

Make sure you do your own thorough search for the best deals and the best equipment before committing to any particular brands. There are many useful information sources for VoIP, but the following links may help you get started.

Service providers:

www.blueface.ie

www.voiceireland.ie

www.broadtalk.ie

www.freespeech.ie

www.skytel.ie

www.skype.com

www.jajah.com

Equipment providers:

www.cisco.ie

www.procom.ie

www.multinet.ie

What should I consider before choosing VoIP?

Ask your provider the following questions so that you can make an informed choice.

- Do I have to change my phone number to use the VoIP service?
- Does your service allow me to dial the emergency numbers 999 or 112?
- Does your VoIP service offer features such as directory assistance, directory listings and access to the operator?
- Does your VoIP service depend on my power supply?
- If I use an ATA (a gateway), do I need to charge it through the main power supply?
- Do you offer back up power in case of power cuts?
- If there's a problem with my broadband connection, will you offer back up through a traditional telephone connection?

Where can I find more information?

We publish a set of guidelines for VoIP providers on their dealings with consumers. You might like to study this to understand how your provider might deal with you. The guidelines are voluntary, but they represent a reasonable code of practice that most providers will respect. The guidelines can be found on ComReg's website under the following hyperlink: http://www.comreg.ie/_fileupload/publications/ComReg04103a.pdf

How can I contact ComReg?

By phone (LoCall): **1890 229 668**
(9.00am to 5.30pm) Monday to Friday

By fax: **(01) 804 9671**

By email: consumerline@comreg.ie

Our websites are:

www.comreg.ie / www.askcomreg.ie / www.callcosts.ie

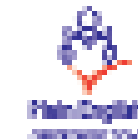
By post: **ComReg Consumer Team, Irish Life Centre
Block DEF, Lower Abbey Street, Dublin 1**

Understanding VoIP



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Voice over Internet Protocol

In this guide we:

- describe what VoIP is and how it works;
- give you tips before you decide to buy; and
- suggest how VoIP might benefit you as a consumer.

What is Voice over Internet Protocol (VoIP)?

Voice over Internet Protocol (VoIP) is a technology that allows you to make telephone calls using an internet connection instead of your regular phone line. The internet connection is normally broadband to make sure the phone calls are reasonably clear and to keep time delays to a minimum during the call.

How does it work?

You can make phone calls with VoIP in one of three ways.

1. Analog Telephone Adaptor (ATA)

The simplest way to make a VoIP call is to use an analog telephone adaptor, sometimes called a 'gateway'. This device allows you to use your current standard phone.

To make a VoIP call, simply plug your standard handset into the ATA and connect the ATA to your computer or your internet connection.

The ATA takes the analog signal from your standard phone and turns it into a signal that is ready to be sent over the internet.

With some ATAs you may be able to:

- set up your computer for VoIP;
- select whether your outgoing calls use VoIP or the ordinary telephone connection; and
- switch between VoIP and your phone connection for incoming calls.

2. VoIP phone

This handset looks just like a standard phone, but it is connected directly to your router or PC through an Ethernet or USB port instead of the standard telephone connector.

The handset already includes all the software and devices you will need to handle VoIP calls. It offers a fast and cost-effective way to use Voice over Internet Protocol.

A basic VoIP handset costs between €40 and €130.

3. Computer to computer

As the term suggests, this involves using the internet connection on your PC to contact someone at their computer. A program on your PC makes this possible by acting like a VoIP phone. Many companies, such as Xten and Microsoft, offer inexpensive software for this type of VoIP. Apart from the software, your computer needs a microphone, speakers, a suitable sound card and a fast internet connection.

You may need to spend some time setting up the microphone and speakers to make sure that the sound works well and there is no feedback during the call. You can help remove feedback by keeping your speakers well away from the microphone and not having the speaker volume too high.

What are the benefits of VoIP?

One of the main benefits is that VoIP can result in lower call costs. Calls may even be free of charge in some cases, for instance if calls are made to users on the same network.

Another benefit is that you can unplug your telephone handset from your PC or adaptor, travel to a new location (potentially anywhere in the world), plug it into another connection and carry on exactly as if you were at home. This is known as nomadic operation.

What services can VoIP providers offer?

Aside from standard call services, VoIP providers may also offer:

- presence indication,
- video calls,
- conference calls, and
- associated data services like web push and whiteboarding.

Some services also offer advanced call-handling options. These are based on caller ID information and allow you decide how to handle calls from a particular number. For example, you may:

- re-direct the call to another number;
- send the call directly to your voice mailbox;
- give the caller a busy signal; or
- play a 'not-in-service' message.

With many VoIP services, you can also check voicemail through the web or attach messages to an e-mail that is sent to someone's computer or handheld device.

Differences between VoIP providers

VoIP services are still fairly new, and not all VoIP providers offer the same basic call services. Although VoIP may bring more choice, additional features and lower prices, consumers need to know what they are buying. Some VoIP services might seem like traditional telephone services but may not offer all of the features consumers have come to expect from their home telephone service.

In general, be aware of the following differences.

- Some VoIP providers may allow you only to call other people who use VoIP, but others may allow you to call anyone who can be reached by telephone, including local, long distance, mobile and international numbers and, or, Internet addresses.
- Some services only work over your computer or a special VoIP phone, but other services work with a traditional phone and an adaptor.
- Some VoIP providers may ask that you use a new number starting with the new '076' code especially for VoIP calls, but others may let you keep your usual phone number to use their services.

Check before you buy

We believe it is important that you, the consumer, have enough information to confidently select the type of service you need. This service may be:

- a traditional fixed-line service,
- a new VoIP service of at least the same standard, or
- a more limited but cheaper service.

We have given examples of equipment and services in this leaflet only to explain how VoIP works. We do not recommend any specific versions or service providers.