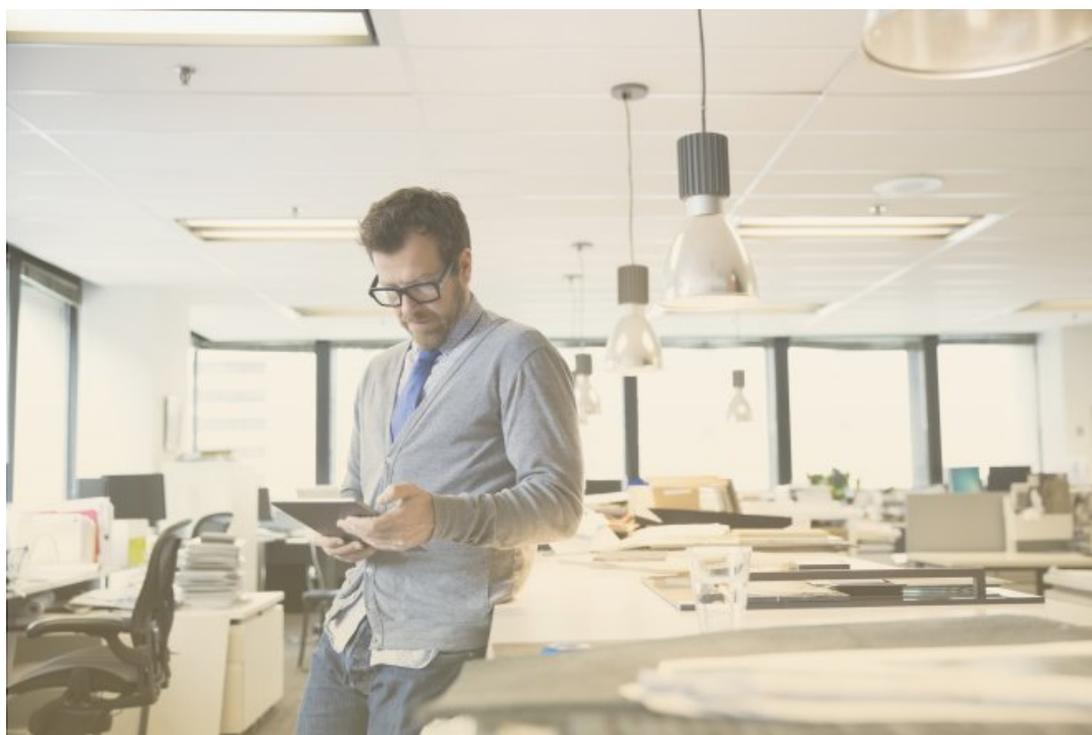


Cloud Scalability: The Case for Digital Communications



By DOUG BONDERUD - Contributor

A telecommunications shift is well underway: Companies using traditional, hardware-based private branch exchanges (PBX) are now facing the question of scalable clouds. Do the increasing maturity of virtual PBX and Voice over Internet Protocol (VoIP) solutions offer a compelling case for digital alternatives?



As organizations grow and add new branches, cloud-based PBX is the superior option to maintain quality communications.

Growing with Cloud Scalability

Cloud-based PBX is enjoying solid growth as companies tap a key technology benefit: cloud scalability. Using the cloud lets software-based resources take the place of traditional hardware, making it possible to scale up available resources on demand. This could take the form of short-term increases to handle increased network traffic or long-term service commitments to supply new satellite offices and bring them into the fold. Opting for scalable cloud options provides critical benefits, including:

- **Lowered Costs:** Cloud PBX solutions eliminate the need for costly hardware purchases and upkeep, while all upgrades and maintenance are handled on the provider side. In addition, according to CIO, many open-source IP PBX solutions now available are capable of scaling on demand and working with major PBX providers.

- **Cross-Team Collaboration:** Cloud scalability means no matter where employees are located — or when they need to connect — cross-team collaboration is possible thanks to reliable bandwidth and connection stability. Since cloud-based solutions don't face the problem of discrete hardware differentiation, all users are effectively on the same network.
- **System Enhancements:** Do you need to add more features, add more lines, or simply ramp up overall capacity? Expansions and enhancements to cloud-based solutions are virtual, meaning there's no new hardware to install, and integration happens automatically.
- **Reliability:** If on-site PBX systems fail, companies could face hours or days without communications service. Reputable cloud providers, meanwhile, maintain multiple data centers to ensure that if one experiences network or system failure, others can pick up the slack. In addition, many providers now offer uptime guarantees along with specific recompense if unexpected downtime occurs.

Changing market forces combined with cloud scalability make a compelling case for off-site alternatives.

Keeping On-Site Communications

For some companies, there's still a case for keeping on-site communications around. As noted by CommsTrader, these organizations often point to three key factors:

1. **Ease of Control:** This parallels the argument for keeping any service on-site, with some IT teams arguing that hardware-based PBX offers greater control over privacy, security, and monitoring. The catch is that many of today's cloud providers can offer superior control thanks to the scope of their infrastructure.
2. **Cost Management:** While the costs of hardware PBX are substantial up front, some companies still prefer to "pay once" for hardware instead of month over month for cloud-based PBX hosting, softphones, and extra features. However, the cost outlays needed to replace old or damaged hardware, conduct on-site maintenance, and regularly upgrade back-end infrastructure far exceed regular cloud spending over time.
3. **Working as Intended:** It's hard for organizations with existing PBX infrastructure to justify a switch. Since it's impossible to take PBX hardware along when companies outgrow current offices or expand into new areas, however, current infrastructure has a limited shelf life.

Hard Truths

Ultimately, on-site PBX can't stack up against cloud solutions. While it's true existing PBX systems can handle enterprise workloads, what happens when organizations open new satellite offices across the country, or build new data centers on other continents? Installing PBX hardware comes with a large price tag and significant time commitment. Renovating or selling old offices makes it impossible to reuse existing hardware, leading to another round of spending on basic PBX technology.

There's also the problem of interconnectivity. Getting hardwired systems to "talk" to one another over long distances is complex at best — and impossible at worst. IT teams face an uphill battle trying to ensure disparate PBX systems across multiple time zones both act as a unified entity and possess enough distinction to operate without the need for a single "parent" system. This isn't an impossible task, but companies choosing to build out PBX must be prepared for the challenging road ahead.

Finally, the cost of cloud solutions is far more manageable over time. Replacing failed hardware, upgrading legacy systems, and building in room to scale as required all come with large price tags. The ongoing spending on cloud-based PBX, on the other hand, comes with provider-side upgrades, no capital expenditure for servers and physical lines, and on-demand scalability that doesn't leave servers sitting idle.

Familiarity and control remain key selling points for on-site PBX. Changing market forces combined with cloud scalability, meanwhile, make a compelling case for off-site alternatives.

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