Voice Over IP responses from Michlib-l

Locally you may want to speak with CTS, Bloomingdale or Moss in GR <https://www.mosstele.com/> for ideas, prices.

TLN uses a voip solution called RingCentral.  It's entirely cloud based - no on premise equipment.  Only the desk phones would need to be purchased if you wish or if no one is at the library, you could use your cell phones with the app installed so you can save on paying for desk phones at this time.  The cost is approximately $30/month per user on the TLN contract.  A user is defined as a person that has a desk phone or the application installed on their cell phone.  When the application is installed on your cell phone, when someone calls the library or your extension, it will ring on your cell phone.  The caller will not know you're not physically at the library since the call is going through the app.  When you make a call for library business, you can make it through the RingCentral app and the library phone number will appear on their caller id rather than your cell#.  RingCentral also has a meetings application that's included that you can use for videoconferencing.  It's similar to Zoom.

RingCentral is easy to use.  There is a web portal to setup all the features for your library.  You are able to support your own library as an admin.  RingCentral would assign an implementation manager to walk you through the settings and recording greetings, etc.

Analog systems normally require on premise equipment which requires a maintenance contract and replacement within ten years.  In addition, depending upon the phone system, you may have to be onsite to make any changes.  In the event of a power outage, your library has no phone access.   RingCentral is up 24/7 and if there's a power outage, it has no effect because it's hosted in the cloud.  You can change the library greeting remotely from your cell phone to let patrons know your library is closed.

Happy to reply. We are a class V public library with one building. We implemented VOIP in 2016, and I think we learned a lot from our experience since then.

·         Make sure you have adequate resources. VOIP doesn’t use a lot of bandwidth, so it doesn't eat up a lot of your inbound internet. Hopefully your connection is reliable though. Ethernet infrastructure within your building is important of course. Often the phone itself can accommodate sharing a single ethernet cable with a computer if that is a necessity, but then you get into VLANs if you want to separate the traffic. It’s my preference for the phones to have their own physical ethernet cables. We use POE switches to power the phones, which are Polycom.

·         We have our phone system on its own segment of IP space, and have gone a step further and physically placed it on its own little basic firewall. Owing to this, there is no interconnection between the phone network and the computer network all the way back to the WAN router. We had some initial reluctance from our provider to firewall our phone system because it denies them the ability to easily get in to troubleshoot and reprogram equipment. If the phones are on their own firewall, you could conceivably grant the phone tech a remote connection to the network without opening up anything else. I haven’t had to do this, because our phone tech can talk me through things over the phone. Putting the phones on their own firewall can also help you troubleshoot your own network. If you’ve lost internet access on your computers, but the phones are still working, it gives you a big jump on solving the problem.

·         In our experience, VOIP is not as reliable as our prior landline system. Before, we had a Lucent Merlin system that hung on the wall for 20 years, requiring practically zero maintenance, and the local Ma Bell phone exchange is 300 feet from our front door. We had rock solid uptime, but higher prices for the lines and calls; so that’s a trade-off. We have had some issues with our VOIP services that have required an on-site visit from a tech. It should be clear up front when you sign up how in-depth your support is, and what the expectations are for the local tech to troubleshoot and work through problems. Your relationship with your phone provider is now something you will probably have to manage more than you used to.

·         An advantage with VOIP is that it’s easier to program equipment, such as changing the name of an extension when you hire someone new, adding speed-dials, etc.

·         We have been thankful for our VOIP system during this time, as it makes working remotely much easier. This includes call forwarding, voice and web access to our voicemail and call history. For an additional fee, we can get an app to install on our cell phones to replicate our desk phones (make/receive calls, access to contacts, and easier access to voicemail). Also, inside the library, we can move our phones around (as long as they are routed to a POE switch) without having to reprogram the phone, whereas on our old system the physical line dictated the phone extension and settings.

·         We went with a phone company that serves customers in our region (the UP). They now offer unlimited calling in the continental US as part of the base pricing structure, and we found that was hard to beat. We have each phone set up with a real 10-digit inbound number. It’s also possible to cut costs by using the menu system to route incoming calls to certain phones instead of giving them all real numbers. Some providers will try to cut costs by doing “buddy phones” where one real phone number is shared between two or more physical phones (which all ring when that number is called). There are so many options that you have for configuration and call management, that I can’t even begin to scratch the surface. Your RFP should be clear on expectations for real phone numbers for extensions, etc.

·        Our fiber connection is through Merit. If I were looking to move to another provider, I would definitely want a new bid/quote from Merit’s VOIP partner, Telnet.

·        We still have two traditional landline numbers. One is for our elevator only. The other is shared between our fax and credit card machines. There's probably a way to eliminate those in favor of VOIP, but as of now we've decided to keep them for convenience and redundancy, and the fax service revenue helps pay that bill.

\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

We actually use the RingCentral service, which has an app that we can download onto our cell phones. You go into the app and it links to our phone system at the library. So when we make outgoing calls, we don't have to be at the library, we can do it from our personal cell phones, but we are using the RingCentral app that uses the library's numbers instead.

RingCentral is a Voice over IP service that we use in house, but which also has a cloud based app that can be used on a cell phone    it requires a subscription, which we have through our consortia TLN

We moved from a 20 year old analog system to VoIP and couldn't be happier!!  We worked with Technology Solutions (see <https://nrr.ninja/>) based on two library director's recommendations prior to the No Reservation Recommendations website and we would also highly recommend them. We have had downtime for a few minutes from time to time, but nothing noticeable at all.  We are a Class IV library in a rural setting.  I hope this helps.

We moved from an analog phone system to a VOIP system roughly two years ago. We replaced an Avaya system that was about 10 - 12 years old with a Mitel MiVoice Business Express system with BSB Communications as our vendor. Our RFP specifically limited the proposals to locally hosted VOIP systems. Our initial research in preparing the RFP led us to believe that cloud hosted VOIP systems would be much more expensive. We did receive one response to our RFP that included a cloud solution and that quote aligned with that expectation.

While we ultimately went with BSB / Mitel, the Zultys MX solution quoted by Technology Solutions was an extremely close 2nd. Mitel appeared a bit more polished but the features were nearly identical to Mitel from what I remember.

We've had issues since the migration, the biggest being periodic issues with call quality. Before moving to VOIP:

* Check with your Internet provider to see if they can tag and prioritize incoming voice packets. With our current TLN / AT&T Internet connection, we're not able to do this and it limits our ability to enable Quality of Service and prioritize voice packets to ensure good call quality during times of peak network activity.
* If your provider can't tag and prioritize, make sure you have plenty of bandwidth or create a plan to throttle it. When we began noticing call quality issues when our bandwidth was maxing out due to online gaming in the Teen Room, we had to begin throttling our Teen computers. We also became more diligent about making sure software updates were pushed out before or after public hours.

It took months of logging issues and troubleshooting with TLN, our SIP trunk provider (TelNet World Wide), and BSB to figure this out.

Other issues involved kinks and bugs with some of the extra features like the desktop app and mobile app. These were heavily pushed during the sales pitch but by the time we got them working the way we expected, most staff had lost interest in using them. Admittedly, these features were more intriguing to the IT department than the rest of the staff anyway. They're especially useful now that staff is working remotely though. The softphone option allows staff members to remotely receive work calls and to place calls and have the call appear to be coming from a desk phone extension / direct dial number.

We have used VOIP for several years now.  We got it from our IT people.  We just recently switched to a company called Pulsar 360.  Under our old company, Skytalk Plus (which was bought out by S-Net), it could take an unacceptably long time to get fax confirmations and, sometimes, the voice quality wasn’t good.