The Definitive Guide To Choosing The *Right* Phone System For Your K-12 School

Buyer Beware!

Do NOT Buy A New Phone System Before Reading This Guide To Avoid Getting Trapped In An Impossible-To-Cancel Contract For An Expensive, Frustrating Phone System You Hate

Read this guide to discover:

✓ The uncensored facts about the phone system industry that no phone salesperson will ever tell you, but that you should know before buying.

✓ How to cut through all the technical mumbo-jumbo and confusing features to know what's truly the most important attributes and features to look for.

✓ A hidden "gotcha" clause phone system vendors try to put in their contracts that lock you in forever <u>and</u> legally bind you to pay thousands of dollars in penalties to cancel – even if the phone system and service doesn't work as advertised. Do NOT sign a contract if this clause is in there!

✓ The proposal "shell game" of hidden costs, taxes and unanticipated monthly fees that 99% of all phone system sales people WON'T tell you about before you buy that trick you into thinking you're getting a bargain (you're not).

Provided as an educational service by:
IKON Business Group
Ken Nero, CEO & Founder
www.ikonbusinessgroup.com

Why I Wrote This Report

An Personal Letter From Ken Nero
CEO & Founder, IKON Business Group

Dear Colleague,

Choosing a new phone system is a critical decision you want to get right. Choose poorly, and you'll be endlessly annoyed and hamstrung with a confusing, difficult and limited system that is constantly breaking down, dropping calls and frustrating you with poor sound quality and non-existent support.

Worse yet, many phone system vendors will lock you into a long-term contract that you will have to pay HUGE fines to get out of, <u>even if the service is terrible and the phone doesn't work as advertised</u>. Further, you're busy – and switching phone systems is no easy task. And what if the new system is as bad (or worse!) than the one you just got rid of? The devil you know keeps you stuck – after all, it's very, VERY difficult to determine if a phone system will work as advertised UNTIL you sign on the dotted line.

You can see the dilemma, which is why I wrote this report.

As an IT services company that has been selling phone systems for more than 20 years to K-12 schools, I've been shocked and appalled by how much the phone system industry has taken advantage of its customers.

From grossly confusing "geek speak" to misleading advertising, hidden fees, onerous contracts and horrible service, I felt it was time someone told the plain truth about how to find an easy-to-use, fairly-priced, quality phone system that will actually work as advertised – or better!

My sincere hope is that by making this information public, we will help raise the standards within the phone system industry, and to give YOU useful information to avoid making a very expensive decision you'll deeply regret.

Dedicated to serving you,

Ken Nero

Ken Nero
CEO & Founder, IKON Business Group
Phone: (212) 334-6481
E-mail: ken@ikonbusinessgroup.com
www.ikonbusinessgroup.com

Phone System Marketing Is Out Of Control!
How To Avoid Falling For The Hype (And Making A Poor Choice)

If you're like most of our clients, you're probably looking for an honest expert who can advise you on which phone system is right for your specific situation and needs. One that is easy to use and works as advertised.

The problem is, phone system marketing is out of control online, with dozens of pure marketing sites posing as "best of" directories that are nothing more than marketing firms who are experts in search engine optimization (not phone systems) that sell leads and directory rankings to the highest bidder. They are NOT interested in providing good advice to you – they are interested in getting you to click or request a quote so they can sell your lead to multi-million and billion-dollar companies like Ooma, RingCentral, Vonage, etc.

In fact, marketing for "phone system provider" is one of the most competitive online, with a single Google click costing anywhere from $500 to $1,000 – for a single *click*! Is it any wonder that your search for "phone system provider" is full of SEO optimized directories and big corporate players who can afford such outrageous marketing fees?

NONE of these sites provide useful information to make a good decision. The marketing directories who rank phone systems don't tell you how they are actually ranking their "top" providers or "best rated." They often don't provide details on how the reviews are vertified for integrity (if they're checked at all) and all reviews are all anonymous. And they certainly are light on facts and transparency. Clearly this is NOT how you want to choose your next phone system, and you can bet your bottom dollar that these sites won't be around to help you if the phone system you buy turns out to be a giant disaster.

Another marketing trick many use is offering free phones and "phone lines as low as…" type offers. These are often used as marketing bait to lead you into thinking you're getting a good deal – but buyer beware! We all know you get what you pay for, so these offers are perfectly acceptable <u>PROVIDED</u> the phone actually performs as it should.

That's why we wrote this guide. Much of the advertising we see for phone systems is misleading and fails to tell you the WHOLE truth. Yes, there certainly ARE good money-saving deals out there and not all of them are fake – **but "cheapest price" should not be #1 on your list of criteria when making a decision on a new phone system because the money saved initially will be long forgotten and lost to countless hours of frustration later trying to make a bad system work.**

We cannot change the way phone system vendors advertise, but we can help you make your way through the "geek speak" and half truths. There ARE good phone system vendors out there. Lots of them. You just have to know what to look for and what questions to ask – which is what this report is about.

The Two Biggest Problems With VoIP Phones
And How To Avoid Them

First of all, VoIP is an overused term that confuses a lot of people. They think it's a phone on your computer, a software application or a physical phone you plug into your PC.

Those all were the early iterations of VoIP. Today, a "VoIP" phone is more of a SERVICE than a physical phone (although physical phones still play into this). With a VoIP service, you can use any cell phone, your PC or other devices to make calls and send messages, which gives you the ability to make and receive calls from any location with a reasonable Internet connection.

But many people have a fear of moving to a VoIP for two legitmate reasons. The first is call quality and the second is "What if the Internet goes down?" So let me address both of those valid concerns and why with the RIGHT phone, this is not an issue.

Problem #1: Call Quality

It's true that in the past, VoIP phones have been notorious for garbled, choppy, low-quality sound and dropped calls. However, the technology that operates these phones has come a long way in the last couple of years, and Internet bandwith (which is a key component to call quality) is faster and cheaper.

So any sound quality issues you might have on a new VoIP system is due to two problems – your bandwidth isn't sufficient, or your firewall, router and computer network (where the phone now resides) is not set up properly for the phone. That's it.

This is why it's critical for your phone vendor to assess your network before selling you a phone to make sure the phone you're buying will actually work on the network you're plugging it into.

KEY POINT: Big phone vendors like AT&T or RingCentral will NOT do this assessment before selling you a phone. They will take your money, ship you a phone in a box and leave you to set it up. When the call quality is horrible and you call them for help, they'll simply point the finger to your Internet provider, bandwidth or computer network and wish you good luck. They WON'T troubleshoot that issue for you, which is why you want to buy a phone system from a local IT company that will own 100% of the setup, problems, and call quality.

Problem #2: What If The Internet Goes Down?

Without a doubt, the internet WILL go down, but that doesn't mean your phone system has to. That's because the "brain" of the phone is not hosted in your office. It's hosted in a secure and highly-reliable server that has multiple backup systems for Internet connectivitiy. Therefore,

when your local Internet goes down, you can have the phone automatically set up to do a number of things, such as:

- Route to a designated cell phone or other location.

- Go to an auto attendant you set up to allow the person to leave a voice mail, similar to your after hours call system.

- They can leave a voice mail, and that voice mail can be e-mailed to you.

A good phone system vendor will set this up in advance so calls are automatically handled the way you want and instantly "fail over" without you having to do anything.

The Truth About All VoIP Phone Systems That No Salesperson Will Tell You

Here's the biggest "secret" to the phone system industry that you won't see any vendor advertising: ALL phone system are basically the same in features and capabilities.

Sure there are a few things some phone systems can do that others can't, but for the most part, it's a highly competitive field and every feature offered by one phone system is offered by them all. So all the marketing hype about how *their* phone system is "the best" or better than the rest is just marketing propaganda that should be taken with a grain of salt.

So how DO you compare, and what IS the most important point of differentiation that you need to look for?

Here it is: The most important "feature" is not in the phone itself but in the after-sale SERVICE – who is setting it up, who will be there to install it, configure it and make sure it works, and who you will call when you need help.

It should not surprise you that most K-12 schools and their administrators do not know how to properly set up a phone system and customize it for their school, nor do they want to learn. They also don't want to become experts at their phone systems – they simply want an EASY TO USE system that consistently works.

That's why you want to really investigate the after-sale service. When something goes wrong or when you can't get the system to do what you want it to do, how easy is it to get fast, easy and helpful support? Further, who will be there to conduct the cut over to the new system and make sure it works?

Here are two critical questions you need to <u>ask the vendor about support BEFORE you buy</u>:

1. **Who will set my new phone system up and customize it for my specific needs and situation?**

   Get specifics here. Some vendors simply ship you a phone and require you to set it up yourself. Sure they'll *tell* you all you have to do is "plug it in," but rarely is anything that easy. Instead of doing it for you, they'll give you the 100-page instruction manual you'll need to muddle through and a "customer support" website that will require you to search through hundreds of questions to find the answer to your specific problem, which is time consuming and frustrating. Rarely do these sites provide the answers you need quickly.

   Then the day of the cut over, you're scrambling to make the sytem work, frantically trying to figure out how to troubleshoot it and set it up.

   Worse yet - if you CAN'T get it to work and you CAN'T get it to do what you want it to do, <u>exactly how will they help you</u>? Do they have local techs who will come to your office and set it up? Troubleshoot it? This brings me to the next question…

2. **How do I get help if the phone system <u>isn't</u> working or I can't get it to do what we need it to do?**

   As outlined above, we all know how exasperating it is to try and get a "customer service" person to help from a big, nameless, faceless coporatation.

   So we recommend you look for a reputable, <u>local</u> phone system reseller who will not only set up the phone system for you and customize it for your specific needs, but also be there to provide personalized support, training and help over the phone <u>AND in-office support</u> should the need arise.

One Final Key Point: As already discussed above in the "Problems With VoIP," you really want to work with a phone system vendor that is also an IT firm, like us. Because your phone resides on your computer network, the network must be assessed prior to installing a phone to ensure it can properly handle the added bandwith requirements, and to ensure the firewall and router are configured properly. Only an IT firm will know how to do this properly.

By doing the assessment BEFORE you buy, you can prepare in advance and be aware of any additional costs you may incur with the phone.

Again, many phone vendors won't do this assessment (or won't do it properly) and then will sell you a phone, only to let you discover later you have to incur hundreds or thousands of dollars in costs to make it work.

Critical Questions To Ask BEFORE Signing A Contract
To Avoid Hidden Fees, Onerous Contracts And Bad Sound Quality

In addition to the above questions about support covered earlier, here are X additional questions you want to ask BEFORE signing on the dotted line:

1. **How many years have you been selling, installing and supporting phone systems?**

   Our Answer: IKON Business Group has been selling, installing and supporting business phone systems for over 20 years throughout the New York metropolitan area.

2. **How can I be certain the sound quality will be excellent with your system?**

   Our Answer: As previously discussed, we will conduct an assessment of your network and bandwidth BEFORE selling you a new phone system to ensure it will work flawlessly with your current bandwidth, firewall and router. If you need upgrades for your network equipment, we can even roll that into the monthly fee so that you are able to move to your new phone system without ANY up-front costs.

   Most companies won't do this assessment, and instead simply sell you the phone. When things go wrong, they'll point the finger at your IT guy or your Internet provider and tell you they can't (won't!) help you.

   We take full ownership of the success of your new phone system and stand behind our guarantee of "flawless performance." If anything is not working, we will troubleshoot the issue and work with whoever we need to in order to get it fixed. You will NEVER hear us say, "Sorry, that's somebody else's problem."

3. **How can I cancel and get out of the contract? What are the fees involved?**

   Our Answer: If, during the first 90 days, you are not happy with the new phone system and we are not able to resolve your issues, simply return the equipment and we will help you move your phone numbers to a different provider AT NO COST TO YOU.

4. **What are the start-up and recurring costs?**

   Our Answer: Our pricing plan is simple, straightforward and 100% transparent. We provide you with a "menu" of phone types with a fixed monthly cost for each phone and all the phone system features you need.

5. **Do I need special cabling?**

   Our Answer: Our phone system uses the same network wire (or WiFi) as your computer network and works perfectly on 90% of the networks we assess. However, in some cases you might need updated cabling, more bandwith or updated cyber security protections. That's why we perform a detailed network assessment BEFORE we provide a final quote for implementing our phone system, so you will know in advance if your existing network will support our phones or if you need an upgrade, and how much that will cost. This is important for you to do no matter who you buy a phone system from. Some phone system companies do not test your network and may only look at bandwidth and sell you a system. This can lead to a lot of frustration when the phone doesn't work – and added, unanticipated costs after you've already committed to buying. One of the reasons we have so many happy clients is because we are IT pros as well as phone system experts and know how to truly assess ALL aspects of a network to make sure you don't experience sound quality issues, dropped calls and other problems.

6. **Can I keep my current phone number? Are there any additional costs involved in keeping my number?**

   Our Answer: Yes! This is called "number porting." Most companies will port your existing numbers over, but may charge a fee to do so.

7. **What features are included? Which ones cost extra?**

   Our Answer: This is always a good thing to verify because some providers will "intrigue" you with a great advertised price, but once you add all of the features you want, you're paying a LOT more than the advertised price! That's why you need to know in advance what features you want and make sure they are included. Here are some features that we INCLUDE at <u>no extra fee</u> that are important to have:

   - Call routing (if Internet goes down)
   - Automated attendant
   - After-hours and holiday messages
   - Voice mail to e-mail
   - Fax to e-mail
   - Paging
   - Call queues
   - Find me/follow me
   - Custom hold music

8. **Does your system include international calling?**

   Our Answer: International calling is enabled by default with our system. However, you will be billed for international minutes separately on your next invoice. We can also disable this feature at your request if you do not want to allow international calls to be placed.

9. **Will it work with my current firewall, router, Internet and network settings?**

   Our Answer: Once we complete our assessment of your network and bandwidth, you will know with 100% certainty if your current configuration will support our phone system. And, if it will not, you will have an option to include the needed improvements in your monthly service charges OR the cost to buy the needed equipment outright.

10. **Do you offer a trial phone we can test in our office before making a commitment?**

    Our Answer: Yes! Once we have completed the network and bandwidth assessment, we are happy to provide a demo phone so you can get a feel for the phone and its features.

11. **If my employees need to work from home, how does your phone system accommodate that? How does the transition happen if we suddenly have to work remote due to a covid-type shutdown or other disaster?**

    Our Answer: Our phones are configured to work from anywhere. If your employees need to work from home or a remote location, all they have to do is unplug their phones from their wall jack and plug them into their home Internet or connect them to their home WiFi as they would a laptop or PC. Since our phone system supports 911 emergency calling, we do require that you let us know the physical address where each phone will be relocated so we can ensure that any emergency calls made from the phones will provide the correct 911 location information.

12. **Who does the transition to the new phone and how long will I be down during the cut over?**

    Our Answer: We handle 100% of the transition for you and will provide a seamless transition from your current system to our phones with NO DOWNTIME. We use a staged process of setting up the phones with temporary numbers first, configure them to your business and test them thoroughly before going "live." We can do this on a site-by-site basis or phone-by-phone if needed. The end result is ZERO downtime or lost calls.

13. **What type of training do you offer for my employees using the phone?**

    Our Answer: Once we configure and install your new phone system, our engineers will show each user how to perform basic functions like setting up their voice mail, recording their mailbox greeting, placing calls on hold and transferring calls to other extensions. We also

provide a customized user guide with instructions for using the phone system based on the features that have been configured for their installation. Finally, our LOCAL support staff are available to answer any questions and provide one-off training to users at any time.

14. **Can you SHOW me how to change office hours, how calls are routed, how to add a new employee, set up out-of-office, etc.?**

    Our Answer: We do better than that – we'll do it for you for FREE over the lifetime of the phone! This is just part of the high-quality service we offer that helps us stand out from the "big box" phone system companies. Of course, we will also train your staff on how to be self-sufficient with our phone system and provide an instruction manual so you can make changes at any time, quickly and easily. However, we also provide free support for the phone system and are happy to make any changes you need if you simply want us to handle it for you.

15. **Can you provide me references from other RECENT clients you installed this phone system for?**

    Our Answer: Absolutely! We are always happy to provide a list of customer references who can attest to the value, reliability and overall positive experience with our system. Just give us a call and we can provide them to you.

16. **Does your system handle emergency 911 calls?**

    Our Answer: Yes, we enable 911 calling on all extensions and ensure that the physical location for each extension is set up with your 911 provider. For this reason, we ask that our customers notify us any time they are planning to move an extension to a new physical address, so we can ensure that emergency services have the correct physical address.

The Most Important Features To Look For

As I said earlier, almost all phone systems are the same. However, here are a few features you want to make sure are included or at least available:

Call Routing When The Internet Goes Down

Another key feature to have is instantaneous, automatic fail over for phone calls if and when the Internet goes down. Providers that understand the critical role a phone system plays for most businesses will also have an option for cellular backup to your Internet service so you can keep your phones working even if the Internet goes down.

Automated Attendant

The Automated Attendant feature allows you to create simple or complex menus so callers can be directed to the appropriate person or department without having to talk with an operator.

After-Hours And Holiday Call Flows

Almost every school has times when they want incoming calls to be handled differently. The After-Hours and Holiday Call Flow features allow you to have calls handled differently based on the day of the week, time of day or holiday.

Voice Mails E-mailed To You

This is a feature many of our clients don't ask for (initially) but later tell us is one of their favorites. Here's how it works: when a call comes in for someone who is on the phone or away from their desk, most phone systems provide the ability for the caller to leave a voice mail. With this feature, the voice mail is also converted to a sound file, attached to an e-mail message and sent to the e-mail address configured for that extension so the extension owner can listen to their voice mail, even if they are out of the office.

Fax To E-mail

Wouldn't it be nice to have your phone system automatically recognize that an incoming call is actually a fax message and just convert the incoming fax to a PDF, then e-mail it to you? That is exactly what this feature provides. With it, any inbound phone number can be set up to receive faxes.

Call Queues

In organizations where there is a high volume of incoming calls, you may want the ability to have the caller automatically placed in a queue, with a custom on-hold message playing until the next agent is available. This feature provides this function and will automatically send the call to the next available staff member.

Find Me – Follow Me

This is a customer favorite, especially for those users who are outside their office on a regular basis. This feature allows your office phone to ring on your cell phone or laptop either simultaneously or in sequence (office phone first, then cell, then laptop) so you never miss a phone call again!

Custom Hold Music, Information and Special Announcements

This is one of our most requested features because it allows you to deliver a message to callers about important announcements or to simply wish them a Happy Holiday Season. This is a far better option than music, which can aggravate someone who doesn't share the same taste in music as you.

The Next Step:
A Free Phone And Communication Assessment

Are you ready to make a move to a new phone system? Curious if you could save money on your phone and Internet bills? Do you HATE your current VoIP system and want to find a replacement – but are stuck in a contract you don't know how to get out of without paying huge fines and early cancellation fees?

Then we'd like to offer you a free phone and communication Assessment to answer these questions:

- **Is your current network environment (bandwith, firewall, router, etc.) able to handle a VoIP system**? We have a diagnostic tool we can run on your computer network to ensure a VoIP phone would work. We'll reveal any additional costs you might have to incur in advance so you're not unpleasantly surprised AFTER you buy.

- **Is it possible for you to get out of a long-term contract with a phone system that you HATE?** We'll review your contract and tell you if and what can be done. Sometimes there are loopholes that give you an out. In some cases, we can negotiate on your behalf to get you out or significantly reduce the fees. In some cases, the NEW system will save you enough money to more than cover the initial payment of early cancellation. We'll go over all of this for you when we meet.

- **Can you save money on your phone and Internet bill?** It's very common for us to save our clients between 20% and 50% without sacrificing quality. As we said earlier, this is a highly competitive industry and vendors DO have unadvertised discounts and incentives you can take advantage of if you know where to look (and we do!).

At the end of this assessment, you'll have all the answers you want as to whether or not it makes good business sense to upgrade your phone.

We hope you become a client, but if not, that's okay too! You have my personal guarantee that absolutely NO high-pressure sales tactics will not be used at any point during our engagement. We simply want this to be a delightful, informative and positive experience for you.

How To Request Your Free Phone Assessment

There are 3 ways to communicate with us and schedule this free assessment. They are:

Go online to: www.ikonbusinessgroup.com/phonedemo

Or call us direct at (212) 334-6481

Or e-mail me direct at ken@ikonbusinessgroup.com

Looking forward to serving you,

Ken Nero

Ken Nero
CEO & Founder, IKON Business Group

P.S. Even if you don't have an <u>immediate</u> need for a new phone system, having this Assessment done is an easy, no-cost way to have "fresh eyes" looking at what you're spending on your phone and Internet, as well as to pinpoint problems with your bandwidth, firewall and router that could be causing phone problems, poor sound quality and dropped calls.

In the 20+ years we've been supporting IT and phone systems for K-12 schools in the New York metropolitan area, we've never been able to find a "perfect" setup with zero problems or ways that I can improve your situation. At the very least, the peace of mind you'll gain from having a credible 3rd party reviewing your systems is worth the little bit of time it takes, and this is truly an easy, non-invasive process.

See What Other Schools Are Saying:

The Bronx Better Learning Charter School Works with IKON to Navigate E-Rate Application Process and Implement Critical Technology Initiatives

"Apart from making me look good, IKON is very knowledgeable. They are a very important part of our team. I'm not sure where I'd be without them, and I really don't want to find out. IKON is like Tylenol--they offer pain relief!"

- Kevin Williams, Technology Director

The Renaissance Charter Schools Tap IKON to Provide Added Security and Peace of Mind Across Locations

"What set IKON apart from other IT providers was their commitment to onsite support. If our Internet goes down, we can't function. Other companies said they'd try to be there by the end of the day, whereas IKON guaranteed us that they'd have someone in the building within 4 hours or less."

- Dan Fanelli, Assistant Director and Assistant Principal

IKON Helps Ascend Public Charter Schools Navigate Remote Learning and Staffing Challenges with After-Hours Support

"The skillset that IKON brings and their laser-focus on K-12 schools were key differentiators. It's important for us to work with vendors who are invested in our community. Working with a managed services provider who specializes in the education space has been invaluable."

- Emeka Ibekweh, Managing Director of Technology

Why Choose Us:

1. **We Respond Within 5 Minutes Or Less.** The average amount of time it takes for one of our clients to get on the phone with a technician who can start working on resolving their problem is 3.5 minutes. We know you're busy and have made a sincere commitment to making sure your computer problems get fixed FAST. And since most repairs can be done remotely using our secure management tools, you don't have to wait around for a technician to show up.

2. **No Geek-Speak.** You deserve to get answers to your questions in PLAIN ENGLISH, not in confusing technical terms. Our technicians will also not talk down to you or make you feel stupid because you don't understand how all this "technology" works. That's our job!

3. **100% No-Small-Print Satisfaction Guarantee.** Quite simply, if you are not happy with our work, we'll do whatever it takes to make it right to YOUR standards without charging you for it. And if we can't make it right, the service is free.

4. **Lower Costs, Waste And Complexity With Cloud Solutions.** By utilizing cloud computing and other advanced technologies, we can eliminate the cost, complexity and problems of managing your own in-house server while giving you more freedom, lowered costs, tighter security and instant disaster recovery.

5. **We Won't Hold You Hostage.** Many IT companies do NOT provide their clients with simple and easy-to-understand documentation that outlines key network resources, passwords, licenses, etc. By keeping that to themselves, IT companies hold their clients "hostage" to scare them away from hiring someone else. This is both unethical and unprofessional. As a client of ours, we'll provide you with full, written documentation of your network and all the resources, software licenses, passwords, hardware, etc., in simple terms so YOU can understand it. We keep our clients by delivering exceptional service -- not by keeping them in the dark.

6. **Peace Of Mind.** Because we monitor all of our clients' networks 24/7/365, you never have to worry that a virus has spread, a hacker has broken in or a backup has failed to perform. We watch over your entire network, taking the management and hassle of maintaining it off your hands. This frees you to focus on your customers and running your business, not on your IT systems, security and backups.