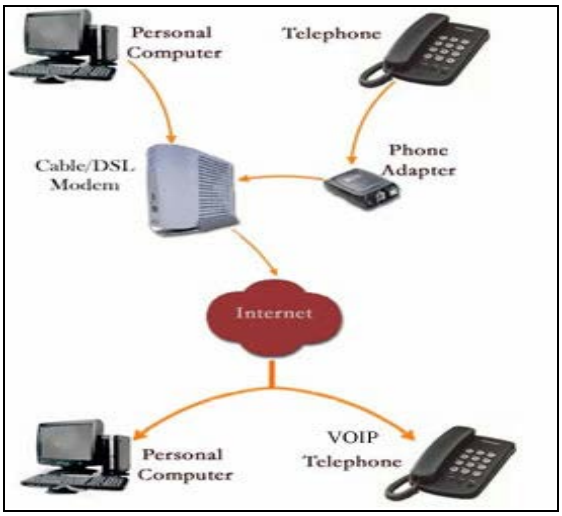
# Voice over Internet Protocol (VoIP)

Voice over Internet Protocol (VoIP) is a technology for communicating using "Internet protocol" instead of traditional analog systems. Some VoIP services need only a regular phone connection, while others allow you to make telephone calls using an Internet connection instead. Some VoIP services may allow you only to call other people using the same service, but others may allow you to call any telephone number - including local, long distance, wireless and international numbers.

## How VoIP works

VoIP converts the voice signal from your telephone into a digital signal that can travel over the Internet. If you are calling a regular telephone number, the signal is then converted back at the other end. VoIP calls can be made from a computer, a special VoIP phone, a traditional phone with or without an adapter, or using a wireless phone, depending on the type of VoIP service you subscribe to.

Here is one example of how VoIP service works:




## What equipment do I need?

Depending on the VoIP service you purchase, you may need a computer, a special VoIP telephone or a regular telephone with an adapter. If you are calling a regular telephone number, the person you are calling does not need any special equipment: just a telephone.

## Are there special considerations for using VoIP?

If you're considering replacing your traditional telephone service with VoIP, be aware that:

- Some VoIP service providers may have limitations to their 911 service. For more information on VoIP and 911 services, see the FCC's guide at **www.fcc.gov/guides/voip-and-911-service**.
- Some VoIP services don't work during power outages and the service provider may not offer backup power.
- VoIP providers may or may not offer directory assistance/white page listings.

Always check with potential VoIP service providers to confirm any limitations to their service, including 911 service.



Federal Communications Commission · Consumer and Governmental Affairs Bureau · 445 12th St. SW. Washington, DC 20554
1-888-CALL-FCC (1-888-225-5322) · TTY: 1-888-TELL-FCC (1-888-835-5322) · www.fcc.gov/consumer-governmental-affairs-bureau

### With VoIP, is there a difference between making a local and a long distance call?

Some VoIP providers do not charge for calls to other subscribers to the service. Some VoIP providers charge for a long distance call to a number outside your calling area. Other VoIP providers permit you to call anywhere at a flat rate for a fixed number of minutes. Your VoIP provider may permit you to select an area code for your VoIP service that is different from the area code in which you live.

### How does the FCC regulate VoIP?

- **911 Services**: Providers of "interconnected" VoIP services – which allow users generally to make calls to and receive calls from the regular telephone network – do have 911 service obligations; however, 911 calls using VoIP are handled differently than 911 calls using your regular telephone service.
- **Portability**: The FCC requires interconnected VoIP providers and telephone companies to comply with Local Number Portability (LNP) rules. (See our guide on Portability **https://consumercomplaints.fcc.gov/hc/en-us/articles/203332360-Keeping-Your-Telephone-Number-When-Changing-Service-Providers**).
- **Calling Records**: The FCC limits interconnected VoIP providers' use of customer proprietary network information such as your telephone calling records, and requires interconnected VoIP providers to protect it from disclosure.
- **Universal Service**: The FCC requires interconnected VoIP providers to contribute to the Universal Service Fund, which supports communications services in high-cost areas and for income-eligible telephone subscribers.
- **Accessibility**: Interconnected VoIP providers must contribute to the Telecommunications Relay Services Fund used to support the provision of telecommunications services to persons with speech or hearing disabilities and offer 711 abbreviated dialing for access to relay services. Providers and equipment manufacturers also must ensure their services are available to and usable by individuals with disabilities, if such access is achievable. (See our guide about TRS **https://consumercomplaints.fcc.gov/hc/en-us/articles/202939724-Telecommunications-Relay-Service**.)

### Filing a complaint

If you have concerns about an interconnected VoIP provider's handling of your 911 calls or telephone calling records, making services available to and usable by individuals with disabilities, or porting your telephone number, first try to resolve the matter with your service provider. If you can't resolve the matter directly, you have multiple options for filing a complaint with the FCC:

- File a complaint online at **https://consumercomplaints.fcc.gov**
- By phone: 1-888-CALL-FCC (1-888-225-5322); TTY: 1-888-TELL-FCC (1-888-835-5322)
- By mail (please include your name, address, contact information and as much detail about your complaint as possible):

  Federal Communications Commission
  Consumer and Governmental Affairs Bureau
  Consumer Inquiries and Complaints Division
  445 12th Street, S.W.
  Washington, DC 20554

### Accessible formats

To request this article in an accessible format - braille, large print, Word or text document or audio - write or call us at the address or phone number above, or send an email to **fcc504@fcc.gov.**

###

*This document is for consumer education purposes only and is not intended to affect any proceedings or cases involving this subject matter or related issues.*

Last Reviewed: 1/22/15