

# ‘Must Have’: Defining Your IP Phone System

**Decision makers seeking a new communications solution are finding that developing requirements for a phone system is a far more complicated matter than it was 10 years ago, if only because of the myriad choices available.**

**by Stephanie L. Carhee**

Today’s telecommunications manager works with two types of end users: standard users and power users. A standard user has a basic need for functionality that is typically found within any standard TDM system, while a power user needs functions that go beyond the basics, with unique and sometimes advanced requirements. When deploying a solution you instinctually may say, “I want to mimic the features and functions of what I have now.”

The problem with this approach is that it does not distinguish a key set of business-critical requirements — you must know what your “must-have” features are as opposed to your “nice-to-have” features for both the standard and power user. Must-have features, if not enabled, will cripple or disrupt my business. Nice-to-have features include a laundry list of functionality requirements that are not common, not widely used, and will not be missed if not included.

As a decision maker, you will have a better chance of optimizing your time and benefiting your enterprise if you start by asking yourself, “Am I trying to mimic what I have or solve

business problems that the new solution can address?”

If you are trying to solve a problem, the approach should be to first understand all your business-critical features and then add additional features to solve the existing problems. This way, you prioritize the list of features that are critical, then examine additional features that will optimize your workforce, drive productivity, and solve mission-critical business problems.

## **Wow Your Users**

In order to gain support and build momentum for the new system, consider adding a few “wow” features that will get end users excited. It’s not enough to just include basic features at the onset as end users will question the need for the change and will not see the value or benefits of the new system. If you give them a new tool, just one tool, they can often get passed the things that will change. A simple tool that can be added to an IP endpoint could be an LDAP directory of all employee phone numbers, Web access to email, scrolling bulletin announcements of important employee

news, or maybe a local phone directory of restaurants, attractions, and fun things to do.

It’s best to do the homework to understand what core, culture-driven features are critical to your organization. To get you started, use the Top 10 action items sidebar to help guide you through the process of separating your must-haves from your nice-to-haves.

**The key to success is to remember that optimizing your IT investment starts with change, followed by understanding your core requirements, and ends with setting expectations accordingly**

With this list in hand, consider a phased — “crawl-walk-run” — approach to releasing features. First, attempt the basic yet mission-critical features, sprinkled with a few applications that will “wow” them, and then begin introducing those advanced features that take the solution beyond dial tone. Finally, once you have end-user acceptance, standardization, and a solid infrastructure in place, launch the prob-

lem-solving business applications that will transform your communications network.

The key to success is to remember that optimizing your IT investment starts with change, followed by understanding your core requirements, and ends with setting expectations accordingly.

The more background you have on your users, the more surprises you take out of the picture. And the fewer surprises you have, the smoother the migration. **[VM]**

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## FEATURE PRIORITY TOP 10 LIST

- 1 Capture a list of power users and understand their business-critical functionality requirements.
- 2 Identify your must-haves and include those features that are critical for enabling users to do their jobs.
- 3 Consider conducting a survey to better understand your user requirements, current voice challenges, and optimization opportunities.
- 4 Most of your users don't know their own phone set configurations. Don't just rely on them for verification of standard features.
- 5 Eliminate buyer's remorse by meeting and exceeding user expectations.
- 6 Do your homework and don't fall back on mimicking as a solution.
- 7 Understand the needs and differences of each business unit's — marketing, finance, manufacturing, etc. — set of critical features.
- 8 Understand the role of company culture — or “the way we do things” — as it pertains to enterprise communication.
- 9 Minimize complexity by creating an optimization plan for future feature releases.
- 10 Review any existing vendor contracts to ensure that you have ownership of your PBX configuration report, listing existing station reviews and functionality standards.