WHY A
HYBRID PBX ENVIRONMENT
MAKES SENSE FOR THE
MANUFACTURING SECTOR

As a manufacturer, the decision to move your business communications to the cloud is a journey that either starts out with great enthusiasm or wrought with trepid hesitations. Although it's clear that at some point you'll move away from your on-prem PBX as your primary communications technology in your future, it's understood that you are feeling cautious to jump on the cloud-migration bandwagon… and rightly so.

This is where a hybrid PBX model approach might end up being the 'sweet spot' in the middle to bridge the gap between keeping what you have and taking advantage of the benefits only cloud can offer.

It's becoming increasingly difficult from a management perspective to modernize and unify your communications technologies without considering the cloud. The path forward may start to become muddied- instead of looking at the best possible choices, you're considering what "works for now" instead.   Yet it ultimately takes you even further away from your ultimate goals.

There's a lot to take into consideration for those in manufacturing as internal systems, machinery, tracking, and other assets can create a complex infrastructure that doesn't always present a simple move to cloud.

In this paper, we'll address the reasons why you might want to consider a hybrid PBX deployment, what that environment can look like for your business, and how to ultimately get there.

ON-PREMISE IS BECOMING INCREASINGLY DIFFICULT

Maintaining an on-premise PBX lends itself to certain advantages that IT management have appreciated over the years. For example, having control over when and how upgrades occur, rolling out patches and testing within their unique environments are aspects that IT management aren't going to embrace losing control over. The idea of relinquishing that level of control to a cloud provider can be scary, even threatening.

However, on-premise PBX vendors have seen the demand for cloud increasing for over a decade and can now be seen investing their R&D not into new features for existing on-premise PBX systems, but on reliable cloud solutions that cater to their consumer demand.

Fewer PBX updates are being released by these vendors since supporting PBX systems is increasingly becoming a drain on their available internal resources, specifically their technical support departments. This in turn makes it more difficult for manufacturers to offer modern communication and collaboration technologies for both their customers and internal workers through their on-premise PBX.

Manufacturers that have found reliable and established cloud vendors offering these more modern communication and collaboration technologies have quickly put themselves at a competitive advantage over other manufacturers that do not.

Another reason on-premise systems are becoming less appealing is the associated cost of new hardware, equipment, and licenses to keep the PBX running and in compliance. Just like upgrading to a new version of Windows on an older computer, sometimes upgrading to a newer version of the existing PBX software requires newer hardware. Compatibility and performance issues can present significant financial setbacks or technical complications.

THE CHALLENGE OF MEETING CLIENT EXPECTATIONS

For manufacturers, a key element of the success of your business is the quality of support you provide while meeting the needs of your client. Whether you are a B2C manufacturer servicing factory warranties for home power equipment or a B2B wholesaler producing bottle caps, the end client expects to communicate easily and efficiently when, where and how they want. If delays occur over service calls or order processing, the negative experience can lead them elsewhere.

Consumer behavior has changed rapidly over the years and now B2B clients now expect the same types of quick, convenient experiences.   Expectations pertaining to speed, accuracy, proficiency and especially the ease of communication are critical for manufacturers to provide.

When your customers require assistance, it's almost second nature for them to look for a chat feature with a service agent or send an email to a support team. Although inbound calls are still a large part of your customer service department, that experience has changed as well. Clients expect much shorter hold times, higher levels of personalization and near-instant resolutions from the first person who answers.

If still using an on-premise PBX system, your IT department knows they can alleviate these challenges with various third-party apps. Yet, even these solutions leave much to be desired when they're not part

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of a seamless integrated solution where tracking and reporting is easily attained for managers and supervisors.

REASONS WHY CUTTING THE CORD WITH ON-PREM ISN'T FEASIBLE

Despite all these appealing and logical reasons to consider a move to cloud, there are always exceptions that make a full migration unrealistic.

A business cannot expect to move all their communications to cloud unless they have a solid internet connection, such as fiber. This is often an issue in rural areas where connectivity is spotty and moving critical parts of the business to rely on the cloud isn't realistic.

Businesses also have to consider the risk for unreliable emergency lines, e911 compliance, pagers and speakers, fire alarms, and elevator phones. Laws such as the Ray Baum Act will require all phone systems to provide caller location details to the emergency response teams automatically. Without a stable internet, this poses another risk.

Another reason manufacturers may not be ready to eliminate their on-premise PBX is because they don't want to forfeit the remaining depreciation left in their equipment and gear. Huge investments went into originally acquiring these systems, and depreciation is certainly a key factor in why some businesses are hesitant to move on too quickly.

WHY CLOUD HAS ENTERED THE CONVERSATION

Cloud communications continue to increase in adoption throughout the manufacturing sector since it solves many of the challenges with on-premise PBX deployments. Replacing standard phone connections with mobile-enabled cloud solutions means that your users are no longer location-dependent. Instead, they are able to make and receive calls while remaining connected on any device with a stable internet connection via cellular, fiber/cable or Wi-Fi.

Another plus with cloud communications is that there's built-in security and encryptions at multiple levels of the architecture to ensure all data remains protected. Modern cloud platforms also offer native or 3rd party API integrations to bring all your technology into a single secure interface, making it an ideal solution for the manufacturing industry in particular.

Then there's the aspect of cloud contact centers opening the doorway to a seamless omnichannel experience with your customers across video chat, SMS, messaging, email and social media. A unified workspace allows your service department to handle inquiries more efficiently, and features such as skills-based routing helps ensure the best qualified individual handles each interaction appropriately.

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COMBINING THE BEST OF BOTH WORLDS: A HYBRID PBX APPROACH

While cloud is quickly becoming a staple for the manufacturing industry, you might not be in a position to fully migrate from your on-premise communications. But there are actually several distinct advantages of a hybrid approach that creates a "best of both worlds" scenario for manufacturers.

For example, whether your incoming phone lines are copper-wired or VOIP (voice over IP), hybrid means you'll have the option to keep hard phones in important locations and retain familiar internal dialing extensions. Extensions used to connect employees from one facility to another can remain undisturbed.

An added benefit to the hybrid approach is that you're much better protected from downtime due to power outages or loss of Wi-Fi since you'll be able to switch back & forth between networks to remain operational. With cloud softphones, you're also adding a third potential layer of connectivity over cellular networks.

Another benefit of the hybrid deployment is that it allows you to ensure the right employees within your organization have the right tools to collaborate and communicate effectively, whether it's floor personnel communicating with warehouse staff or front office service reps.

Features such as chat or video may not make sense for employees working on the assembly line throughout the day, however the functionality would prove invaluable to a warehouse manager communicating with distribution logistics personnel who may be offsite. Hybrid allows each staff member to have the ideal technology for their particular role within the company.

THE GROUNDWORK OF A HYBRID PBX DEPLOYMENT

Hybrid allows you to keep the familiarity of your on-premise system where it fits while adding the expanded features of the cloud. Here's what that would look like within your manufacturing business:

- Your organization can keep landlines in frequently used departments and offices. Equipment such as machinery, elevators, pagers and security systems can continue to utilize the existing on-premise system.

- You'll decide which team members will keep existing desk phones, transition to VOIP hard phones or browser-enabled softphones.
- In most cases, internal call extensions can be maintained or re-routed to cloud devices to maintain continuity across your PBX network.
- Customer service agents can be easily configured to work-from-anywhere with a cloud-based platform accessible via any internet connected device such as mobile phones, web browsers, or computer desktop application.
- Advanced features such as video can be used to assist customers in troubleshooting equipment or products instantly with service reps, thus eliminating slower communication methods such as email and online support portals.

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- Omnichannel functionality removes the disparity between multiple 3rd party apps and instead brings them under a single pane of glass view for agents and supervisors to see past and present interactions for each client or customer.

- During the cloud migration process, outdated hardware can be upgraded or phased out, depending on the actual deployment strategy. This would be decided during the planning phases.

- A key factor when deciding on-prem versus cloud will be the licensing and line fees at each physical location. For example, fiber internet may be a cost-saving alternative to existing PRIs or analog lines. This too would be discussed in the planning phases.

THE RISE OF THE CLOUD CONTACT CENTER

As addressed earlier, a hybrid approach is appealing to many in the manufacturing sector due to the use of a modern, omnichannel featured cloud-based contact center that works on top of their traditional PBX.

In an industry where service levels can greatly influence the success of a business, moving your customer support and sales teams onto a cloud platform has many benefits.   By focusing on the customer service, reliable modern cloud platforms can offer a unified view of customer interactions across popular channels of choice like voice, SMS, messaging, video and social media makes servicing customers easier and more efficient.

The modern cloud contact center is all about enhancing the customer journey through next-generation collaboration and reporting features, skills-based call routing and simplified management. These technologies ensure that you'll be able to get inbound callers to the most appropriate service agent quickly, regardless of the location they're physically working from.

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HOW TO GET STARTED

At Converged Technology Professionals, we take a holistic, advisory approach to helping manufacturers find the best possible outcomes in cloud. We specialize in helping regional and national clients adopt a phased approach for their communications technologies, from initial strategy to deployment, management, training and long-term consulting. We serve as an extension of your IT leadership team to ensure you're always making the best possible decisions for your business.

Converged Technology Professionals has strategic relationships with cloud office and contact center providers that we've fully vetted in-house. We began our consultative approach decades ago for businesses on the ShoreTel platform and continue many of those relationships to this day. We work together as their advocate and advisor, helping them make the right decisions when considering a move to cloud, whether in a hybrid or full cloud environment.

If you're considering a move to cloud or would simply like to learn more about the option for a hybrid PBX environment for your business, please reach out to our team to start a conversation.

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This whitepaper was written by Converged Technology Professionals, an IT solutions provider and support partner that specializes in helping businesses successfully migrate their communications and contact center operations to the cloud. Their in-depth expertise and experience in the industry enables them to provide strategic advisement and consulting from pre-planning to deployment and ongoing support.

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