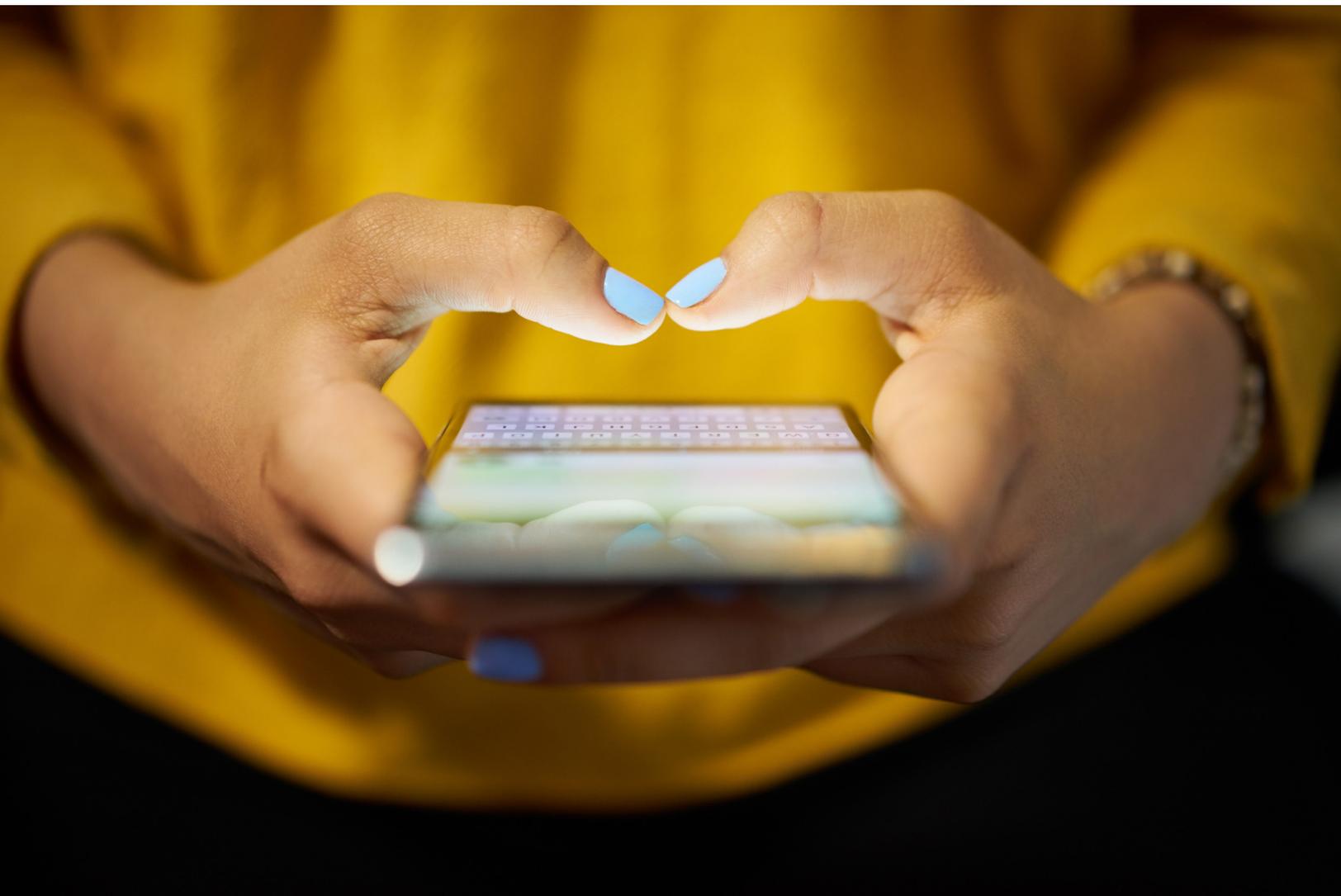


Toward a Smartphone VoIP Operation



Ninety-eight percent of millennials own a smartphone, and Gen Xers are right behind them at 96 percent. Businesses that provide office telephones (that is, all of them) must take this trend into account when updating telephony.

If your IP desk phones mimic smartphones, workers will be more likely to use them.

IP phones can now augment the other screens that today's workforce uses. The business assets are no longer the phones themselves; they are just enablers to support cloud-based applications.

As more companies move to VoIP telephony, managers may have questions about systems that purport to augment the smartphones employees already use. This brief article will answer some of the most common ones.

1. How does the move to smartphone-type VoIP impact the drive toward wireless networks?

Wireless VoIP networks have improved both in quality and gigabit connectivity. In general, you want more connectivity with smartphone-mimicking telephony because it enables the phones to do more.

VoIP phones on traditional wired LANs will probably stay wired because they still work. But new systems will likely be wireless. This may have cost implications in the medium term but that's still unclear.

2. How do I know if these phones will be a good investment?

It depends on whether you consider what you have now to be a good investment. If your phones are fairly new and you're already ready to get rid of them, they may not have been worth the money.

In general, returns on VoIP desk phones are measured in utility. Your employees have alternatives to desk phones — their smart phones, personal computers, etc. If you want them to use the desk phones, you have to buy something that's worth it to them. If phones will enable your employees to do things they couldn't do before, they are a good investment.

In terms of raw numbers, VoIP telephony is more affordable now than in previous years because these phones are not meant to last forever. In general, the hardware will have a three to five year lifecycle. They may not be quite as disposable as mobile phones, but as feature support evolves these phones will need to be updated and replaced.

3. If my employees are still using traditional desk phones, do I need to move to a smartphone-mimicking VoIP system?

Mature businesses don't change a whole lot. Workflows are routine and their customer base is established. If that describes your business, there's not much reason to change unless phone breaks down.

However, employees will get younger and more digitally oriented. They will likely demand a higher quality desk phone or they won't use one at all. Be mindful that their needs might require a system upgrade.

Customer needs may also drive change. If your phone system doesn't enable you to be responsive to customers as fast as they need, it could cost revenue and reputation. This is also something to remember if you're using a legacy telephony system.

4. Is VoIP telephony available in the home office?

Yes. IP phones that aren't hardwired to desks will work wherever you have access to the internet. If you are configured to your company's network, it doesn't matter if your phone is connected to a jack in the office or at home. You can work just as effectively from either place.

IP phones in general are more conducive to remote work. This may make it easier for companies to decentralize their operations. When telephony is in the cloud, you can access everything from anywhere.