WHAT PHONE FEATURES SHOULD EVERY SMALL BUSINESS HAVE?

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8 x 8, Inc.
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• VoIP made easy...
• Basic phone features...
• Advanced features, including online meetings, mobile solutions and more!
1. Introduction

There is no doubt that this is both an exciting and challenging time to own a small business. Exciting, because technology has given the small business owner tools that make running their business easier. Computers, hardware, software, broadband and the like have revolutionized business. Small businesses are able to do far more—faster, easier, and cheaper – than ever before. It truly is a revolution.

But it surely is also a challenging time to be in business because, of course, in this economy small business owners are finding that they have to do more with less: Fewer customers, smaller orders, fewer employees, smaller budgets . . . no, it is not easy. But the good news is that, once again, technology can make a difference, a big difference. In fact, even with fewer resources, there is no reason any small business need look or act small.

The truth is, even today, especially today, there are ways to remain competitive, look professional, get the job done, and even save money in the process. For example, by doing something as simple as choosing a VoIP phone system, you can get superior phone quality and powerful features at a fraction of the cost of an old-fashioned phone system. Think of it this way: Are you still typing letters on a typewriter? Of course not. Why? Because technology has made it so that there are better alternatives.
Well, the same is true for your phone system. As you will discover in this e-book, there really is no reason to cling to a 19th century invention when a superior 21st century alternative, full of powerful, cool features, is easily and readily available.

Sound good? It should! Read on.

2. VoIP Made Easy

So just what is VoIP, anyway?

VoIP, or Voice over Internet Protocol, is simply a new and better way to make and receive phone calls. It is the natural evolution of communication. Here’s why: Most small business already have some form of broadband lines coming into their building for their Internet needs. Well, those lines are actually underutilized; they have the bandwidth for far more data than they typically carry – oh, say, like phone calls for example. So instead of paying for a separate phone line as you are probably doing right now, you could get rid of those phone lines and transmit voice messages (phone calls) over internet protocol lines that you are already using – voila, VoIP.

“Most impressive, [8x8 was] the first VoIP service to offer true 911 support.”
— CNET Review
Given that you already pay for a high-speed Internet connection, the economics of making the switch to a VoIP system (like the ones offered by my friends at 8x8) likely makes intuitive sense – you will greatly reduce the cost of your phone service because you won’t be paying for two sets of wires to come into your office. When combined with state-of-the art features and great sound quality, it’s actually an easy decision to make.

“Great sound quality?” You bet. According to CNET, “Under baseline conditions, [8x8] . . . delivers nearly the same audio quality as that of a regular (landline) telephone connection.” And About.com says, “[8x8] provides great quality voice for cheap.” So, if switching to VoIP

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**Work and call from any location!**

One of the great changes that the Internet has produced for small business is that not only can you run your business from anywhere at any time, but you can actually create a virtual business. You may see your staff and partners only occasionally because they too are not tethered to the office.

So why have a phone system that is?

Now you don’t have to. Among its many other benefits, a hosted VoIP phone service offers all of the features mentioned in this e-book from anywhere. If you are working from home one day and you have high-speed Internet access there, then your VoIP phone at home will act just like your VoIP phone at the office. This great benefit is available to all employees who work from home or other remote locations. They too will have remote access to all the features they would have in the office. This sort of mobility and flexibility is not only a great benefit, it can also save you money as it helps eliminate the need for costly office space.
generally, and to 8x8 specifically, is starting to make sense (and it should), then consider these additional great benefits:

- You will also save on long distance: A switch to VoIP should result in around a 50% savings from what you are paying now. Internationally, that jumps to at least 80%.

- You get to keep your same phone numbers.

- The system is scalable. It can be upgraded and expanded easily as your business grows. Even better: You will not have to buy or lease expensive equipment.

- It’s safe. System and security updates are handled at the network level, so you need never have to update software.

- And you will never be locked into outmoded equipment.

- Finally, and importantly, a good VoIP system should have a host of powerful, sophisticated features.
3. Basic Phone Features

Whatever you can do on your regular phone system, whatever features you like and need, you will find available on an 8x8 VoIP solution, and at less cost. In fact, because a VoIP phone system is in fact so cutting-edge, so 21st century, you just may find that it is more powerful than what you are used to.

But we’re getting ahead of ourselves. Let’s start with the basics. First, of course, you will need a phone or phones that are professional, elegant, sturdy, easy-to-use, and functional. Check. 8x8 has a wide selection of phones that meet those criteria, and then some. On these phones, you will find all of the features that you are used to and which you use on a daily basis in your small business, such as:

- Caller ID with Name
- Voicemail (with Find Me / Follow Me Feature)
- Automated Attendant
- Call Waiting
- Call Forwarding
- Call Transfer
- Three-Way Calling
- Do Not Disturb

“[8x8 is] a great choice [especially] if you make a lot of international calls. Their unlimited international plan is tough to beat. They also offer custom business solutions such as a hosted Virtual Office and hosted Call Center. They offer excellent service with many features and quite a few plan selections.” — TopChoiceReviews.com
If, like so many, you run a one-person office, or a home-based business, or some other sort of small business, then I recommend that you take a look at 8x8’s Business Basic service plan; it is a great option. Aside from all of the essential features above, you can set the system up as one line or two (with the second being a roll over line), you can have a dedicated fax line, you can get an incoming toll-free 800 number and more. Most of these features are part of the package, so there is nothing additional to buy and no extra appliances to install. And how about this: If you want to make a change to your plan or system, administration is easily handled online with a few clicks of the mouse.

4. Advanced Features

It should be clear by now that VoIP generally, and 8x8 specifically, offers small businesses a wide variety of features and benefits that not only rival more traditional phone services, but in many ways laps them. Well, as they say, you ain’t seen nothin’ yet!

8x8 Polycom IP Phones

8x8 phones are easy to use and have excellent features. And how about this: All you need do is plug one into any Internet connection and you will immediately be able to make or receive calls. There is no network to configure, no firewall hassles to worry about, in fact, there is nothing to do at all. All the phones are great looking and many offer a programmable speakerphone. These phones offer execeptional clarity, LCD screens, and process up to nine call lines. Other features include one-touch pre-programmed intercom, paging, direct dial from a searchable corporate directory, and shared line appearance.
To run a modern small business requires modern technology. Here are some of the various features that you should expect from your VoIP service and carrier (and, I am happy to say, are all offered by 8x8.)

**Hosted PBX**

Imagine an old telephone switchboard. All of the calls to a company would come into a central switchboard and then would be processed and forwarded by the switchboard operator on to the appropriate party. Over time, this process became more and more automated, yet vestiges of it actually still remain in most companies – in a closet or room somewhere devoted to switching hardware.

But all of that technical stuff and hardware upkeep is eliminated if you have a hosted PBX solution (PBX stands for Public Branch eXchange.) When you have a hosted PBX system, there is no complicated, expensive equipment to store in your office. Instead, when a call is placed to

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a business with hosted PBX, the telephone carrier (like 8x8 for instance) hosts and handles all of the equipment and network switching so the call goes through the host’s PBX system and is then routed to your office.

This means that you can have advanced call routing without the hassle and upkeep of the technology or equipment since the PBX is being hosted by someone else. In fact, what is even better is that the 8x8 VoIP solution is far superior to the old PBX equipment because the 8x8’s VoIP solution is software-based; the need for big, clunky switching hardware has been eliminated. As such, 8x8’s Hosted PBX also handles voicemail, automated greetings, touchtone menus, faxes, conference calls, and much more. And note: To an outside caller, the experience is exactly like calling a company with an in-house PBX hardware system. This solution also makes upgrades easy and affordable; features can be added, dropped or updated without having to change equipment, and the provider takes care of maintenance and security issues.

Hosted PBX is really something you should be on the lookout for when choosing a VoIP system.

**Hosted Key Systems**

It should be clear by now why you would want a hosted system – it affords you the luxury of having a state-of-the-art solution without the associated costly equipment and upgrades. This is as true for a
key system as it is for a PBX system. Whereas a PBX system is used in larger offices with many incoming lines and numbers, a key system is typically used in a smaller business with fewer phone numbers. Key systems phones have multiple lines with individual lights on each phone delineating each connected line. Key systems are important in offices where you need to share the lines and see if they are in use or not.

What features should you look for with a hosted key system? Aside from the usual suspects – call waiting and forwarding, voicemail and so on – look also for things like:

- Network directory search. You want to be able to easily access business contacts through a search function.

- Shared line appearance. This feature allows multiple users to view and answer incoming calls on the shared lines.

- Intercom, paging, and personal phone directory.

**Virtual Trunking**

It may be that your business has already expended a considerable amount of money in its current phone system’s switching equipment (either key system or PBX) and that you would like to avoid the capital expense of changing out your phone system hardware. Or maybe you have yet to fully depreciate your telecom equipment. Whatever the case, this is where “Virtual Trunking” comes in.

Virtual Trunking allows you to keep the switching equipment you already have and merge your voice and Internet lines (called “trunks”) so as to still get all of the great benefits of VoIP calling.
without having to replace equipment. Virtual Trunking therefore delivers digital-quality dial tone service over a broadband network. You retain your existing phone system equipment while the 8x8 Trunking services provide the dial tone, and local, long-distance and international call routing.

Aside from all of the features that you have come to expect, you should find that any Virtual Trunking solution should also include:

- National directory listings
- Emergency 911
- Online billing and account management
- On-site installation

“[8x8 is] a great choice [especially] if you make a lot of international calls. Their unlimited international plan is tough to beat. They also offer custom business solutions such as a hosted virtual office and a hosted call center. They offer excellent service with many features and quite a few plan selections. — TopChoiceReviews.com

**Online Meetings**

Whether you want to save money by reducing travel costs or you simply want the ability to meet people with whom you work in a virtual setting, a feature that you should consider strongly is some sort of flexible online conferencing. Online
conferencing is a growing trend in small business with all sorts of applications: It can be used for meeting, webinars, trainings, conferences, sales presentations, and more. But beware: Some online meeting solutions are quite complicated. What you want is something that is simple, easy, and affordable. Ideally, it should be able to be used anywhere using any Web browser, with no software to install, nothing to download, and no third-party vendors to deal with. (Yep, 8x8 offers that too!)

Specifically, when looking for a VoIP online meeting solution, here are the main features to be on the lookout for:

- Flexible dial-in numbers for different area codes, including the ability to offer toll-free numbers
- Unlimited meetings of unlimited length
- Scalability – the option to add more people as RSVP’s grow
- No hardware to buy, no software to download
- Browser-based from any computer platform
- Ability to record meetings
- Ability to share your desktop
- Being able to hold a private conversation during the meeting
- Mute controls
Mobile Solutions

The Web has changed everything in business, and one of the biggest changes is that many small businesses now do a significant amount of international transactions. Not only does selling online mean your business is open 24/7 all across the globe, but it also means that you must have the ability to communicate with all of those prospects and partners in far off places. Business today is on the go, so you better have a phone system that has international mobility ability, or your business won’t know much tranquility!

That is where VoIP, once again, comes in. For example, 8x8’s MobileTalk can significantly reduce your international calling rates – by as much as 90%. Here are some examples:

- Mexico – 3 cents a minute
- China – 1 cent a minute
- India – 5.9 cents a minute

What is great about this solution is that there are no PIN codes to remember, no long access numbers to dial, and you will never run out of minutes. Just an affordable, dependable solution.
5. Conclusion

In this exciting, ever-changing new era of business there are a growing number of powerful tools being designed specifically with you, the small business owner and manager, in mind. VoIP is one of the best. A communication method with all the bells, whistles and features you may want, a cutting-edge business system, and an easy-to-use integrated networking tool all in one, VoIP also happens to be a very smart financial move.

It is the savvy entrepreneur indeed who sees something like the 8x8 VoIP system and realizes that it just might be a game-changer.
About 8x8, Inc.

8x8, Inc. offers voice, video, mobile and web conferencing IP communications solutions for small business customers. These solutions, based on internally developed, patented technologies, leverage existing broadband Internet connections and cellular networks to deliver advanced features and digital quality phone service at a fraction of the cost of legacy, copper wire alternatives. The 8x8 Virtual Office solution, 8x8’s flagship offering currently in use by over 18,000 companies, eliminates the need for costly, on-premise business phone systems by delivering all telephony services over managed or unmanaged Internet connections. 8x8 is committed to providing innovative, high quality Internet communications services that offer enhanced functionality over traditional solutions at significantly less cost to the user. In addition to outstanding quality of service, 8x8 places a high value on the quality and effectiveness of its customer support organization and maintains established California-based call center operations. Contact us at 866-879-8647.

About Steve Strauss

An internationally recognized author, lawyer, and international speaker, Steven D. Strauss serves as Senior Advisor to Small Business Resources. He is the author of 15 books, including the best-selling Small Business Bible. As a senior business columnist for USATODAY.com, his column, Ask an Expert, is one of the most highly syndicated business columns in the world. In addition, he has served as the small business spokesperson for companies such as Bank of America, Humana Insurance, and Capitol One. Steve too is an entrepreneur. He is president of The Strauss Group, Inc: Strauss Seminar Co., Strauss Syndication, and MrAllBiz.com. If you would like to sign up for his free e-newsletter “Small Business Success Secrets!” please visit his website, www.MrAllBiz.com.