbers associated with your business?
- Does the provider support analog extensions?
- Does the provider give you an option to bring your own phones?
- Does the provider also offer Internet access?

Be sure to uncover any potentially hidden costs associated with cloud-based communications services. A seasoned, reliable provider will be very up-front with what you do and do not get with their services.