

Wireless Business Phone Overview

More and more, business is an activity rather than a place. Utilizing cell phones, PDAs and wireless access, offices are becoming increasingly virtual and employees untethered from their desks. This article explores the various methods of adding mobility to your office telephone system.

There is no lack of choices when it comes to freeing employees from their desktop telephone. We'll address all of the options available, from the simplest to the most sophisticated. The primary differences revolve around feature access, coverage area and integration into the phone system (and your data system).

“STORE-BOUGHT” CORDLESS: All current telephone systems will support simple analog cordless telephones such as manufactured by Panasonic, Uniden, V-Tech and many others. To integrate such a device into your phone system requires an analog terminal adaptor, a device that converts your digital telephone connection to an analog connection. The price range for this converter ranges from \$150 to \$400 per unit. Add the price of the phone and you're looking at \$200 to \$700 per cordless phone.

Don't be fooled by a cordless telephone being sold as “digital”. The digital denotes the transmission technology – the actual physical connection to your phone system is still analog.

Frequency: 900 mhz

Pros: *Least expensive (maybe)*

Cons: *Limited range, limited features, single line access, limited number of users.*

Recommended applications: *companies on tight budgets. No need for multiple call handling or any feature access.*

PBX CORDLESS TELEPHONE: This telephone uses the same transmission technology as the consumer-level phone as described above, however it's designed specifically for your phone system and heavy commercial use. These cordless phones will provide many of the same features as their corded brethren.

Frequency: 900 mhz

Pros: Multiple lines access, good feature access, calling Line ID (if equipped), look and feel similar to pbx phones.

Cons: Limited range, limited number of users

Recommended applications: Receptionists, small offices, and people in a workgroup. In larger companies, it's easy to exceed their physical range.

“INDUSTRIAL STRENGTH” WIRELESS SYSTEMS: Some phone system manufacturers and a couple of independent manufacturers make higher capacity/higher strength wireless systems. Typically they involve the deployment of antennas and signal repeaters to dramatically increase range and the number of phones supported.

Frequency: 2.4 ghz

Pros: All of the pros of the pbx cordless phone. Capacity up to 64 users and more. Coverage up to the equivalent of 3 football fields.

Cons: Not inexpensive

Recommended applications: Fully replace corded phones. Highly mobile workforce. Warehouse, campus, outdoors

VOICE OVER WIRELESS LAN: For VOIP-enabled telephone system owners, another cordless choice is available. Just as wireless networks support computer users so can they support wireless IP devices such as phones. Computers and phones can share the same network, cutting down on infrastructure costs.

Frequency: 2.4 ghz, utilizing 802.11 wireless standard

Pros: Share data network

Cons: Wireless network must have ability to prioritize voice traffic

Recommended applications: Extend value of wireless LAN to telecom. Collaborative environments. Computer/telephone integration. Softphone users.



THINGS TO CONSIDER:

HEADSETS: Most cordless phone users need (or want) headsets. Confirm that headset capability is included in the system you are considering.

COVERAGE: Coverage is determined by the quality of phone, amount of interference, i.e. downtown San Francisco is filled with radio signals, composition of walls (concrete, wood, etc). Actual coverage can only be determined in real world tests.

BATTERY TIME: Many cordless phones do not have the battery capacity to function for eight continuous hours. Consider an extra battery or choose a phone that has a longer battery life.