



Maybe it's Time to Consider a Telephone Upgrade

PRIVATE BRANCH EXCHANGE (PBX) PHONE SYSTEMS ONCE WERE WITHIN REACH OF ONLY THE LARGEST CORPORATIONS. THEN LOWER COST HARDWARE MADE THEM ACCESSIBLE TO MEDIUM-SIZE BUSINESSES. NOW WITH HOSTED IP-BASED SHARED SYSTEMS, EVEN SMALL BUSINESSES AND HOME-BASED BUSINESSES MIGHT FIND A PBX IN THEIR PRICE RANGE.

Clients and prospective clients don't care how you do it, but they expect you to have a telephone system that doesn't get in their way. Websites, blogs, and a social media presence are all important, but if your clients interact with you by phone, the telephone system is critical.

Don't take that consideration too lightly because not all companies need the same level of telephone support. Some large companies deal with their customers almost exclusively via their website and e-mail. But if yours is a *high touch* business, the telephone system might be the most critical link you have. Trying to make do with a phone system patched together from equipment intended for home use will make a poor impression.

Besides being expensive to buy, old PBX gear was bulky and often required its own room. Today's phone systems that are provided as an Internet-based service mitigate both of those issues because there's no hardware to install locally and the monthly service fee can be worked in to your company's monthly budget.

Technically, these are known as hosted IP PBX systems. The IP part is *Internet protocol*,



so most of the equipment is located off-premises. As a result, the systems are scalable and services may be added or eliminated at any time. Companies that need call center capabilities can add it. Likewise audio conferencing, music on hold, call forwarding, auto attendant, employee directory, and Web conferencing.

The systems are based on voice over Internet protocol (VoIP) technology. If you've ever used a service such as Skype, you're already familiar with VoIP. Instead of point-to-point connections created by traditional telephone systems, VoIP treats phone calls as data. Analog voice signals are digitized and sent in packets. Employees can make and receive calls on the corporate PBX regardless of their location. To an outside caller, the experience is identical to calling a company with an in-house hardware-based PBX system.

Hosted systems frequently offer a long menu of services to choose from.

According to one of the larger providers of such services, 8x8, which hosts more than 20,000 busi-

ness PBX systems, these are the most commonly used features:

- Direct dial telephone number.
- Extension dialing from any location.
- Personalized voice mail.
- Find me/follow me.
- Voice mail message delivery to e-mail inbox.
- Caller ID with name.
- Three-way calling.
- Do not disturb (DND).
- Microsoft Outlook integration.

Those are just a start, though, because these providers offer lots of options such as dedicated fax service, live-answer switchboards, and toll-free or virtual numbers that provide a local number outside your geographic area. They can also provide unified messaging that makes it possible for employees to receive voice mails, e-mail messages, and faxes in the same inbox, as well as to make and receive calls from an IP phone, a mobile phone, or a computer.

In most cases, a new hosted IP PBX system can use a business's existing phone numbers. You will need a high-speed Internet connection and to ensure continuous service, you may want to consider some sort of fail-over service from your Internet service provider.

Small businesses that have employees who are located in multiple locations and that are struggling with communications issues may find a

hosted phone system such as this to be worthwhile because they can provide no-cost “inter-office” calls even when those offices are widely separated.

Some providers can include a range of local and long-distance calling plans, including low-cost

international calling plans that are suited to an individual company’s needs. Ω

Enable or Motivate? Few Changes in 500,000 Years.

THERE IS A REMARKABLE SIMILARITY BETWEEN THE WAY WE WORK TODAY AND THE WAY OUR ANCESTORS WORKED THOUSANDS OF YEARS AGO.

Our daily commute to work is much the same as the hunting party gathering to start the hunt. Routine work can be considered locating and stalking prey.

Then success:

we achieved

something;

the job is

finished

and it’s

great.

That’s

the equiva-

lent of attacking

and bringing

down a large

animal. The

next consid-

eration is

compensation, or dividing the prey so we can carry it. Commuting to our home is about the same as returning to the cave or wherever the tribe lives.

How Do We Work?

AS WE REVIEW THESE FIVE PARTS OF HOW WE WORK, IT’S EVIDENT THAT, FOR THE MOST PART, COMMUTING (TO AND FROM), THE ROUTINE WORK, AND COMPENSATION ARE JUST PLAIN BORING AND FREQUENTLY RESULT IN LESS THAN HIGHLY MOTIVATED EMPLOYEES.

Compensation rarely motivates employees. It is, in fact, demotivating if perceived as inequitable.

So what’s left? Success. Achievement. Results. Recognition for a super job. That’s what turns people on and keeps them charging.

Our ancestors were certainly motivated by their success. And our instincts haven’t changed much over the years. Is there, therefore, a way to build into the management process an opportunity for success for every employee, whether you have just a few or a few hundred?

Yes. There is a way. It’s called managing effectively and it *enables* people to perform superbly, requires a bit of creative thinking,

occasionally creates a bit of objection, takes a bit of time, and almost always results in improved performance.

Here’s how to manage effectively:

First, make certain your employees have as complete a job as possible. Review the work processes and change them, if necessary, so employees produce a clearly identifiable output, result, or product. People want to see the results of their hard work and to know that what they accomplished has value and meets or exceeds your expectations.

Next, give employees a measure of autonomy—the right to make the decisions needed to do the work. This may also mean letting them decide how to do the work. When employees are free to make

these decisions, an enormous energy is released that compounds the value of their contribution to the company. Can you remember your 2- or 3-year old saying, “I do it, I do it, I do it!”

Then, identify each employee’s client. That is the person or organization who directly benefits from the employee’s work. It may be the person in the next cubicle, in the next building, at another company, or perhaps a supplier or customer. Make certain employees know who uses their output, how it is used, and why. If possible, link the employee and client so they can communicate directly.

Finally, make certain employees get information (feedback) about their performance soon after the work is finished and frequently during the process. Employees get feedback from you, the manager, the work process itself, or from their client. Of these, the most valuable is feedback from their client.

Although this description is concise, using the process requires intense effort. It works, though, and I suggest you give it a try. Ω

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