

TECHNOLOGY HISTORY · MIGRATION · 2026

From PSTN to Voice over Cloud: Four Eras

Every Australian business phone system belongs to one of four generations, and most owners could not tell you which. That matters, because the sensible next move is entirely different depending on where you are starting, and because.

Four eras, not two. Analogue POTS from the 1880s, where one line carried exactly one call and every feature was metered separately. Digital ISDN with an on-premises PBX from the late 1980s, where channels replaced lines, call control moved into your building, and capacity became a hard ceiling that required a site visit to raise. VoIP from the 2000s, where voice became data packets and SIP trunks replaced circuits, but the PBX frequently stayed exactly where it was, which made call quality your problem rather than the carrier's. And Voice over Cloud from 2017, where there is no box, capacity is elastic, any device is an extension and you pay per user per month. **The distinction that matters: VoIP is a transport technology, Voice over Cloud is a delivery model.** You can run VoIP with the system still in your cupboard, and thousands of Australian businesses do.

■ The short version

Characteristic	What it meant in practice
Voice as an electrical signal	No conversion, no packets, no software. The medium was the message, literally.
One line carried exactly one call	Two simultaneous calls required two lines. Ten meant ten. Capacity was a physical property of the building.
Call control sat in the carrier exchange	You owned a handset and rented a service. Everything intelligent happened somewhere else, operated by somebody else.
Features were metered and billed individually	Call waiting was a line item. Call forwarding was a line item. Voicemail was a line item. This is where the habit of billing per feature was learned, and the industry has never.

■ Also worth knowing

What changed	Consequence for a business
No box to own	No hardware refresh cycle, no end-of-support cliff, no single cupboard whose flooding takes out the phones, no capital purchase to depreciate.
Capacity is elastic	Concurrent call capacity scales on demand rather than being provisioned to a worst-case peak and paid for permanently. The eleventh call is not a failure.
Any device is an extension	Desk phone, laptop, mobile, browser, the same extension, the same number, the same call flow. Location stops being a property of the phone system.
Pay per user, per month	Cost tracks headcount rather than infrastructure. Adding a person is a setting; removing one is a setting.
Automatic failover	An outage at one site does not take the number down, because the number never lived at the site.
Self-service provisioning	A new user takes minutes in a portal rather than a technician visit. The cost of change collapses, which changes what businesses are willing to try.
Continuous upgrades	New capability arrives without a scheduled outage or a version migration project. You do not run version 6.2 of anything.

The one genuine virtue, and it is a real one

An analogue line was powered from the exchange, which meant a corded handset kept working when the building lost power. **No subsequent generation has replicated that for free**, and any honest account of this history has to concede it. What every subsequent generation offers instead is redundancy by other means, a mobile app in a pocket, a diversion that fires when a site goes dark, a platform that reroutes to another network.

■ Questions the full guide answers

- ☐ What is the difference between VoIP and Voice over Cloud?
- ☐ How do I tell which generation of phone system my business is running?
- ☐ Is the PSTN being shut down in Australia and what does that mean for my business?
- ☐ Should I put SIP trunks into my existing PBX or move to a cloud platform?
- ☐ Why did call quality become a problem when businesses moved to VoIP?
- ☐ What does Voice over Cloud give a business that a hosted PBX or VoIP setup does not?
- ☐ Where did the term Voice over Cloud come from?

This is the summary. The guide has the detail.

Every point above is worked through in full on our site, with the Australian context, the numbers and the exceptions. If you would rather talk it through, call **1300 881 662** or visit **unidenvoice.com/get-started**.