

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 and 112?
- Does your VoIP service offer features such as directory assistance, directory listings and access to the operator?
- How much are VoIP calls to local, national, mobile and international numbers?
- Is there a 'lock-in' (minimum) period that I must pay for when I sign the contract?
- Does your VoIP service depend on my power supply?
- If I use an ATA adaptor (a gateway), do I need to charge it through the mains power supply?
- Do you offer a back-up power source in case of power cuts?
- If there's a problem with my broadband connection, will you offer back-up by allowing me to fall back on 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. You can find the guidelines on our website www.comreg.ie

*Calls to 1890 numbers from landlines are charged at a local call rate. Charges from mobile phones may vary depending on your operator.

How can I contact ComReg?

By phone: **(01) 804 9668** or **1890 229 668***
(9.00am to 5.30pm, Monday to Friday)

By fax: **(01) 804 9680**

By email: consumerline@comreg.ie

By post: **ComReg Consumer Team**

Irish Life Centre, Block DEF, Lower Abbey Street, Dublin 1.

Our websites are:

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

Understanding VoIP



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Voice over Internet Protocol

This guide:

- describes what VoIP is and how it works,
- provides tips to help with your buying decision, and
- suggests 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, usually over a broadband connection instead of your standard phone line. VoIP uses 'packet technology', which means it uses communication channels more efficiently than traditional telephone connections.

How does it work?

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

1. Analog Telephone Adaptor

The simplest way to make a VoIP call is to use an ATA (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:

- select whether your outgoing calls use VoIP or the standard telephone connection, and
- switch between VoIP and your standard phone connection for incoming calls.

2. VoIP phone

A special VoIP handset looks just like a standard phone, but it is connected directly to your router or PC, usually through an Ethernet or USB port (the slot used for memory sticks).

The handset already includes all the software you need to send and receive VoIP calls and offers a fast and inexpensive way to use Voice over Internet Protocol.

3. Computer to computer using software and a VoIP phone

As the term suggests, this involves using software on your PC and an internet connection to contact someone else with similar software on their computer. 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 that there is no feedback during the call. You can help remove unwanted feedback by keeping your microphone and speakers a little apart, pointing your speakers away from the microphone, and making sure the speaker volume is not too high.

What are the benefits of VoIP?

One of VoIP's main benefits is that it can significantly reduce the cost of calls, especially over long distances. Calls may even be free in many cases, for instance if you make them to people using the same VoIP network as you.

Another benefit of VoIP is that you can unplug your handset from your PC or adaptor, travel to a new location (potentially anywhere in the world), plug the handset 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:

- video calls, and
- conference calls.

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

- re-direct the call to another number,
- send the call directly to your voice mailbox, or
- reject the call.

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

Differences between VoIP providers

Not all VoIP providers offer the same basic call services. Although VoIP may bring more choice, extra features and, in most cases, lower prices, some VoIP services 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 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 restrict you to calling other people who use VoIP, while others support calls to anyone who can be contacted by telephone, including local, national, mobile and international numbers and internet addresses.
- Some current services may not allow you to make emergency calls to 999/112. In these cases you will need to keep your traditional landline or your mobile phone.

Check before you buy

While this guide briefly explains how VoIP works and gives examples of VoIP equipment and services, we cannot recommend any specific versions or service providers.

Make sure then that you fully research the best deals and equipment for you before you commit to any particular brand.