

Smooth move

Five steps for a successful phone transition during your office move

Moving your office to a new location is a considerable endeavor affecting nearly every aspect of your business operations. While there are many important projects to consider, ensuring that the primary means of communication—the phone for most businesses—transitions seamlessly should be one of the top priorities.

Successfully moving the phone system is vital. Just a few hours of downtime can cost thousands in lost revenue or opportunities. Even the most competent professionals can experience a high degree of stress due to the scope and time-sensitivity involved in the project. Taking the time to put together an action plan well in advance, though, will keep anxiety to a minimum. The following five steps will help get you started.

1. Start early. Each of the services required for your move will typically take 30 to 60 days to implement. Addressing these steps early in your move process will ensure that you have ample time to evaluate your options. Waiting as late as even a full month before your move date could result in hasty and potentially poor decisions due to a time crunch. If possible, begin making arrangements 90 days or longer in advance.

2. Establish local and long distance services. Contact your current local service provider to find out what services are available to you at your new location. A good provider will review your current services and determine if a different solution or contract would be of benefit. If your current provider does not offer a review, it might be in your best interest to survey the competition. Technology is continuing to improve and prices are continuing to fall in this area of telecom.

A major consideration for most businesses when they move offices is whether they can keep their main listed local telephone number. Traditional local telephone providers (former regional Bell companies) usually have geographic restrictions on what numbers can be assigned. If your business is moving across town or further, it is likely that a number change will be required by those carriers. If keeping an existing number is important and your current provider mandates a change, consider switching to a different

one. Competitors to the former Bell companies typically do not have the same restrictions on phone number assignment and will be able to move, or port in telecom jargon, your existing numbers over to their service. Timing is crucial. Porting numbers from one carrier to another takes four to six weeks and requires a great deal of coordination between the new and incumbent carriers.

3. Decide whether to move your current phone system or purchase new. Moving offices offers a great opportunity to evaluate whether your existing phone system is still meeting your business needs. Your service provider may recommend a change in local and long distance service when you move that will save you hundreds per month but cannot interface with your existing phone system. Changing from analog phone lines to a PRI circuit, for example, could prompt a system change or upgrade if your current phone system does not support a PRI card or gateway.

Waiting as late as even a full month before your move date could result in hasty and potentially poor decisions due to a time crunch.

If your system is over five years old, it is likely that new technology could increase efficiency and reduce costs. If your office move is prompted by company growth, your current phone system may not have the capacity to handle the increased end-users or traffic. For older phone systems, it may not

make financial sense to sink the move cost into a system that is discontinued or no longer supported. On the other hand, a system less than five years old may just need some minor configuration changes or upgrades to accommodate your new environment, costing much less than a full system replacement.

A competent telephone system vendor will conduct an extensive needs analysis to help you determine whether a system change is warranted. Favor vendors who will focus on your business operations, processes, and people first. Be skeptical of vendors recommending acronyms and buzz words without basis. *Note: For the first step in selecting a new phone system for your business, check out "What Type of Phone System Should I Buy?: Despite the buzz, VoIP or non-VoIP is not the most important consideration" It is available at www.sean-wilder.com.*

If you plan to move your existing phone system, choose a vendor who is certified by the manufacturer. A certified tech will be able to address potential

problems that may arise during the transition and will have access to manufacturer resources that can remedy almost any situation.

4. Determine voice and data cabling requirements.

If you are moving to an existing building that was occupied previously, some cabling may already be in place. Share your floor plan with your cabling contractor. If you do not have a floor plan for an existing structure, make your own sketch of the facility and mark where each phone and computer will be located.

If you are constructing a new facility, new cabling will be required. Cabling a new facility will require an accurate electrical floor plan drawn to scale. Ask your building contractor or architect to provide one to you as soon as possible.

It will usually cost less if your computer network equipment and your phone system reside in the same location. Your cabling contractor can follow the same route with both voice and data cabling, reducing the overall labor cost. Locating this room in a central area of the facility will lessen the amount of hardware needed to complete the job and avoid distance issues on your data network.

One area of cabling that is often overlooked is the extension of your local, long distance, and internet provider services into the equipment/server room. It is likely that their point of entry into your facility (or point of demarcation (dmarc)) will be in a different area of the building than your equipment room. Most service providers will not extend their dmarcs, deferring to your cabling contractor for this service.

It is helpful to schedule a conference between your telephone system vendor and cabling contractor if they are separate entities. The type of phone system you are installing will likely determine the type of cabling required. Your phone system vendor will know exactly what is needed and is most qualified to communicate those needs to your cabling vendor. If you are moving into an office with existing cabling, your phone system and data vendor will need to determine if the right type of cable is available at each phone and computer location. For a new facility, it is a good idea to run data grade cabling for both voice and data. Data cabling (Cat-5 or better) is required by the newer voice over IP (VoIP) phone systems. Even if you are not planning to implement a

VoIP system now, cabling is a permanent fixture in your new building, and it makes good sense to plan for the future.

Make sure that your cabling contractor obtains all of the appropriate permits and that they meet the building codes for your area. Select a cabling contractor who is familiar with the regulations in your county and will commit to pulling all of the appropriate permits required to perform the work.

Complying with codes can also make a difference in the price quote so be sure to gain a commitment upfront that the proposal you receive meets the appropriate specifications.

5. Hire or designate a project manager. A successful telecom move requires the coordinated efforts of service providers, phone system vendors, cabling contractors, and data vendors.

The most frustrating part of the transition can be delays caused by lack of communication among the parties involved. A dedicated project manager can make sure everyone is on the same page. If someone in your organization is not available to take on the role of project manager as a primary responsibility, consider hiring an outside party on a temporary basis. As an alternative, many phone system or data vendors offer project management as a professional service or even as a value added component of their product offer.

Moving a phone system to a new office is a long process that requires organizational skills, diligence, and, not to be overlooked, the ability to work well with others. The process doesn't have to be a harrowing experience, though. If you use these five steps to guide your course of action, select only the highest quality vendors and service providers, and remember to keep your sense of humor, you will enjoy a smooth move without missing a call.

- The Five Steps**
1. Start early... at least 90 days prior to move
 2. Establish local/LD service
 3. Move existing phone system or purchase new
 4. Determine voice and data cabling requirements
 5. Hire/designate a project manager