PSTN Connectivity for Microsoft Teams the Easy Way

Introduction

As the new era of hybrid working dawns, Microsoft Teams is growing fast. Microsoft are currently reporting 300 million monthly active Teams users, many of whom require PSTN connectivity. Although there are various ways to connect Microsoft Teams to the public network, there are some very valid questions about the different PSTN calling options.

These questions include:

- What are the differences between the calling options?

- What are the are the advantages of each one?

- Which option will best meet an organization's unique needs?

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Connecting Microsoft Teams to the Public Network

Today, there are three different options available when it comes to PSTN connectivity. These are:

- Microsoft Calling Plans

- Microsoft Direct Routing

- Microsoft Operator Connect

Microsoft Teams Phone
Cloud-based enterprise-grade calling capabilities

Microsoft Teams Calling Plans
Microsoft is your Operator

Operator Calling Plans

Operator Connect
Seamless integration of qualified operators

Direct Routing
Bring your own operator & on-prem infrastructure

Microsoft Calling Plans

Whether you are considering your migration path to Microsoft Teams, or already using it for unified communications (UC) and collaboration, Microsoft offers straightforward PSTN connectivity with calling plans available on a per-user per-month license.

With this option, Microsoft actually becomes your service provider, offering a bundle of minutes and a dedicated phone number for each of your users. Calling Plans is available directly from Microsoft with no additional PSTN carrier contract necessary, and there are several packages to choose from depending on your organizational needs (domestic, international, etc.). It is available in these countries.

The benefits of Calling Plans include:

Smooth and seamless connectivity

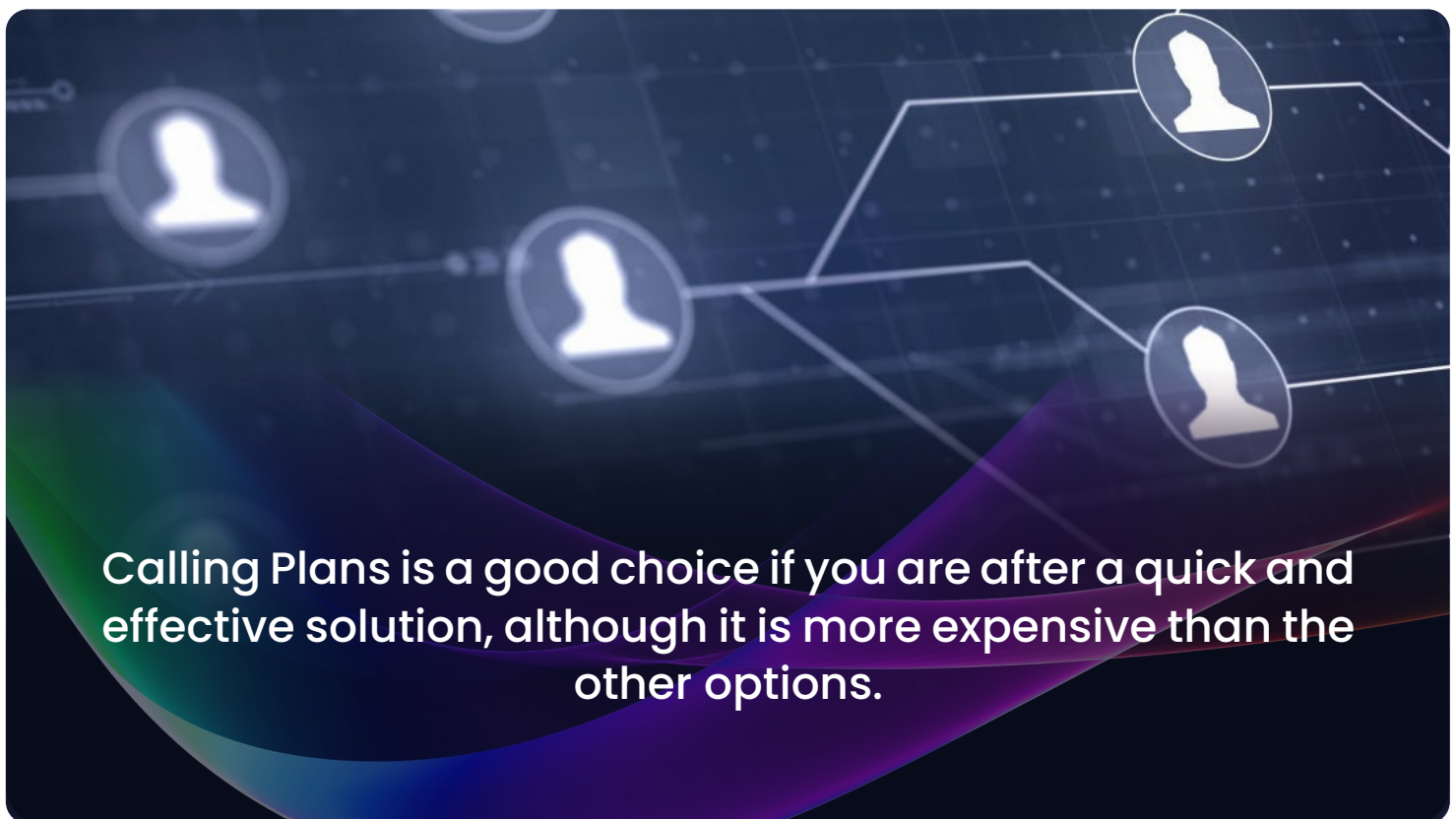You do not need to be an expert in voice to deploy Teams calling functionality.

Reduces complexity and the need for dedicated IT resources

No integration with service providers is necessary.

Simple and straightforward purchasing model

Because everything is based on a per-user per-month subscription plan, there is a clear understanding of the costs involved.

Calling Plans is a good choice if you are after a quick and effective solution, although it is more expensive than the other options. If you already have a carrier contract in place, or you have an advanced SIP trunk configuration or existing IP-PBX, UC deployment or contact center that requires integration, you might find that other options will better answer your integration needs.
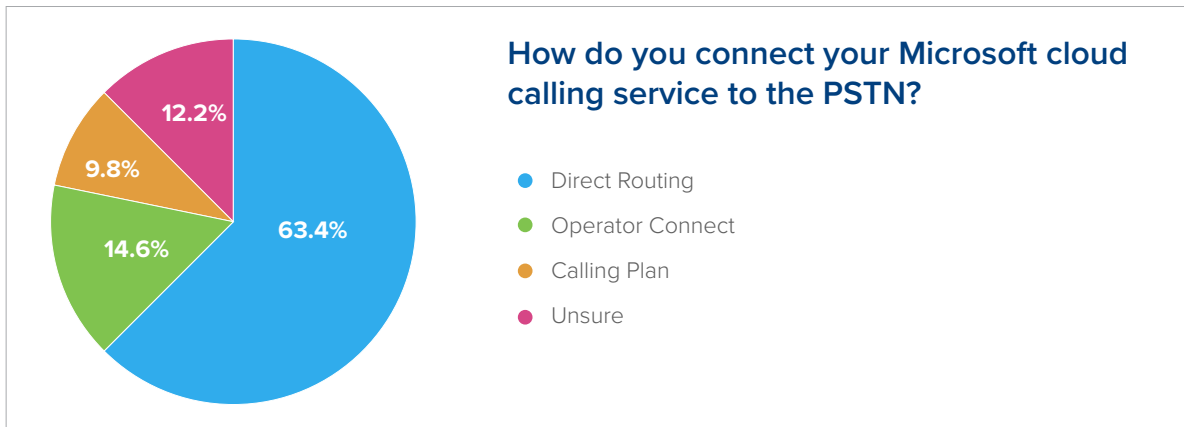

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Direct Routing

Microsoft Teams Direct Routing connects Microsoft Teams customers to local PSTN or SIP trunk providers via certified session border controllers (SBCs). This enables customers to adopt a bring-your-own-carrier (BYOC) approach, with full voice infrastructure flexibility, and facilitates co-existence with legacy voice and UC systems.

As can be seen in the diagram below, 63.4% of enterprises surveyed by Metrigy prefer the flexibility of Direct Routing even though Calling Plans is quick and simple.

How do you connect your Microsoft cloud calling service to the PSTN?

- Direct Routing
- Operator Connect
- Calling Plan
- Unsure

12.2%
9.8%
14.6%
63.4%

Taken from: "Metrigy report: Workplace Collaboration 2023-24"
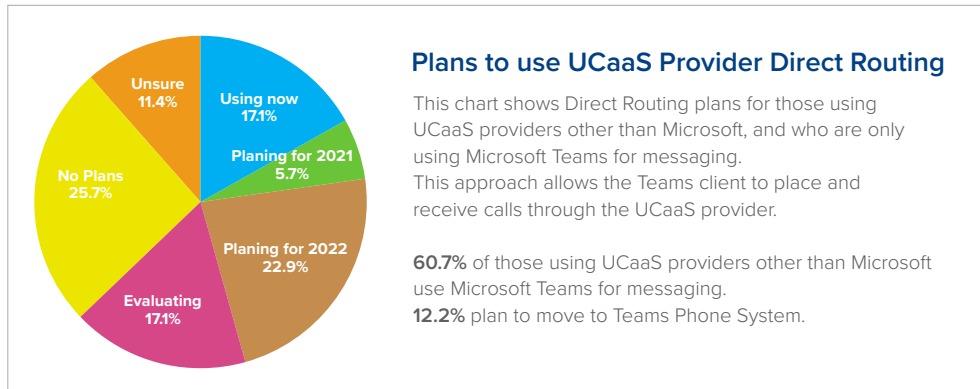
The benefits of Direct Routing include:

- **Flexibility –** You can keep your existing carrier contracts.

- **Easy to deploy –** Connects your existing infrastructure to the PSTN and Microsoft Teams.

- **Reliable –** Your carrier can offer improved service level agreement (SLA) resolution in line with your contract.

- **Straightforward to manage –** Have full control of your PSTN connectivity costs as well as the required security policies.

If you are already connected to a local PSTN or SIP trunk via your service provider, Direct Routing is probably the most suitable option. It gives you the ability to integrate your existing connectivity with your carrier and optimize your SIP trunk configuration.

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However, enterprises need to consider the additional costs and effort required for the integration of Direct Routing SBCs into existing UC or contact center IP-PBX systems.

As can be seen in the diagram below, 60.7% of enterprises surveyed by Metrigy prefer to acquire a managed service from the carrier or integrator, which enables easy optimization and a clear understanding of the cost on a per-user per-month basis.

Plans to use UCaaS Provider Direct Routing

This chart shows Direct Routing plans for those using UCaaS providers other than Microsoft, and who are only using Microsoft Teams for messaging.
This approach allows the Teams client to place and receive calls through the UCaaS provider.

60.7% of those using UCaaS providers other than Microsoft use Microsoft Teams for messaging.
12.2% plan to move to Teams Phone System.

Pie chart labels: Unsure 11.4%, Using now 17.1%, Planing for 2021 5.7%, Planing for 2022 22.9%, Evaluating 17.1%, No Plans 25.7%

Taken from: "Metrigy report: Unified Communications Management and Endpoints: 2021-22"

Operator Connect

Operator Connect lets you choose which operator you would like to work with through the Microsoft Teams admin center. To get started, all you need to do is click the Operators tab in the Teams admin center, where a list of qualified operators is displayed. You then select your preferred operator and connect to their calling services.

Once you have made your selection, the operator of your choice will contact you and connect you to the service. You will also receive all the phone numbers you need for your users.

The benefits of Operator Connect include:

Operator Connect is an easy way to select an operator that you are interested in working with. However, terms and conditions and prices may differ significantly between carriers.

- **Smooth and seamless connectivity –** You do not need to be a telecommunications expert to deploy Teams calling directly from the Teams admin center.

- **Continuity –** If your existing carrier appears in the list, you can choose to remain with them.

- **Reduces complexity –** The necessary PSTN calling services and SBC infrastructure are managed by the operators themselves, saving on hardware purchase and management costs.

- **Enhanced support and reliability –** Operators provide technical support and shared SLAs to improve their support services, while direct peering powered by Azure creates a 1:1 network connection for greater reliability.

Operator Connect is an easy way to select an operator that you are interested in working with. However, terms and conditions and prices may differ significantly between carriers. For this reason, it is highly recommended to take some time to fully understand the differences between various offers before you commit to a particular carrier. Furthermore, integration with your existing UC or contact center IP-PBX systems is not included in this service and its cost should therefore be factored in to your deliberations.

AudioCodes Solutions for PSTN Connectivity for Microsoft Teams

With over 20 years of experience and partnership with Microsoft, as well as with vendors and service providers in the telecommunications industry worldwide, AudioCodes can help simplify your PSTN connectivity for Microsoft Teams decision and mitigate all your concerns.

AudioCodes SBCs are certified for Microsoft Direct Routing and can be deployed as virtualized or cloud-native solutions in private clouds (such as VMware and KVM), public clouds (such as Azure and Amazon Web Services) or as on-premises appliances. Our Direct Routing SBCs are available as a stand-alone product, or as part of our AudioCodes Live for Microsoft Teams managed service for an end-to-end Microsoft Teams solution.

In addition, AudioCodes can also help service providers with the integration of Microsoft Operator Connect APIs through AudioCodes Live Cloud for Microsoft Teams.

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AudioCodes Live for Microsoft Teams

AudioCodes Live for Microsoft Teams is a flexible portfolio of managed services designed to simplify Microsoft Teams adoption, voice communication and connectivity via the preferred SIP trunk provider.

AudioCodes Live can also be delivered in conjunction with your existing partner of choice, whether you are already working with an Office 365 partner helping you through your digital transformation, or a telephony integrator or carrier with whom you have a long-standing relationship related to your legacy telephony solution.

The benefits of AudioCodes Live solutions include:

- **Smooth and seamless migration to Microsoft Teams –** AudioCodes handles the connectivity to your IP-PBX, UC or contact center systems, and optimizes your SIP trunk and PSTN configurations.

- **Simplicity –** Considerably reduces the complexity of planning and deploying Microsoft Teams, and eliminates the need for in-house, specialized voice and telephony skills since this role will be filled by AudioCodes Professional Services experts.

- **Transparent and easy to understand –** A simple and straightforward purchasing model based on a per-user per-month subscription plan means that you know exactly what you're getting and how much it will cost.

Finally, if you want to enhance your employees' Microsoft Teams experience even further, AudioCodes offers a wide range of additional subscription-based options for you to choose from. These include business phones, video and audio room conferencing, call recording, conversational IVR, chatbot voice integration and our unique Meeting Insights solution for getting the most out of your meetings.

For more information about seamlessly connecting to Microsoft Teams the easy way, <u>contact us</u>.