

# Guide to Buying a New Hospitality Communication Solution

**BUYING A COMMUNICATIONS SYSTEM, PARTICULARLY ONE AS COMPLEX AS A HOSPITALITY COMMUNICATIONS SYSTEM, IS NO SMALL FEAT.**

Hospitality communications systems are a long-term investment, and it's important to find a solution that will grow and scale as your needs change. This guide is here to help you find the right solution for your property that will help improve your guest experience, boost employee productivity and grow with technology as it changes over time.

Should you get a new phone system?  
Unsure which system is right for you?  
We'll help you find the answer.

Unified communication solutions are still relevant for your property

Even with the technological improvements that make integrating with mobile devices a necessity, your hotel requires a telephone system to address (at least) the following:

- Inbound calls for reservations, business inquiries and guest calls
- In-house communications with the front desk and staff
- Emergency calls

## Replacing your old unified communication solution

You may not need to replace your system immediately, but you should start researching modern options now, as older systems increasingly don't support the kinds of functionality needed to stay competitive today. Most older systems use time-division multiplexing (TDM), technology that is used in traditional landline systems. First generation Unified Communication (UC) systems are also often unable to integrate with some applications that are essential for your work today. Communications as a whole, however, is moving toward VoIP, unified communications and cloud architectures. IP and cloud communications offer a range of capabilities that will continue to improve the guest and employee experience, which will both increase revenue and reduce costs. As these new technologies become more and more common, older systems are going to become harder to maintain. While parts may still be available, they are becoming harder to find and there are fewer qualified technicians available to work on these legacy systems.

## Keeping your remote employees connected

It's important to consider your remote employees as you make your communications decision for your hotel. With team collaboration applications and VoIP extensions, remote workers can be connected to your communications system no matter where they are located. Newer systems with mobility features provide remote staff the full functionality of their desk phones anytime, anywhere, and hotels can also transfer calls to them seamlessly. This allows for real-time responses to guest issues as well, no matter where your staff is located.

## **STEP 1: GATHER YOUR REQUIREMENTS**

The following are some key areas to consider when identifying what your hotel needs from a communications system. A key step in your review process should be identifying what key functions your hotel will most benefit from, what key functions are necessary to provide the minimum amount of service and what will help advance your guest experience now and in the future.

### **Size of Hotel**

Hotel size affects the type of equipment and physical space and provisioning requirements that may be needed.

### **System Capacity Requirements**

Your system type and size will be dependent on the number of staff and guest users. It is also important to identify any potential remote users or teleworkers that may require access to the system including external reservation centers, sales staff and operational personnel who work offsite.

### **Provisioning Requirements**

With a traditional on-site unified communication system your options include buying individual analog lines, higher capacity circuits or SIP Trunks. A typical PRI carries 23 voice channels. For larger hotels or those with call centers, additional circuits may be required and back-up individual POTS lines should be considered for overflow and redundancy purposes.

### **Infrastructure within hotel**

Existing or new property? Historic building? Thick walls? Legacy cabling? The answers to these questions will help determine your next steps. Your cabling infrastructure will affect how you are able to deploy a new IP system.

### **Integrations Requirements**

Which applications will your new communication system need to integrate to? Will it work with your PMS? To get the most bang for your buck, your communications system should enhance the most important applications of your PMS.

### **Support Requirements**

System support parameters should be identified early on in the process, including the following types of users: reservation attendants, General admin stations, teleworkers, guest rooms, public space area phones and back of the house.

### **Call Volume**

Simultaneous calls? How many circuits? Peak calling periods? Sharing bandwidth between a data and a voice circuit? Overflow to another unused circuit? With calling analysis tools, answer these questions and learn more about what peak loads your systems needs to handle. For SIP (VoIP) trunks that run over your broadband Internet connection, you can buy the exact number of ports you need. Alternately, you can mix and match PTSN and SIP circuits in a combination that works best for your property.

### **Staff Mobility**

Look for a communications system that integrates with staff mobile phone devices, that can be used with a DECT headset and allows for calls to ring the staff's desk phone and mobile phone simultaneously. This allows the staff to multi-task and move around the property while staying in communication with their office.

### **Phone Devices**

You will require a variety of different phones within your property depending on the different needs of your staff and guests including administrative phones, consoles, public space and back of house phones, specialty phones.

## Messaging

Reduce your response times to guest and maintenance requests by looking for a communications system with messaging applications built in and that supports comprehensive wake-up call features that integrate with your front desk consoles.

## Staff Workflow Optimization & Management

If your property management system doesn't already include a workflow scheduling or rapid response system, one great option to consolidate your applications is to find a unified communication system that gives you options to address these issues.

## Mobile Application

While many hotels utilize industry-developed mobile applications or develop their own, looking for a communications platform that includes access or integration with a mobile application will help your team stay focused on taking your guest experience to the next level.

## High-Touch Solutions for Smaller Hotels

In the past, smaller hotels who operate with limited staff and budget have been limited in their communications system options. However, today smaller hotels are able to compete with larger properties with strategic Unified Communication product applications. These include:

- Hybrid Phone Consoles
- Workflow Scheduling / Rapid Response Systems
- Housekeeping Requests
- Maintenance Requests
- Room Ready / Room Status Notifications



## STEP 2: HOW ARE YOU GOING TO DEPLOY AND HOW ARE YOU GOING TO BUY

### Deployment model

Now that you've got a budget, a clear understanding of your existing infrastructure and a general idea of what you need, it's time to consider which deployment model makes the most sense for your hotel.

#### Infrastructure

Most newer hosted solutions are IP-based. These systems are typically designed to operate on home-run Category 5/6 cables. While most of these systems are designed to work with IP- or SIP phones, they can accommodate the use of analog phones through the use of analog gateways.

#### Hosted or on-premises

The budget you selected in Step 3 is going to have an impact on which deployment model works best for your hotel. Traditionally, hosted solutions run on an OpEx model, while on-site/on-premise solutions run on a CapEx model. If your hotel finances call for one model over the other, that will likely shape which type of system you are able to deploy.

#### Survivability

One of the key drivers behind the decision of whether to go with a hosted or on-site solution is the question of survivability. What happens if a circuit fails or if your phone service is disrupted? Maintaining communications is critically important and for this reason, most cloud-based offerings will provide survivability at the property level, typically in the form of a small switch or node. Further, additional trunk lines or circuit

may need to be installed at the property.

#### Support

While UC solutions are getting easier to administer and manage, they are still considered critical systems and need to be effectively supported. To ensure your system operates effectively and that all your features and functionality operate at all times, it's important to partner with a reliable vendor. You should also look for a solution with online monitoring capabilities, to keep your system running smoothly.

#### Redundancy features

Reliability is essential in the hospitality industry. You cannot allow your phone systems to go down. When evaluating offers, you need to know which redundancy features are included.

Some key features to look for:

- Hardware redundancy
- Software redundancy
- Circuit failover options
- Power redundancy options
- Emergency support services

#### Disaster Recovery

What options does the system offer for disaster recovery, and what plan, if any, has the vendor developed to address potential catastrophic outages? Key areas of focus include:

- System backup and restore solutions
- Onsite storing of critical spare parts
- Development of a disaster recovery program
- Emergency support response program

## Expense Models

There are often specific parameters surrounding a hotel's buying decision that can dictate whether and how to purchase a new solution. As you begin searching for a communications system for your property, it's important to take these factors into consideration and build an action plan around them.

There are two basic expense models to consider when selecting a communications system, and each will impact your hotel's finances in different ways.

### CapEX



Typically on-premises deployment models are procured with a CapEx expenditure model, and are typically chosen for long-term purchase decisions. Under the CapEx model, your deployment should include:

- Equipment costs
- Installation
- Support

For owners and developers who prefer a CapEx procurement model, on-site solutions systems typically have a lifespan of many years, and can return a good ROI for owners. However, on-site equipment requires maintenance and upkeep, and will require additional costs to upgrade as guest technology changes over time.

There are benefits and costs to both expenditure models, so it's important to evaluate what makes more sense with your overall financial goals and plans.

### Subscription



Most hosted solutions are designed to operate under an subscription model. Like many other hospitality applications, this procurement structure funds systems based on a monthly operational expenditure that typically includes the following:

- Equipment costs
- Installation (in some cases)
- Support
- System updates

Subscription can be preferable for owners and developers looking to limit their up-front expenditures and pay for services out of an operating expense account. The OpEx model does impact your monthly and yearly operational bottom line differently, as opposed to a CapEx model.



## **STEP 3: CHOOSE A VENDOR AND A SYSTEM**

The hard part's over: you've done your research, separated your needs from your wants, identified your financial considerations and selected a deployment model. You've got a basic idea in mind of what kind of features you'd like, and what kind of infrastructure and deployment model you'll use. Now it's time to choose a vendor and a system.

**Here are a few considerations you'll want to bear in mind as you approach your vendor and device search:**

### **Setup and Support**

When choosing a phone system vendor, consider who will install the system and provide support for technical issues. Ask vendors how much experience they have in installing this particular system in hotels of your size and structure. You want to find a reputable vendor who's had years of experience in this industry. Do they offer training and support? Ask for customer references and call them. Visit their website and look for case studies from previous customers. Find out if they charge for installation, and get an itemized list of maintenance and service fees. Finally, be sure you fully understand your vendor's support model.

### **Aesthetics and Ergonomics**

Now comes the part in the communications system shopping process that you may have been tempted to start with—the design of the devices themselves. While you may not be replacing all of your phones in one purchase, it's worth considering the aesthetics of the devices that pair well with the solution you've selected. The design of the user interface is key, too as having user friendly consoles can greatly improve user experience.

### **Reputation**

Because your phone system is instrumental to the day-to-day operations of your business, you want to get the best product from a reputable manufacturer. Compare product reviews. A great way to measure reputation is to look for recognition from reputable third parties, like Gartner, in their Magic Quadrant Reports. Frost & Sullivan and Forrester are other industry experts who offer independent research and vendor reviews. Don't rely solely on testimonials; seek out user references from businesses like yours. And ask about warranties, service agreements and costs.

### **Vendor Outlook**

It's important to take the whole picture into account: not just where your vendor sits today. Pick a vendor with a long history of innovation, who can adapt to the way technology is evolving. Digital transformation is affecting all parts of business today, and your hotel communications system is no different. You should look for a vendor who is innovating with the Internet of Things, cloud communications, AI and mobile-first design. The vendor you want in your corner is looking forward and showing signs of being here to support you in the future.

### **Don't Forget to Ask About Promotions**

Larger vendors, like Mitel, sometimes offer special pricing and promotions. It never hurts to ask about any promotions that might be running, or to subscribe to their communications so you're always in the loop.

## Choose a vendor with trustworthy resellers

Finding the right vendor for your new solution is crucial but you need to make sure that the partners that they work with are trustworthy as well as the partners are going to be essential in the implementation of your solution. Some vendors, like Mitel, have partners who are certified and specialized in hospitality. These resellers, together with the vendor will provide you with the right amount of help and support throughout your whole journey.

## Implement your solution

Here's a quick rundown of what you'll need to do when implementing your shiny new system:

- Notify staff.
- Take inventory of the delivery.
- Test the system with staff before deploying it hotel- wide
- Train staff.

Don't feel overwhelmed when searching for a new communications system. Sticking to these steps will keep your search focused and strategic. As an experienced vendor in hospitality communications solutions, Mitel is here to help you find the best communications solution for your hotel.

Visit [mitel.com/hospitality](https://mitel.com/hospitality) to learn more.