



COMPARISON GUIDE:

Operator Connect, Direct Routing & Microsoft Calling Plans

Your complete guide to the three different options
for adding PSTN calling to Microsoft Teams

Faster. Smarter. More



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What are the options?



With over **270 million monthly active users** and rising, it is no surprise to see Microsoft continually announcing new ways to add calling to their unified communications platform, Teams.

With the launch of **Operator Connect**, there are now three options for adding voice services to Teams.

Microsoft is aiming to streamline the process of adding external PSTN calling to Teams by providing options that suit a range of requirements. Together with Direct Routing and Microsoft's own Calling Plans, Operator Connect presents users with a third option for migrating their telephony to Teams.

One way to think about it is that these options represent three alternatives on a sliding scale, with Operator Connect positioned in the middle as an option that balances the convenience of ordering and provisioning services through the 365 Admin Centre with the flexibility of Direct Routing.



Microsoft Calling Plans

Provide bundles of domestic and international minutes and per user pricing directly from Microsoft (requires the correct Microsoft Office or Office 365 license).



Operator Connect

Allows you to add PSTN calling from directly within the 365 admin center by connecting carrier services from approved third-party providers.



Direct Routing

Allows you to connect external carrier services from your chosen provider to Teams via a Session Border Controller (SBC) located either on-premises or in the cloud.

Key differences



Although on the surface these three **voice connectivity solutions** are similar, key differences make each suitable for **distinct use cases**.



Microsoft Calling Plans

These are ideal for organizations without complex requirements that are looking for a voice service they can activate quickly and easily on a per-user basis. It is especially convenient for businesses that might value the regular monthly price for budgeting reasons, and like the idea that they can manage their whole communications stack through the 365 admin center.



Direct Routing

This sits at the other end of the scale, supporting organizations that need more flexibility and have more complex requirements. These could be anything from sophisticated configuration or call routing demands, to the integration of other applications such as contact centers. There are also cost benefits available, particularly through providers offering more transparent “pay for what you use” pricing models.

Any organization that is interested in consolidating their voice systems to a single network, achieving greater feature parity with their previous phone system, or adding regional offices in areas Microsoft doesn’t cover, has needed the flexibility of Direct Routing — which is why, until the launch of Operator Connect, it has been the preferred option.



Operator Connect

comes some way towards filling the gap between the two, allowing organizations to add and manage standard voice services through the Microsoft 365 Admin Center, choose their own carrier, and access some of the cost savings of Direct Routing. Operator Connect is almost on a par with Direct Routing when it comes to the supported features supporting hybrid, with minimal scenarios requiring Direct Routing. It can also support hybrid environments and integrations with related voice applications, the combination of which explains why it has become a popular option.

Comparison Table

	Microsoft Calling Plans	Operator Connect Pure IP services provided as an example	Direct Routing Pure IP services provided as an example
Voice Connectivity	Provided by Microsoft	Provided by one of the carriers available on Operator Connect through trusted cross-connects between their network and Microsoft	External carrier services are connected to Teams via a cloud-based or on- premises session border controller (SBC)
Voice Service	Managed in the 365 admin center	Managed through the 365 admin center and the carrier's portal. Additional complementary management services can also be available via the carrier	Number and service management through the carrier's online customer portal
Integrations	Only supports applications designed for Teams using 365 API integrations	Supports the integration of voice applications and hybrid environments	Supports the integration of voice applications and hybrid environments
Pricing	Bundled and pay as you go calling plans, minutes, and licensing on a per-user, per-month basis	Depends on Carrier. Some offer bundled pricing, others work to a transparent 'pay for what you use model where you pay the carrier for the minutes used + monthly rental charge	Depends on Carrier. Some offer bundled pricing, others work to a transparent 'pay for what you use model where you pay the carrier for the minutes used + monthly rental charge

Comparison Table

	Microsoft Calling Plans	Operator Connect Pure IP services provided as an example	Direct Routing Pure IP services provided as an example
Supporting Hybrid Environments	Not supported	Supported; different platforms, contact centers, legacy systems, and analog devices can all be connected using the same voice network	Supported; different platforms, contact centers, legacy systems, and analog devices can all be connected using the same voice network
Voice Routing	Standard options only	Standard options only	Completely configurable
Global Coverage	Limited to the countries where Microsoft offers services	Depends on where the Carrier has PSTN replacement services. Can also be used in conjunction with Managed SBC services where available to extend geographic coverage	Depends on where the Carrier has PSTN replacement services. Can also be used in conjunction with Managed SBC services where available to extend geographic coverage



Benefits of Operator Connect

If your organization **does not have** complex routing requirements, and wants a cost effective solution that is simple to provision and manage, then **Operator Connect** might be right for you.

Security & Quality

Operator Connect uses trusted cross-connects, which are direct private links between the Microsoft & carrier networks. That means your calls need to go through one fewer hop on a public network, which contributes towards better quality and security.

Some Operator Connect carriers, like Pure IP, can use the same cross-connects to provide those benefits to their Direct Routing customers too.

Convenience

Operator Connect can remove the complexity of having to configure and manage the provisioning of services internally through Microsoft PowerShell.

Instead it allows users to use the Teams Admin Centre interface, to provide a much less technical and more intuitive experience. Activating and deactivating users in Operator Connect is easier than in Direct Routing, where licenses and configuration might need to be managed separately.

Coverage

Dependent on the carrier used, the geographic coverage will vary. Most will offer a number of countries – more than Calling Plans – where services are delivered through direct connection with the carrier's cloud-based voice network.

Cost

Operator Connect is arguably the most cost effective of the three options. It opens up the cost efficiencies on offer from using an external carrier. In some instances the ongoing costs can be up to 60% less than with Calling Plans.

In addition, the simplified provisioning process can provide savings over Direct Routing if external support is required for the initial configuration and set up.

Integrations

Operator Connect, like Direct Routing, allows organizations to integrate Teams with other voice applications, such as contact centers, third party platforms, legacy systems and analogue devices. The capabilities to support this may vary by carrier. At Pure IP it is fully supported.

Benefits of Direct Routing



Direct Routing is usually **cheaper & more flexible** than Calling Plans, and caters to more complex telephony requirements. It can be delivered as a **fully managed service**, which makes it easier to consolidate services, port numbers & reduce your hardware footprint.

Agility & flexibility

Direct Routing offers slightly more flexibility in how you choose to build your communications stack. It is completely configurable, and makes it much easier to achieve closer feature parity with a traditional telephone system.

Integrations

Like Operator Connect, Direct Routing allows organizations to partner with carriers who can integrate Teams with their other voice applications, such as contact centers, third party platforms, legacy systems and analogue devices.

Coverage & consolidation

Direct Routing is available globally, so you can select the carrier and plan that works best for you. It can also be offered alongside a fully managed SBC service, which can be used to connect hard-to-reach regions, and integrate all your voice applications.

Cost reductions

Although bundled calling plans can be convenient for budgeting, they can prove expensive – particularly for enterprise users. Not only do external carriers typically charge lower rates, some also offer usage-based pricing plans that are up to 60% more cost-effective than fixed-price bundles.

Smart insights & billing

Direct Routing, similar to Operator Connect, can give you access to in-depth usage reports and advanced monitoring tools, which can help you identify, and overcome, traffic bottlenecks and call quality issues.

Invoicing can also be done on a regional basis, and includes full breakdowns of the voice services and which teams have been using them.



Benefits of Calling Plans



Microsoft's Calling Plans offer **convenience & bundled pricing** to organizations with **basic requirements**.

Convenience

Calling Plans allow organizations to arrange the necessary Phone System licences, their domestic and international minutes, and PSTN trunks all directly from Microsoft.

As such, the main benefits of opting for Calling Plans stem from the convenience of having all of your telephony within the Microsoft environment.

As everything is managed through the M365 admin center, it is easy to activate and deactivate users and services, and especially convenient for organizations that are using Microsoft products elsewhere in the business.

A single supplier

Some organizations prefer dealing with a single provider/carrier, to minimize time spent managing them.

Compliance

Some organizations might be more comfortable working with a big name that can offer a degree of assurance when it comes to compliance with legislation such as E911 in the USA.

Did you know?

External carriers, like Pure IP, can also offer your business everything from migration support, PBX auditing, & proactive monitoring services that support you with issues such as security and network stability.



Frequently asked questions

Can I mix and match options across my estate?

Yes, if desired you can mix the options throughout the business. The decision will largely factor around, capabilities, coverage and personal preference.

What do I do with my legacy environment?

Depending on the various carriers, some will offer services that can integrate and consolidate legacy systems and devices into a connected single service for ease of management. This is only possible with Operator Connect and Direct Routing.

Can I order Operator Connect directly from the 365 Admin Center?

As of writing, you cannot place number/service orders directly via the 365 Admin Center. The ordering process will vary by carrier – some will offer an automated option, others will be more traditional. You will need to contact the carrier in each instance to place an order though.

How do I connect in other regions not covered by PSTN replacement services?

Again this will vary by carrier, but some providers will offer services beyond the advertised PSTN replacement countries. For example, at Pure IP we offer an SBC managed services to provide extended geographic coverage, typically taken in conjunction with our Direct Routing Managed Service.

What does the process of ordering Operator Connect look like?

Once you have created your shortlist of potential carriers through the 365 Admin Center you would typically investigate their offering using the information and links available, and eventually make contact with the chosen few.

Once you decide upon your desired carrier, you would need to provide them with consent in the 365 Admin Center and place your order. The carrier would then provision your numbers which will appear in your 365 Admin Center.

Important Note:

It is often thought that providing consent will automatically trigger the carrier to make contact. This is not necessarily the case. In most cases you will need to initiate contact directly with your chosen carriers.

How we can help

Pure IP offers secure and reliable Operator Connect & Direct Routing solutions that utilise the scale, reach, and flexibility of Pure IP's cloud-based global voice network.

Our Microsoft Teams Voice solutions are delivered as fully managed global services that provide secure, resilient voice communications to organizations of any size. These cloud-based solutions combine the strength, scale, and reach of our own voice network, with the speed and flexibility of our fully managed services, and around the clock access to our team of experienced voice engineers.

They allow organizations to accelerate and simplify their migration to Microsoft Teams, through either the Operator Connect service, or using our secure and easily deployable Direct Routing as a Service solution. The solutions are fully customizable with a range of services to support customers through the migration and ongoing management of their Teams telephony environment.



Cloud-based

- Robust, geo-redundant network
- Platform agnostic
- Eliminate need for on-site hardware
- Flexibly add or change your services

Technical Support

- 24/7 follow-the-sun support
- No triage - reach a voice engineer every time
- Manage your services online

Add-ons

- SBC Managed Service
- Analogue and legacy system integration
- Contact Centre integration
- Call recording integration
- Number management
- Cloud enablement
- Teams Voice Managed Support
- SIP endpoints
- Fax services



Connected. Everywhere.

At Pure IP, we connect the old with the new, integrating voice across platforms, systems and applications to provide a single connected communications service to enable business to collaborate effectively in more locations than other providers.

We offer a suite of services built around our own secure, reliable and adaptable global voice network, which is supported by a team of experienced voice engineers. With geo-redundancy and resilience built-in, our flexible voice network has been designed to keep adapting to customer requirements as they evolve.

This is why we are trusted by millions daily to power their business communications.

Faster. Smarter. More

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