

## **Consumer Guide to Internet Phone Service**

Voice and other telecommunications services traditionally carried over the public telephone network are now being offered using Internet technology. If you are considering these services, commonly known as Voice over Internet Protocol (VoIP), the frequently asked questions below provide useful information that may help you decide whether VoIP is right for you.

### **What is VoIP?**

VoIP is a technology protocol that enables voice communications to be transported over the Internet and in some cases transported over the public telephone network in accessing the Internet. VoIP works by sending voice information in digital form using Internet protocol rather than the traditional protocols of the public switched telephone network. You may also hear VoIP referred to as IP telephony or Voice over the Internet.

### **Can I use my current telephone to make VoIP calls or do I need to purchase new equipment?**

Yes, but you should check with the service provider for Customer Premises Equipment (CPE) requirement.

You can use your current telephone to make calls using VoIP, but you will also need the following:

1. A high-speed Internet connection, such as a cable modem, ISDN, DSL, or a T-1 link.
2. A VoIP modem—about the size of a telephone modem, your telephone plugs into this.
3. An account with a VoIP provider.

### **Do VoIP providers have to follow the same rules as traditional telephone companies?**

Currently in Ohio, VoIP providers are not required to follow the rules and regulations that traditional telephone companies must follow. For example, today, VoIP providers do not have to comply with the Commission's billing requirements, disconnection and complaint procedures, or service and repair standards. However, a VoIP provider may agree to follow some or all of these rules. You should check with potential VoIP providers, before you sign up for service, on how they will handle such things as billing disputes, disconnection, and repairs. The PUCO and Federal Communications Commission (FCC) are currently investigating whether or not VoIP providers should be subject to regulation and, if so, the relevant regulations that should reasonably apply.

### **Is the quality of VoIP calls the same as with my traditional telephone?**

Depending upon the provider, VoIP may or may not offer the same quality of telephone service as traditional telephone service. You may want to ask potential VoIP providers about the voice quality of their product.

### **Can I keep my current telephone number if I switch to VoIP service?**

Under the FCC's local number portability rules, as long as you remain in the same geographic area, you can switch telephone service providers, including VoIP providers, and keep your existing telephone number. This process can take 4-5 weeks, and in some cases, may take even longer. If you decide to cancel your order with a VoIP provider after the porting process has begun, you may not be able to get your old telephone number back, even if you return to the same traditional carrier you had before.

If you are considering a switch to VoIP service and would like to keep your existing phone number, check with potential VoIP providers to see if they have the capability to port your number. If you decide to go ahead with the switch, your new provider will need to know information about your existing account. If you have a copy of a bill from your current provider, it will help to ensure that the personal account information needed to port your phone number is correct. Before the port is finalized, ask the provider to verify your phone number to ensure that the correct number is ported. Do not cancel your existing service with your current provider until you have made arrangements with a new provider. Once the port has been completed, confirm the cancellation of service with your old provider and finalize your account.

### **Will I be able to make a 9-1-1 call using VoIP?**

It depends on the VoIP provider. Not all VoIP providers offer 9-1-1. In some cases, a 9-1-1 call made using VoIP will be completed like a 9-1-1 call made using the traditional telephone network. In order to provision 9-1-1 service, a VoIP provider assigns a telephone number to the customer's modem, and the modem is associated with a physical street address. This information, when conveyed to the appropriate authorities, has the capability to accurately convey the physical location of a 9-1-1 call. However, if the customer moves their modem to another address, their original address (not the new location) will be conveyed to 9-1-1 authorities when a 9-1-1 call is placed.

Beginning on Nov. 28, 2005, all VoIP providers that enable customers to make and receive calls to and from the traditional telephone network must inform all their customers of their 9-1-1 capabilities and limitations of their service. Providers that have not achieved full 9-1-1 compliance by this date must discontinue marketing VoIP service and accepting new customers in areas where they are not transmitting 9-1-1 calls appropriately. VoIP providers that do not utilize the traditional telephone network in any way are not required to provide 9-1-1 service.

### **Can I get all the features I currently have with my traditional telephone service?**

Some VoIP providers do not provide directory assistance, operator service, or other calling features offered by traditional telephone companies. You may want to check with potential VoIP providers on whether they offer the features most important to you.

### **What happens if my power goes off?**

Unlike traditional telephone service, VoIP service will not work when your electric service is off. You may want to consider this before choosing a VoIP provider.

**What do I do if I have a complaint involving a VoIP provider?**

You may contact the PUCO at the numbers listed below with questions and concerns. Although VoIP providers are not currently subject to PUCO jurisdiction, some providers have agreed to follow PUCO rules, and we may be able to assist in resolving your complaint.

**If you would like to know more about the PUCO or have utility-related questions or concerns,**

**contact the PUCO at:**

**(800) 686-PUCO (7826)**

**(800) 686-1570 (TDD/TTY)**

**In Columbus only:**

**(614) 466-3292**

**(614) 466-8180 (TDD/TTY)**

**[www.PUCO.ohio.gov](http://www.PUCO.ohio.gov)**