

# 10 questions to ask your prospective SIP Trunking provider

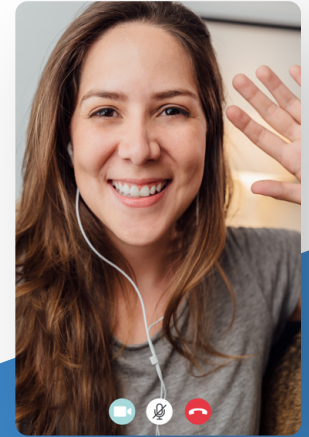
Find your ideal SIP Trunking match

Read on



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# Get the most from your SIP trunking provider

## Here's how.

The service, a SIP Trunking provider offers can make or break your collaboration services, so choosing the right one is essential. The pressure's on to make the right choice but how? How can you really get the measure of a SIP Trunking provider and establish which ones will really serve the particular needs of your organisation?

We started to explore this in the e-book, "**The five things you must know about SIP Trunking Providers**". This next e-book goes an essential step further. Here's a detailed look at exactly what you should be asking any prospective SIP Trunking provider. Consider this a checklist for sourcing the information you need to identify a provider that's the right fit for your organisation.

## Good Questions ?

1 Availability

2 Failover

3 Costs

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## Availability

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# 1 Availability

**If your contact centre becomes unavailable for any reason, how will your customers' voice and video calls, reach a location with skilled people to handle them?**

You need to know how the SIP Trunking provider will route your customers' calls during a failover scenario — and what circumstances would cause such a scenario. Get the SIP Trunking provider to make this clear — and be demanding.

Your SIP Trunking provider should allow you to have multiple levels of failover for each of your contact centres. So if your primary contact centre is unreachable, you should be able to choose a second, third and even fourth option, so that voice and video calls are routed to one of your contact centres with the right skill set to handle your customers' inquiries. Also, make sure you're not restricted to a single geographic region, or that you're charged more for these failover routing scenarios. More on this in the next question.



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# 2

## Failover

### Does the SIP Trunking provider have the ability to route failover calls both intra and inter-regionally?

You need to understand the limitations of the provider's network routing capabilities — and how these limitations would affect your ability to provide services to your customers. Is it possible to establish a failover plan that allows for major catastrophic events — natural or man-made — in a geographic region? Are you limited to only having failover locations in the same geographic region, or can you only select certain regions for your failovers? Are your video calls handled differently from your voice calls during failover?

This could greatly affect your ability to provide services to your customers, especially at a time when they may need them most.

Further, in the event of a failure, how is the outage handled and from which locations is another major question which should be asked.

Despite the best effort of any provider, outages do happen. What matters is how they're handled. Any SIP Trunking provider can say

they provide support for the outages, but get them to tell you exactly how they're handled, and by whom.

All providers today offer services on a 24/7/365 basis, but are your troubles being handled by an operations centre that specialises in enterprise voice and video, or is it the same centre that handles the provider's data network as well? What skill sets are available at these operations centres, especially the people who take that first call?

Those people should have training in both data, voice and video services and have the ability to diagnose what the issue is and in most of the cases (optimally over 80%), resolve the issue during that first call.

Understanding how calls are handled by the provider and who is going to answer that phone call is just as important as having automatic re-routing capability in the network - they both affect how your service is going to work.



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## 3 Extra costs

**Are there any extra costs on either per unit call or per minute basis for these re-routed calls?**

There shouldn't be. Check to see if there are any hidden costs for calls affected by a failover scenario. Every SIP Trunking provider handles these scenarios slightly differently; in some cases there's a 're-routing' fee to complete the call to one of the backup contact centres. These fees aren't typical for calls handled within the same geographic region, they're usually only applied when the call is routed to another region.



# 4 Last mile

## How are the last-mile circuits connected to the provider SIP Trunking network: directly or via MPLS?

Most of today's SIP Trunking providers use Multi-Protocol Label Switching (MPLS) to connect their customer to their network. What varies between providers is how these MPLS connections are physically connected to the SIP Trunking infrastructure. There are two main methods: the first is a virtual one — and it should be your preference. In this case the physical MPLS connection has a physical port on the provider's MPLS network and a virtual one to the SIP Trunking switch. The second is to have a direct connection, still based on MPLS, directly to the SIP Trunking switch.

You can make a case for both methods, but in terms of positive functions, the virtual connection to the SIP Trunking switch wins hands down. With a virtual connection you eliminate the single point of failure within the provider's network. So if something were to happen in the providers network, such as a card failure or a rare total switch failure, the provider's network will automatically 'move'

this virtual connection to a secondary SIP Trunking switch. This allows your business to continue without any lost calls and maintain your customer service standards.

The same can't be said for a physical connection. Yes, it may save some costs, but it also introduces a single point of failure within the provider's network. As this connection is directly to a card in the SIP Trunking switch, if that card or switch were to fail then you'd be down and unable to process incoming or outgoing calls.

What's more important for your organisation: saving money on the cost of connectivity or having the ability for calls to be completed in failover scenarios? It's something to consider.



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# 5 Regions

## How is region-to-region routing handled?

Let's say you've established how the SIP Trunking provider handles calls in a failover scenario. Now, what about how they handle calls during normal operations? This is just as important. Is their SIP Trunking network architecture flat or hierarchical? Find out, because this will affect how your calls are routed between geographical regions and potentially add more delay into the voice stream. Here's why:

In a traditional TDM network you have edge switches and tandem switches. Customers are connected to the edge switches, which in turn are connected to the provider's edge switches for regional traffic, and tandem switch for inter-regional traffic. This kind of hierarchical architecture works well for TDM networks as the switches are connected to each other via point-to-point circuits called Inter-Switch Trunks (ISTs).

However, it does create potential problems with routing as a call will route through the edge switch, then one or more tandem switches and then to another edge switch for call completion. While this architecture has been around for years, it can be an operational nightmare — particularly when you consider the number of ISTs you'd need to cover the world.

This is one reason why flat architecture is usually a better option. With a flat architecture, all the SIP Trunking switches are connected to each other via dedicated or virtual (MPLS) connections. This eliminates that need for a middleman (tandem switches) as the edge switches all talk to each other. Besides decreasing the operational headaches for the provider that a hierarchical network.



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# 6

APIs

API

## Is your service provider helping you with your automation and integration of SIP with your Apps

With more and more businesses looking to automate as many processes, it is of paramount importance that your service provider is enabling you to integrate SIP with your apps and systems.

The businesses are also looking to create new use cases for enabling their end users via voice and text and hence are continuously looking for ways to enable this automation via API which help all provisioning, service consumption and maintenance in a API driven fashion. Making this one of the most sought after features which customers must look for in their SIP service provider.





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Toll Free Number  
1800 XXXX 1234



# 7 Toll free

**In what geographic locations can the provider sell you toll and toll-free access for your contact centres?**

If your business has contact centres (help desk, telephony sales centres, etc.) you want to ensure you can give your customers a number that's either toll-free or local. With this in mind, make sure the SIP Trunking provider can provide services like International Toll Free Services (ITFS) and Local Number Service (LNS), and that these countries/cities they're able to provide these for, align with your current and future business needs. If the best SIP Trunking provider in the world can't provide phone numbers in the countries. SIP Trunking provider in the world can't provide phone numbers in the countries where you do business, it's of no use to you.

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# 8 Partners

## Who are the partners the provider works with in each of the countries where you need voice services?

No matter what a SIP Trunking provider tells you, they work with partners to deliver your calling services. No single provider has the ability to own the connection into every home and business worldwide, so find out who their partners are around the globe.

There are over 1,600 providers of telephony services globally, but only about 100 top level or Tier-1 carriers, so SIP Trunking providers have plenty of choice in how your calls are routed to their final destination. With this in mind, find out whether your prospective SIP Trunking provider uses a Tier-1 carrier as the primary partner in most (if not all) of the countries where they provide inbound and outbound calling services. Do they have different levels of services for enterprise customers versus carrier customers? They should: enterprise customers should enjoy the highest level of quality, without the provider using Lowest Cost Routing (LCR) to deliver your call to its final destination.



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## 9 Utilisation

### What are the circuit utilisation metrics the provider uses for both customer access and trunk circuits?

Just as you would ask your data provider about their traffic capacity management policies, ask the same questions of a SIP Trunking provider. It's important to understand exactly how they monitor traffic, and at what intervals. Also, find out the utilisation percentages that place a circuit on the 'watch list', and what triggers the movement from the watch list to the upgrade list.

A number of different criteria cause these triggers to become active, and lower cost providers tend to allow higher circuit utilisation than their more expensive counterparts. It's also worth finding out the measurement period as this can affect the ability of your calls to be completed. A carrier that averaged 75% over a 1-hour measurement period may sound like it's performing better than the carrier that averaged 95% utilisation over a 5-minute measurement period.

What you don't see is that the carrier averaging 75% hit 100% utilisation over a 10-minute period during that 1-hour. So for 10 minutes, no calls were completed. Compare this to the provider who hit 95% for 5 minutes, but who may only have had a minute or two of 100% utilisation.

In other words, it's not enough just to consider utilisation; you need to look into the measurement period as well. And ultimately, you want a SIP Trunking provider with key monitoring systems and KPIs in place, both for connectivity and call quality. Learn more from this short video.



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# 10 Fraud prevention

**With ever increasing frauds and hacking attempts, how frauds are reported prevented and prevented in real time?**

The voice frauds are often overlooked by businesses but the statistics show that the frauds have been growing at phenomenal rate year over year, a single incident of fraud can result in a substantial financial dent to the organisation. The service provider should not only have mechanics to identify potential fraud/hacking attempts but they should be able to inform the customer in real time and customers should be able to take corrective actions in real time.

The service providers should also be able to learn from these incidences in an automated fashion and build on this knowledge to block the attempts right at the beginning.



# SIP trunking provider checklist

In brief, your ideal SIP trunking provider should:

- ✓ Allow you to have multiple levels of failover for each of your contact centres
- ✓ Allow you to establish a failover plan that allows for major catastrophic events, with the option of failover locations in more than one geographical region
- ✓ Manage a failover scenario, without charging you extra for rerouting
- ✓ Use a virtual connection from the MPLS network to the SIP Trunking switch to practically eliminate call failures
- ✓ Use a flat architecture for a smoother, lower cost operation
- ✓ Use Ethernet for the last mile connection
- ✓ Provide toll and toll-free access for your contact centres, wherever they are
- ✓ Use a Tier-1 carrier as their primary partner in most or all of the countries where they provide inbound and outbound services
- ✓ Offer enterprise customers the highest level of quality
- ✓ Keep utilisation levels consistently moderate and monitor these regularly
- ✓ Handle outages by offering skilled support from highly trained people.

# About Tata Communications

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With our global infrastructure, rich Tata communications GlobalRapid Managed Services portfolio, best-in-class network quality, and flexible terms, we can meet at the current and future needs of your enterprise. We offer modular solutions for both customers and partners that enable reliable and scalable global voice, video, unified conferencing, managed services, cloud contact centre and real time communication APIs, with unparalleled interoperability and flexibility. Uniquely positioned in key growth markets, we are the only telecommunications company with a strategic presence across six continents, the world's largest wholly-owned subsea fibre cable network, and data centre space across 44 locations worldwide. Wherever you want to go with Unified Communications and Collaboration, count on us to get you there.

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