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Phonebooth Free: An Alternative to Google Voice for Small Businesses

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March 10 2010

In November, Phonebooth.com released the beta version of Phonebooth OnDemand, which is a full-featured phone service that lives in the cloud, but can communicate with both cellular phones and IP desk and conference phones. Today, that service — which costs \$20 a month per user — is becoming generally available. Phonebooth.com is also leveraging its own private VoIP network to launch Phonebooth Free, a free version of its hosted phone system, which is very similar to Google Voice but aimed at small businesses.



Phonebooth.com is a product from Bandwidth.com. While Bandwidth.com might not be as well-known as players like Comcast, Verizon and Cisco, in the business VoIP space it's a pretty big player. Bandwidth.com has its own VoIP network and because of that has more flexibility over pricing, which is one reason the company can launch products like Phonebooth Free.

Phonebooth Free

A problem that a lot of small businesses face — especially businesses that have employees located all over the country — is deciding on a phone system. On the one hand, the investment into a PBX system is often an expense that just can't be justified in the beginning. On the other hand, having everyone use their own cell phones can appear unprofessional — especially if you are a customer-facing company.

Services like Grasshopper exist and they offer a low-cost way to get features like auto-attendant (press 1 to reach Jenny in Accounting) and call forwarding, but even they have a minimum monthly pricing plan.

Phonebooth Free is, from what I can find, the only free VoIP-based phone system that will give you a local number with up to five extensions, offer call forwarding to multiple sources, voicemail with transcription, and the ability to let users connect with you from the web (like the Google Voice widget) for free.



Welcome to Phonebooth

Help	Section	You've Used	Available	stepper
?	Users	4	of 50	setup
?	Groups	2	of Unlimited	setup
?	Auto-Attendants	1	of Unlimited	setup
?	Voicemail Transcriptions	4	of 50 / per month	
?	Inbound Minutes	2	of 200 / per month	

Welcome to Phonebooth.

Start by clicking the "[setup](#)" link to the left for any section.

You can return to this page anytime by clicking the "[help](#)" link at the top of the page.



Free? Yeah. Free. If you sign-up for Phonebooth Free you get a free local phone number for up to five users and 200 inbound minutes a month. Every additional minute is 6¢, which is about the industry standard.

Phonebooth Free includes an auto-attendant so that you can have number-based redirection to go to other employees or users. And like Google Voice, you can set-up call forwarding to forward to one or multiple cellular phones based on rules that you set.

Phonebooth Free also includes support for something called Contact Us Plus, which is a dynamic widget that you can put on your website that offers up contact information (including click-to-call), plus other business contact info like e-mail, Twitter links and a Google Map with your company's location.

The widget is dynamically generated, which means that if you change your phone number or website or other information, it gets updated automatically.



« Auto Attendants / Contact Us Plus

Contact Us Plus

1. Edit Your Company Contact Information

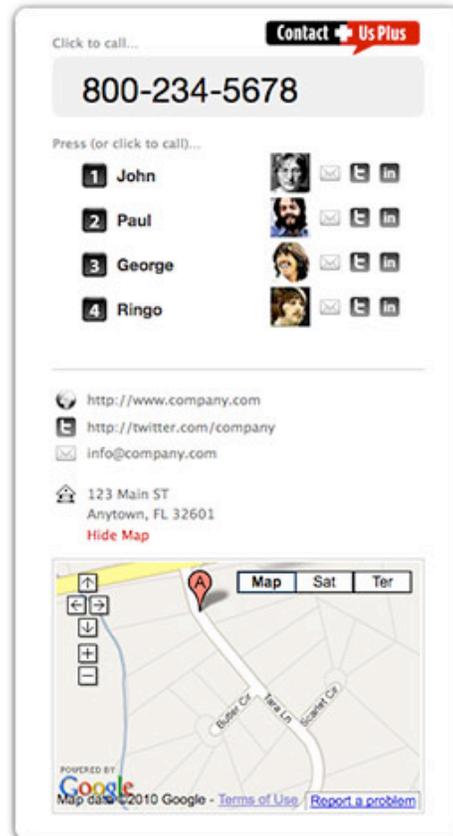
Edit your company's contact information below. If you need to make additional edits to individual users, please go to the Users section of Phonebooth. Once you are satisfied with the widget on the right, copy and paste the JavaScript in step 2 into your website.

Company Website <http://bandwidth.com/help>
Company Email support@bwstest.com
Company Twitter Name [bandwidth](#)
Company Address [4001 Weston Parkway](#)
[Cary, NC 27513](#)

2. Copy and Paste Into Your Site

Copy and paste into this your website.

```
<script type="text/javascript" src="http://localho
```



Click to call... **Contact Us Plus**

800-234-5678

Press (or click to call)...

- 1 John
- 2 Paul
- 3 George
- 4 Ringo

<http://www.company.com>
<http://twitter.com/company>
info@company.com
123 Main ST
Anytown, FL 32601
[Hide Map](#)

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Phonebooth OnDemand

Phonebooth Free is a brand new offering, but Phonebooth OnDemand is also becoming generally available. Phonebooth OnDemand is a product aimed at businesses that need either more inbound minutes or need to be used with desk phones and have other features from a full-featured phone system.

Phonebooth OnDemand is \$20 a month per user and includes unlimited local and long distance calls on the Phonebooth.com nationwide network, supports HD VoIP and IP phones, can handle conference calls (that can be set up within the web admin interface),

and can do everything that Phonebooth Free can do in terms of number porting and forwarding.

Phonebooth.com has an upgrade path that will let users or companies upgrade from Phonebooth Free to Phonebooth OnDemand, if their needs for a phone system extend or grow beyond free offerings.

Other Thoughts

Phonebooth Free has most of the features of something like Google Voice except for one — outbound calls still appear from the number in which they originate from. I spoke to Todd from Phonebooth.com and he said that while masking tools will probably be available in the future, it will most likely be done on the software side for the individual cell phone clients, because those systems handle that sort of thing better.

On the mobile end, Phonebooth sees the potential for mobile and VoIP integration — especially at the business level — and they have plans to make their whole platform integrated across the big mobile platforms. As it stands, you can use your cellular phone with either Phonebooth service without a problem, but mobile clients are something that will be featured in the future.

Big Opportunities for Small Businesses

By offering a free option with a direct upgrade plan to another product, Phonebooth Free is really attractive for small businesses — or even individuals who want to maintain separate business and personal communications fronts, without having to invest in getting multiple phone numbers or phones.

We think that VoIP's business implications are potentially even greater than its consumer implications, especially as more and more companies move or consider moving to IP-based PBX systems. Hosted services like Phonebooth have a real opportunity to get business from companies that might not want to invest in full systems that someone has to be paid to maintain, but that still want an easy way to route and manage incoming and outgoing calls.

Does your business use any sort of VoIP solution? What do you use and why? Let us know!