

10 Questions You Need to Ask Your Conference Call Provider

Are you easy to reach?

Ask them to provide the customer service phone number and email, then give them both a try. Find out if you can reach a person right away. If you are on a conference call and you need help, you want to get an immediate response. Ask the representative how long it takes to reach technical support. Find out if there is an automated menu that you need to navigate through to reach a representative. Your time is important and you shouldn't spend it waiting on hold.

Can you handle any type of conference?

In the future, you don't know what kind of service you might want to offer on a conference call. For example, you may want to host a PowerPoint, or invite a high-profile speaker. Perhaps you'll want to add video, or invite 1,000 participants to listen in. The last thing you want to do is change your conference provider when business is booming. You need to make sure your provider can adapt and grow with you. Find out what capabilities the conference call provider has. In addition, find out if the prices will change.

Do you guarantee line capacity?

You would be surprised to find out that many companies "overbook" their systems. Make sure your provider guarantees that all of your participants need to get on the call. Ask what their conference bridge capacity is maintained at. Ideally, you want a provider that keeps their system at 50% capacity. We've heard stories about how people were paying for 200 lines, even though their conferences were averaging about 30 people. When their clients would call in and get busy signals, the company assumed it was because their lines were full, not because the conference call provider was overbooked and "out of lines".

Do I need to sign a contract?

Find out if there is a cost to signup or a penalty to cancel. You don't want to lock-in to a contract and discover a few months later that the quality isn't good or the service doesn't match your needs.

Do you have live call controls?

These are moderator controls that you can use to manage your conference call. Ask the representative if you can visually track participants using online controls. This is an important feature because it will provide you with added security and help you resolve issues fast. For example, if someone's phone is making a disruptive noise, you need to see where it's coming from and mute it so that it doesn't distract the others.

Are there any hidden fees?

Be aware that once you start using a conference service you may discover various fees and stipulations you didn't know about. Watch specifically for monthly fees or minimum usage requirements. Some providers will charge a monthly fee for toll-free accounts regardless of usage, as opposed to using a pay-as-you-go model. Also, some fees are hidden on the invoice as arbitrary taxes which are not required to be collected. For this reason it is a good idea to ask upfront about fees and get a sample invoice.

What features and benefits are included and do they cost extra?

Find out what capabilities the conference call system has. Make a list of features that are important to you and ask specifically about these features. Be aware of companies that seem to “nickel and dime” you because it will add up in the end. Some of the popular features which you should ask about are recording (playback and download), web conferencing, code options (for added security), operator services (for event planning), and 800 Forwarding (for additional flexibility). You should not pay extra for most of these.

What guarantees do I have that this will be a good service?

Ask if the company has a written policy that is posted on their website. Listen carefully as to how they answer this question. If they are confident and to-the-point, then you know that they stand behind their product. Ask about the technical support, the hours of operation, and how the company will solve your problems. Take note as to how fast they answer the phone. Did you have to wait on hold? That’s a good indicator of what kind of service you can expect.

Does your system use VoIP?

Also known as “**Voice over Internet Protocol**”, this technology uses the internet to transmit your conference call data. VoIP is not reliable and can be the root of many problems including poor call quality. Make sure the carrier you choose uses fiber-optic lines and a private telephone network to transmit your audio. Be extra aware of “free” conference call providers as the telephone bridges that they use are often blocked by large carriers like AT&T, Qwest, and Sprint.

Do you have DTMF clamping?

DTMF clamping traps tones from your telephone keypad, preventing them from playing into your call. This is important because many conference call providers rely on using telephone keypad controls to activate special features like recording (*2) or muting (*6). The last thing you want is a bunch of “beeps” playing into your call.

Bonus Question: Can I get a free trial?

If the product is good, then they shouldn’t mind letting you try it. When possible, don’t give out your credit card information for a demo. There is no reason why a company should need your financial information for a FREE trial.