

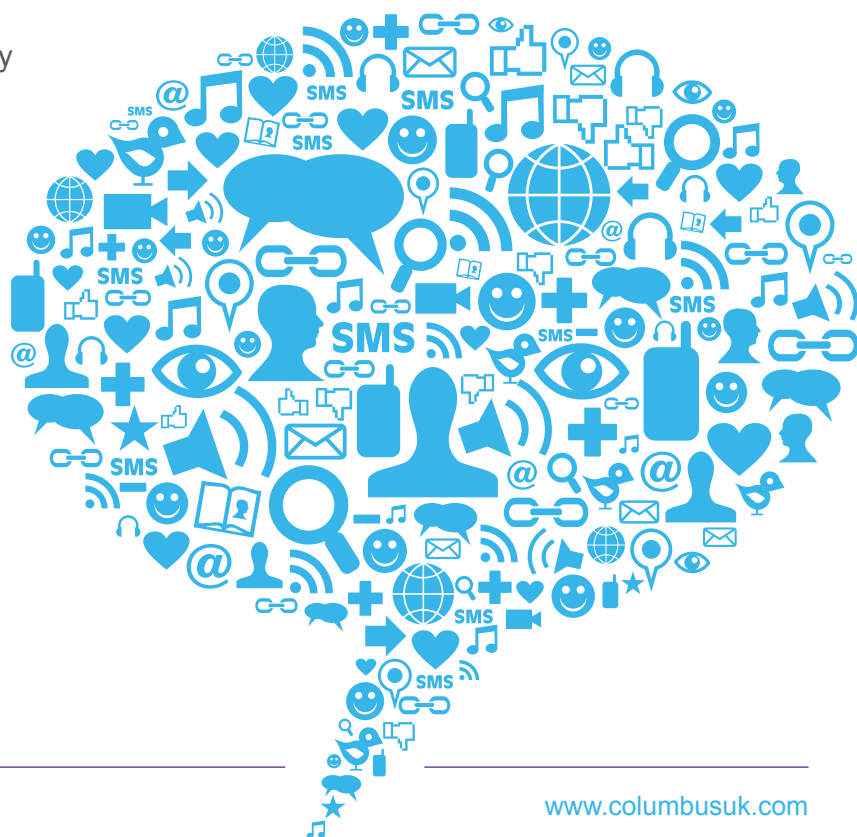
An SME's guide to improving business performance through connected communications

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Find out how you can improve business performance with unified communications

To support healthy, continued growth, every business needs to operate effectively. From IT to human resources, telecoms to finance, every function needs to work efficiently in order to maximise profitability and to free up funds for investment back into the business.

Communications play a major part in modern business operations. However it's easy to assume your existing phone system is operating effectively if there isn't an obvious issue with performance.





But there are several problems with the traditional telecoms system that businesses often overlook:

- The on-site PBX is limited in capacity – as your company grows you will need to purchase additional expansion cards until the maximum limit is reached
- Adding capacity to the PBX means installing and renting additional ISDN lines
- Operating a unified telecoms system across multiple sites is complex and costly, and each office will need its own on-site PBX



Business growth is not impossible with an on-site system, but it is slow and will eventually reach an upper limit:

- There is a lead time associated with the purchase and installation of new ISDN lines
- There is a similar delay in purchasing and installing the necessary hardware upgrades for the PBX
- Configuration of new calling groups, extensions and voicemail may require professional assistance, again attracting more delays waiting for engineer availability



These delays may be short, but any disruption comes at a cost.

Similarly:

- Costly or complex on-site solutions offer poor value for money
- Delays and capacity problems negatively affect customer service, and limit business growth
- Money spent maintaining an on-site, traditional system could be better invested in improving the customer's experience or expanding operations

On-site, ISDN-based systems have obvious failings, but these can be avoided with a hosted telephony solution. When it comes to telecoms, there are three major hurdles that a hosted phone system can help SMEs overcome:



Difficulties in selecting and implementing a telecoms system that grows with the business



Justifying any investment or expenditure in a new comms system



Ensuring a consistent level of customer service across the business

1. Plan for growth

Whether you're purchasing your first telecoms system or replacing an existing on-site PBX, your business needs to choose a solution that will be able to support your business for long as possible, in order to see maximum return on your investment. Many businesses initially look for similar replacements for their existing on-site solution, often using ISDN lines to provide connectivity, as it is technology that is familiar and has met their needs in the past.

However, by ignoring alternative services these businesses could be unknowingly restricting their business performance.

Technological advancements and improvements in connectivity speeds have meant that hosted services have become a much more viable option for businesses of all sizes.

Choosing a hosted solution over a traditional system has many advantages, particularly for growing SMEs, as much of the necessary configuration and provisioning can be done more easily:

- A new extension can be deployed in seconds using the hosted PBX console, usually an online portal
- Additional users can be added within minutes, without the need for third party support
- Branch offices can be joined to the main switchboard simply by connecting VoIP handsets to the network - the same goes for homeworkers
- The simple 'per user, per month' pricing structure ensures you only ever pay for what you need

Ultimately, a hosted phone system ensures that SMEs have access to all the capacity they need, when they need it, while remaining cost-effective. So if the business grows, the telecoms system will not hold them back.

Even in the age of the internet, calling in on the telephone still accounts for 73% of interactions in the UK.

2. Maximise spend

As previously mentioned, there is a need to extract maximum value from any business investment. After all, the less money spent, the greater the potential profit margins.

Purchasing an on-premise PBX is a big capital investment, bringing with it the problems of owning and maintaining physical assets and not forgetting depreciation.



Subscribing to a hosted solution allows for a move to operational expenditure:

- Confirming annual costs upfront
- No requirement to purchase hardware or software assets
- Licensing and maintenance costs are built into the subscription fee

With telecoms expenditure clarified in advance, business owners are able to budget more effectively and avoid any large upfront costs, freeing up cash for investment in other areas of the business.

3. Improve customer satisfaction

An always-on world demands that your business is always available. Unanswered phone calls are no longer an option, particularly when customers have instant access to your competitors online if they perceive they have received unsatisfactory service.

A hosted telecoms solution offers businesses a number of tools to improve availability and raise customer satisfaction by ensuring calls are always answered:



Access calls from any office – so long as you are logged in to an enabled handset, calls to your extension will be connected to them.



Smartphone support – even when out of the office, calls can be routed seamlessly to your smartphone at no extra cost via call twinning or compatible smartphone app.

In the event of a localised disaster, hosted VoIP can also ensure business continuity. If your office is rendered inaccessible for whatever reason, so too is the on-site PBX. Your entire phone system is effectively out of action until you can get back on site, or wait for your service provider to activate call forwarding, which can be expensive and can take hours to put in place. Because hosted telecoms use always-on, always-accessible cloud infrastructure, local outages will have no effect to service. Even if your office is completely inaccessible, all incoming calls can be quickly diverted to smartphone apps or replacement VoIP handsets using the online portal configuration – your clients won't even be able to tell the difference.



69% of people who call a business will hang up instead of leaving a message. That means they call someone else, probably your competitor. – BT.

4. Use statistics to improve performance

To verify that performance really is improving, your business will need to be able to define and measure relevant metrics. A good hosted phone system will provide suitable call reporting to provide you with a number of valuable insights. These can be used to assess the performance of marketing campaigns, customer service delivery and provide the data needed to make informed strategic resourcing and budgetary decisions.

But far from being a tool reserved for historical analysis, hosted reporting tools also allow businesses like yours to gain a real-time view of activities. This data allows for immediate reallocation of resources, or can be output to a wallboard display to help call centre operatives stay on the ball.

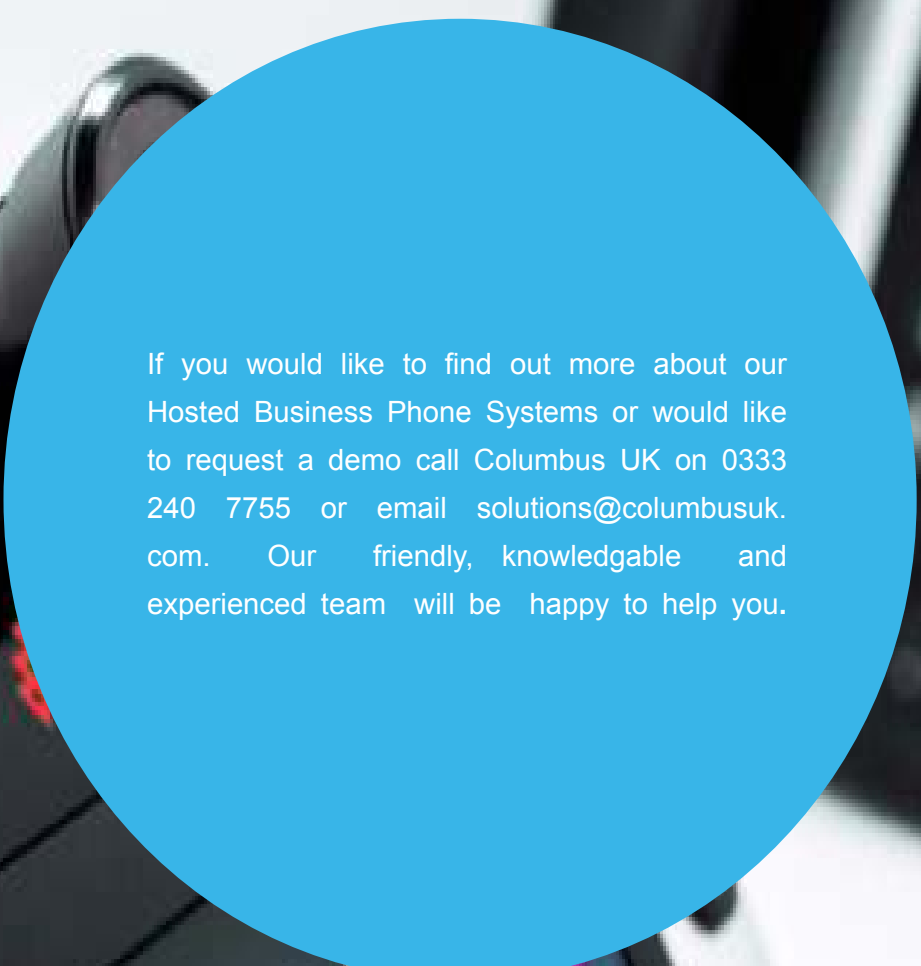
By keeping all of the business connected and communicating, you are guaranteed to deliver an improved service to your customers.



Takeaways:

Modern hosted phone systems solve the major challenges facing businesses wanting to improve operational performance:

- Providing scalability to assist with growth
- Providing maximum return on investment
- Boosting availability and customer satisfaction
- Providing data to make further improvements into the future



If you would like to find out more about our Hosted Business Phone Systems or would like to request a demo call Columbus UK on 0333 240 7755 or email solutions@columbusuk.com. Our friendly, knowledgeable and experienced team will be happy to help you.