ATC

Why third-party Teams telephony solutions lead the market

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Congratulations! Your organization has decided to use Microsoft Teams as a collaboration solution to help you be more productive as a business. You are not alone. Teams is Microsoft's fastest growing business application of all time, with more than 300 million users globally.

So how do you make the most of this application to ensure your collaboration is as efficient as possible? Well, combining Microsoft Teams and telephony could help you.

Telephony is still, alongside email, the most popular communication channel used by businesses for both internal and external communication. By combining collaboration and telephony solutions you can:

- Increase efficiency.
- Enhance productivity.
- Improve customer experience (CX).
- Increase employee performance.
- Simplify the user experience.

But don't just take our word for it; we prefer to let the numbers speak for themselves. Around 75 percent of businesses have already integrated their collaboration and telephony solutions to try to harness these benefits.

Understanding Microsoft Teams Telephony Options

To enable telephony in Teams, individual users need a Microsoft Phone System license, which is available either as an add-on license or as part of a bundle within certain

Microsoft 365 packages. There are several ways to enable telephony within Microsoft Teams, including Microsoft calling plans, direct routing, operator connect and third-party application integrations.

Let's explore some of the options in more detail:

Microsoft calling plans: Microsoft is your telephony carrier and you are provided with a phone number and a bundle of international or domestic minutes. It is a straightforward process, but there are some restrictions and what some may consider to be a major drawback: Microsoft only offers full carrier capabilities in 33 countries.

If you are used to per-user pricing, Microsoft's calling plan bundles might not be as competitive as other telecom providers. For small businesses, they could be a good option, but if you have more than five users, it may be more worth it to look into another carrier.

Direct routing: Another option that many businesses prefer, direct routing lets you connect Teams to a third-party telephony carrier. You can use your existing telephony partner and get cheaper call rates, more flexibility and better support. However, it can be pricey to set up and manage. To make it work, you'll need to use a special SBC device and have PowerShell knowledge. This approach can be pretty technical and costly, so not everyone will want to go this route without direct assistance from a third-party provider.

Operator connect: This option lets you consume phone numbers and telephony services directly from a third-party carrier, and you can do it all from within the Teams admin center. There are about 60 operators in the program, and once you're in, you can assign phone numbers provided by the different operators to individual Teams users.
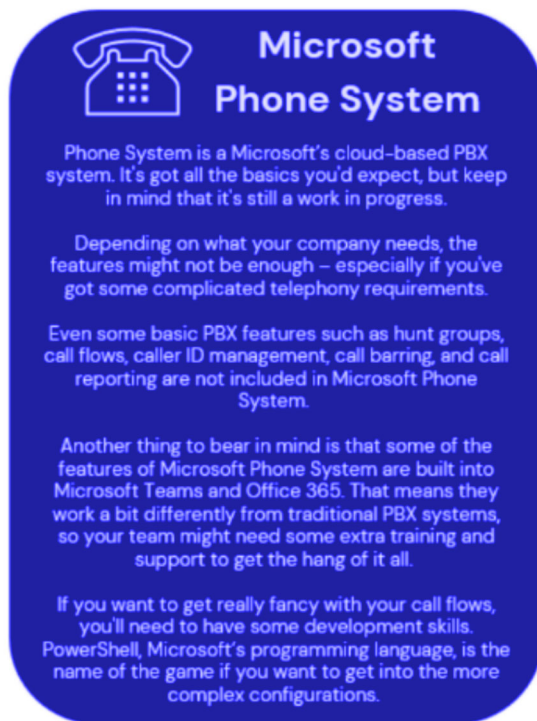
There are some limitations if you use operator connect. To start, you'll have to exclusively use Microsoft Phone System for PBX call control, which might limit some of the features and functions available to your users. You may also need to manage a selection of different carrier relationships if you want to use operator connect across different countries internationally.
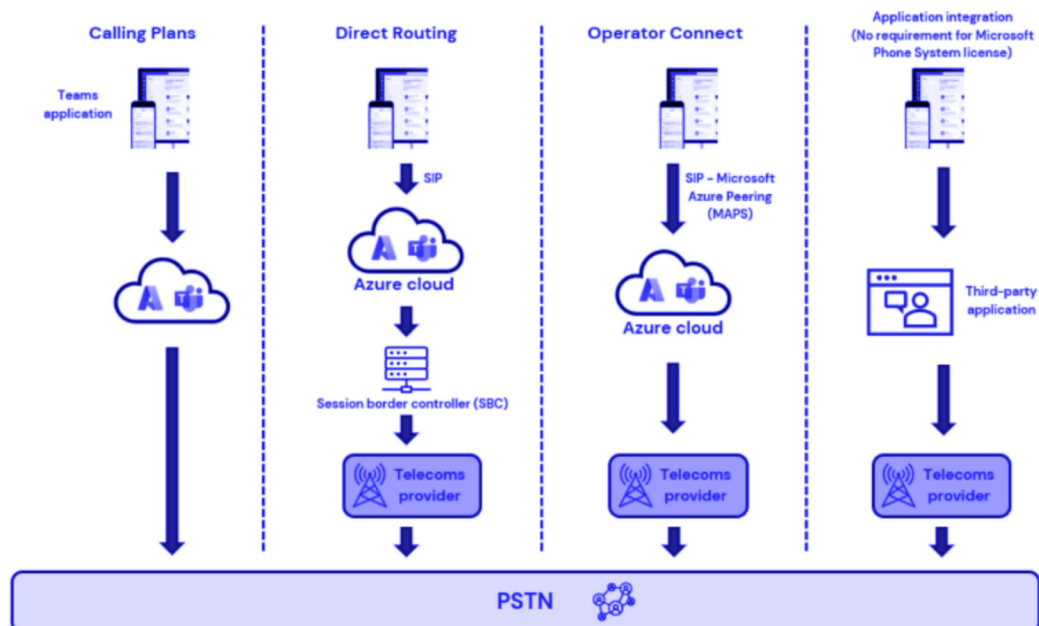
Third-party application integration: This option means using a unified communications provider to enable telephony in Teams. It can save you some money on licensing, but you should carefully consider both end user experience and functionality when evaluating potential solutions. In any case, the majority of businesses (especially larger enterprises), mix and match their Teams telephony solutions to meet the needs of individual users. What's great about this option is that you don't have to choose just one solution to use across your entire organization.

Is Microsoft's Phone System Right for Your Business?

Microsoft Phone System is one of the most important tools in Teams because it lets you make and receive phone calls and provides voice services within Teams. Microsoft's Phone System is essential for all native Teams telephony solutions. If you've got the right license package, you can use it as a full-on phone system, complete with real phone numbers and the ability to call out to any number you need.

Microsoft Phone System

Phone System is a Microsoft's cloud-based PBX system. It's got all the basics you'd expect, but keep in mind that it's still a work in progress.

Depending on what your company needs, the features might not be enough – especially if you've got some complicated telephony requirements.

Even some basic PBX features such as hunt groups, call flows, caller ID management, call barring, and call reporting are not included in Microsoft Phone System.

Another thing to bear in mind is that some of the features of Microsoft Phone System are built into Microsoft Teams and Office 365. That means they work a bit differently from traditional PBX systems, so your team might need some extra training and support to get the hang of it all.

If you want to get really fancy with your call flows, you'll need to have some development skills. PowerShell, Microsoft's programming language, is the name of the game if you want to get into the more complex configurations.

Microsoft's Phone System is what makes this all work. It lets you control calls and do all the things you'd expect from a traditional PBX system, all within Microsoft 365 cloud and Teams. If you are looking to compare it to other cloud PBX platforms, this is the one you'll want to check out.

If you use operator connect or Microsoft calling plans to enable telephony for a Teams user, you must use Microsoft Phone System for that user's PBX call control and can't use it alongside another system.

Why Are Third-Party Teams Telephony Solutions So Popular?

Not having telephony as a standard feature in Teams is a pretty big deal. Calling is one of the most popular communication tools used all over the world and if your business doesn't have it, well, you're missing out on a key asset. This is a critical issue that needs to be addressed and there are reasons why more than 80 percent of Microsoft Teams users who have telephony enabled use third-party solutions.

Microsoft doesn't really have a background in the communications industry. Microsoft has been working hard to catch up by buying up other companies (Skype) and adding to their capabilities. Communications and telephony require some serious expertise, so Microsoft has had to bring in outside help to manage customer requirements that fall outside their traditional business units. Microsoft has only recently started offering capabilities like number porting, provisioning and management as part of their support. It's important to

note that many organizations prefer to get help from third-party experts who specialize in these types of telephony capabilities.

Getting telephony up and running in Teams is no small feat. There are some technical and financial considerations businesses need to keep in mind. Most options require PowerShell expertise, which is basically Microsoft's way of automating tasks and configuring Teams. It's pretty powerful stuff, but not every business has the skills to use it properly. These factors, combined with the limited functionality of Microsoft Phone System and restrictions in the Microsoft telephony enablement methods, generally mean that businesses that value telephony look to third parties to help them maximize their investment in Teams.

If your businesses would find it challenging to configure, maintain or manage a Teams Phone System, direct routing or operator connect deployment, you might want to consider a third-party integration to get telephony enabled in Teams. Don't stress yourself out trying to do it all alone.

What to Look for in a Third-Party Teams Telephony Solution

The vast majority of businesses adding telephony to Teams use a third-party expert to help them. But what are the key criteria you need to consider when selecting your Teams telephony partner? ATC has collated some of the most important factors to consider when you are exploring the market:

Features and functionality: Your phone system needs to keep up with your business requirements. Microsoft Phone System might not have all the features you need at standard such as:

- Text messages.
- Faxes (from the same platform).
- Advanced PBX capabilities.
- Call recordings.
- Customer queues.

More than 10 percent of organizations who already use Teams telephony don't think Microsoft Phone System meets their needs. Be sure to gather the telephony requirements that your users need to be most productive and cross-reference the list against the capabilities of third-party integration providers that can give a boost to your Microsoft setup.

Integration capabilities: Businesses have wide ranging communication requirements and use a variety of different technology systems every day such as:

- Customer relationship management (CRM) software.
- Specific line-of-business systems.
- Contact center solutions.
- And more.

Some of the Microsoft Teams telephony options restrict integration capabilities, making interoperability between apps difficult. Additionally, Microsoft has focused their integration strategy on bringing third-party apps into Teams. Embedding Teams into

apps that could benefit from an integrated communications platform, like a CRM, is challenging.

38 percent of businesses that use Teams for telephony have integrated Teams into their contact center solution in some capacity.

- Microsoft Teams Enterprise Insight Report 2023

Integrated contact center: Teams has become a popular tool with contact center agents to foster internal collaboration. But Microsoft doesn't offer a native contact center solution, leaving organizations to search for third-party solutions to integrate into Teams. If you need both a contact center solution for your customer care agents and a telephony solution for the remainder of your workforce, it may make sense to try to find a single partner who can provide both.

Analytics: One thing that's super important in the world of communication solutions, especially when it comes to Microsoft Teams, is analytics. The market for this is set to hit $25 billion by 2025, so it's a big deal. Companies all over the world need tools that can give them robust metrics across different areas like security, QoS and even user performance and satisfaction.

If you're looking at native telephony analytics capabilities, Microsoft's offering is a bit weaker than average when it comes to diagnosing issues. Microsoft does offer interesting capabilities when it comes to user behavior and usage analytics, so it depends on what you're looking for.

Microsoft's analytics tools are located in different places within its software ecosystem and can be confusing and troublesome to manage. Microsoft is also missing telephony data for line of business leaders. For example, some organizations find it valuable to analyze metrics like call volume in prior, comparable periods to forecast both potential revenue and labor needs. This data can help drive the bottom line, which is top of mind for most businesses these days.

Reliability and SLA: When it comes to third-party Teams telephony products, people often forget about support and service levels. Microsoft Teams promises a 99.99 percent uptime SLA, but that still means users could experience almost an hour of downtime per year in a system that's supposed to run 24/7. Microsoft has added number porting, provisioning and management to its support offerings, but they're still playing catch-up.

If you run a business, it's super important to find third-party telephony products that can match or beat Microsoft's SLA. If you settle for anything less, you're risking a lot: like losing revenue and damaging your reputation due to system downtime. And let's be real, nobody wants that. When it comes to external communication with customers, the cost can be even higher. That's why it makes sense to explore third-party products with better support offerings and higher reliability that are dedicated to telephony issues. That way, you can ensure better levels of service, end-user satisfaction and productivity.

Covering all the bases: Most Microsoft Teams telephony deployments are hybrid. This means that businesses use a selection of different telephony options across direct routing, operator connect and third-party integrated applications depending on the

requirements their individual users have. So, if you are considering third-party Teams telephony partners it makes sense to look at providers that can offer options in each of the different areas so they can help you with all of your different deployment types.

About RingCentral

RingCentral provides Microsoft Teams customers with business calling to help them expand their global reach, integrate flawless employee and customer experiences, and connect the apps they depend on. RingCentral offers a complete phone system with a rich set of integrated capabilities for Microsoft Teams. You'll also get the broadest and deepest set of pre-built telephony integrations to plug in your phone system to all the different apps your business runs on, like Salesforce, Hubspot, Zendesk, ServiceNow and many more. Additionally, IT and business analytics unlock insights and simplify troubleshooting – wherever your teams are located.

RingCentral provides phone service that is 99.99 percent reliable, cost effective and designed to meet even the most advanced business phone needs. Flexible deployment options ensure that you can deliver an experience that balances business needs, end user demands and an exceptional customer experience. RingCentral's embedded app brings powerful, integrated cloud calling into Microsoft Teams – no E5 or Teams Phone license needed. RingCentral Direct Routing works behind the scenes to power reliable calling and an expanded global reach, all while users leverage the familiar Teams interface.

About ATC

ATC is an independent IT company and consulting firm focusing on digital transformation in four core areas: voice, network, cloud and security. We provide highly regarded technical expertise to our clients and access to an extensive portfolio of technology providers. We are a valued extension of their IT leadership team — a trusted advisor.

Strategic, Next-Gen IT Consulting

Deep Expertise

400+ Technology Providers

Proven "DELTA" Process

Super Support

As an independent IT company with offices in Hartford, CT, and Cincinnati, OH, our team is our business. Our currency is technology. We draw upon over 100 years of combined experience and in-depth technology expertise to help clients achieve more than they envisioned for less than they expected. It's an approach that drives positive business outcomes and measurable results.