Choosing a Cloud Provider: 10 Must-Haves in Your Enterprise RFP

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If you want your organization to stay competitive, the time to migrate communications to the cloud is now — or better yet, right now. When choosing a cloud provider, many organizations will start with a request for proposal (RFP).

When choosing a cloud provider, consider how well it scales.

An RFP allows you to shop around to multiple providers to find one that fits. Of course, missing the mark on your RFP could mean getting stuck with an almost-right or completely wrong cloud provider experience. To save you from both scenarios, here are 10 must-haves for any enterprise cloud RFP:

1. Capable UCaaS

Top cloud providers are no longer selling a phone system — they're providing a communications platform that is tied into your business processes. So, if you have customers, you need Unified Communications-as-a-Service (UCaaS). Most users within an organization

regularly rely on a core set of features, and they must work well all the time. For your RFP, this means identifying a list of "X" features that are necessary for day-to-day operations, such as reliable VoIP connections and easy mobile integration.

2. Top-Notch Mobility and Collaboration Tools

Enterprises are no longer settling for second-class mobility and collaboration tools. As an example, think of your employees' business identity as their office phone number. With an ideal cloud solution, they should be able to communicate using that identity with any device they want, such as their desk phone, home computer, personal smartphone, and tablet. So, with a sophisticated cloud solution, the business identity is no longer tied to the office phone.

3. QoS Promises

Promises, promises. The fact is, expectations for quality of service (QoS) have been falling as VoIP and mobile phone use increases, with the loss in connection and performance offset by the convenience. However, enterprises can't afford to compromise on quality — nor can they spend half their communications budgets every month just for clear calls. Make it clear up front that you expect providers to offer reasonably priced QoS that includes guarantees about uptime and call quality. This should ideally include implementation of MPLS or SD-WAN technologies, or a hybrid.

4. Real-Time Support

Ask a cloud provider for 24/7, real-time support, and it will say "Yes" every time. What you need to ask — and what needs to be in your RFP — are questions about how this service is provided. Where are support agents located? How quickly can they be reached? How do they handle VoIP call quality issues? Are they proactive or simply looking at historical outcomes? Are they actively sampling calls? Look for clear, concise answers free of heavy tech jargon or assertions that "it's never been a problem before."

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5. Integrations and APIs

Cloud systems don't operate in isolation. Your communications provider must be able to integrate its services with existing business tools, such as CRM, customer service, and business management applications. By also offering communication APIs, your development team can efficiently create new applications — or enhance existing apps — that enable custom, real-time communication experiences with customers.

6. Scaling Up

One key tenet of the cloud is the ability to scale. However, it's not enough to assume scalability — your RFP needs to ask providers which steps they're taking to ensure they're prepared to meet evolving demands. For example, how well are they staffed? How are staff trained? How much automation (if any) is happening on the back end? Do you they allow self-service?

7. Chain of Command

The choice between working with multiple providers or consolidating services under a single provider is often simple: When things go right, companies want "one back to pat" (or perhaps one throat to choke should things go wrong). Despite the interconnected nature of cloud services — from network, to UCaaS, to collaboration services — enterprises know that dealing with multiple vendors means multiple levels of responsibility and accountability. In effect, providers start playing the blame game. Instead, look for providers that directly handle problems and come back with solutions.

8. Street Cred

When you're choosing a cloud provider, your RFP should also ask for details about any industry accolades it has earned, as well as its ongoing commitment to innovation. Look for offerings mentioned by reputable research firms and ask which providers they're partnering with to drive innovation. Then, follow up with specific questions about those innovations.

9. TCO

What's this all going to cost? Any RFP should include a section on total cost of ownership (TCO). Look for providers that let you pay for what you use, and make sure they're including all "extra" costs, such as 24/7 monitoring and support, in any running totals.

10. BSS/OSS

Last but not least, look for robust business support systems (BSS) and operational support systems (OSS) offerings. These systems are tailored to the services that you provide to your customers and help your employees do their day-to-day jobs. Cloud providers worth your time should offer specialized BSS/OSS solutions paired with solid analytics.

Your organization's efficient migration to the cloud begins with a well-conceived RFP. Start by asking the right questions — and making the right demands.

To learn more about how cloud solutions can help your organization, contact a Vonage Business consultant.