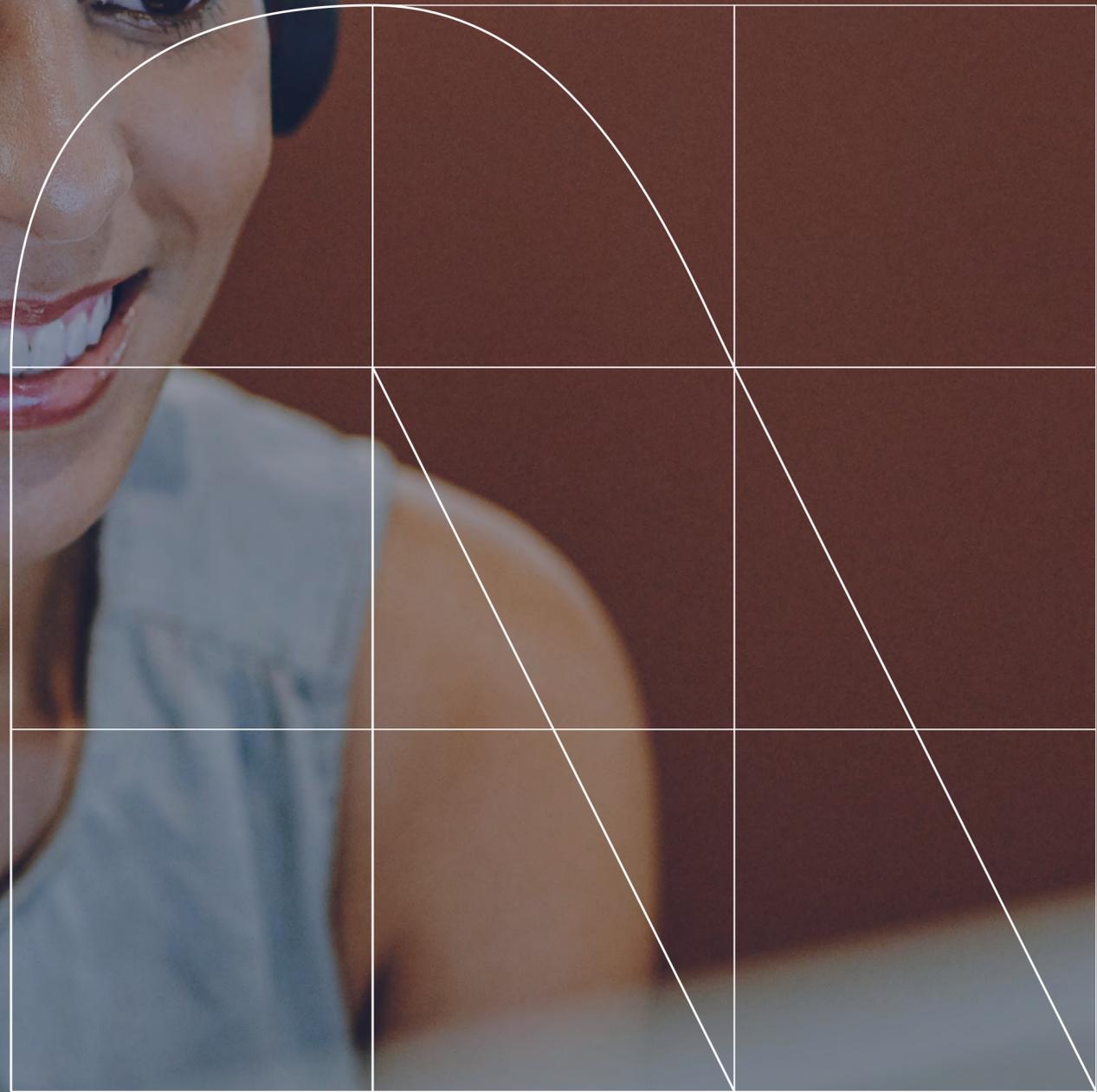




The buyer's guide to Operator Connect

Check before you choose

Eleven considerations before you select your Operator Connect partner



Introduction

Operator Connect offers so many advantages.

Faster deployment, more automation and greater accessibility, for starters. It's also more secure - because you're working via your tenant access – and you can get better support.

All these reasons make Operator Connect a great way to add telephony to Microsoft Teams.

But even though you can simply go ahead with your current telco provider, many organizations are using Operator Connect to consolidate their providers: they're choosing just one telco to go forward with.

So how do you assess for the right fit? After all, look at the list of carriers in the Operator Connect console and you'll see there are quite a few. Yes, you could look to mix and match providers, but you'll create a difficult support situation and a far more complex cost of service to manage.

A better approach is to select an operator that sees Microsoft Teams as intrinsic to its business and is very much able to support you and your critical business needs. Choose to deal with just one telco, one that's well-connected to Microsoft, and you'll have one support model and one unified service. And that's what you want. You'll be able to hold them very much accountable to their SLAs. You'll also find it much easier to support and manage the environment yourself too.

In this guide, you'll find 11 considerations we think you should make before you click that button and select a provider. The list has emerged from what we've learned in creating our Operator Connect proposition. Not to create a minimum viable product, but to ensure it's a service that always provides the best possible outcomes for our clients.

Are you ready? Let's go.



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1. Is your telco also a Microsoft Teams expert?

The first thing to consider is this: is your potential telco partner just a traditional SIP trunking provider? Or do they have a Microsoft Teams practice as well? You may already get support from Microsoft, but when it comes to telephony or replacing a traditional PBX, you'll want a single support model – one that's capable of managing both Microsoft Teams and telephony issues. One that can get directly to the bottom of any issue in one place.

With Direct Routing, the telcos look at their infrastructure, and Microsoft supports Microsoft Teams infrastructure elsewhere. This leads to longer resolution times or costly Managed Services fees to get the service needed. Yes, your telco may have an agreed ticketing system with Microsoft, but only for Operator Connect tickets. What you really want is an Operator Connect vendor that also offers Microsoft Teams support. With this, they can escalate and troubleshoot policy issues, governance issues, site issues or directly send tickets to Microsoft.

At NTT, we've been doing Direct Routing for more than three years. It's clear that most of our clients want Microsoft Teams Support and telephony support too. So, naturally with Operator Connect we've made sure we offer both.



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2. Is your telco ready?

The second thing to check is simply that your provider is ready. It may seem an unnecessary point to raise, but if you're looking at Operator Connect in the Admin Portal, it may not be clear whether they are. Or not.

And this really matters. When Microsoft selects partners to provide Operator Connect there's a lot that, as a telco, you need to get done before you're ready: specifications, agreements and the required licensing all need to be in place. Some providers want to be visible on the portal, but they just haven't set up those processes. They're simply not ready – and may not be any time soon. These processes can take a long time to complete.

The good news is that this is an easy check to make. Just look next to the name of each provider in the Admin Portal. If there's a dot next to their name, it means they haven't yet completed the process moving from preview to production. And you don't know how long that process may still take.

In addition, check which countries they can offer. You might also want to think twice if a vendor only offers one country, even it's the one single country you want coverage for. This single country status probably means they're just starting with Operator Connect and they may not be ready with a mature infrastructure.

If your organization is already global, you'll want a partner that's also global, but whatever your size if you're an ambitious organization, it's worth choosing one that can serve you should you expand or acquire other businesses.

At NTT, we've been working on Operator Connect for well over a year, and we've been ready for quite a while. It's allowed us to develop our business and work on automation. All of this means we can quickly support new user provisioning. We're ready when you are.

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3. Can they fill all the telephony gaps?

Next up is gap filling. Can your provider fill all the gaps you have? With telephony, it's easy to just start off thinking about the easy sites you have and look to deploy numbers. That's what Operator Connect is built for after all: click to get your numbers, provision your users and get going!

What you also need to think about though are the more complex situations. You may have fax lines, or elevator phones, analogue lines or DECT phones. You might have local resiliency or high availability that you need to put in later. Compliance recordings is another area to consider, as is whether number porting is necessary for some, or all, of your users.

For all these reasons, check that your provider has a mature practice and can fill these gaps with something that's native and approved for Microsoft Teams. Do they have a professional practice behind it; something they own and is part of their service? Are you sure they're not outsourcing it? You may think that all you need is a basic reactive service, however when things get more complex, you'll probably want a Managed Service; something similar to what you've likely had with your old PBX.



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4. Is there a choice of Managed Services?

Number four on the list is to make sure you have a choice of Managed Services. There can be lots of policies and things to attend to: MACD's (moves, adds, changes, disconnections), automation, DDI (direct dial-in) management.

Now, of course, different organizations have different needs. Some will be sure they only want a reactive service. Equally, some companies want a co-owned service - with shared tenant access - and some just want a complete Managed Service.

It's your choice whether things get handled by your own IT, or a Tier 1 integrator, and how and when you escalate issues. Sometimes your IT team will get big projects and they can't afford to support all the requests they may get when they've bigger things to look at like, say, IT sustainability or accessibility.

Whatever your position now, you'll want to know that you can upgrade to that fully managed service if you need to. Do then check that your provider has a mature, in-house Managed Service. Whether it's now or later, you'll be glad of that support.



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5. Is there room for growth?

The next thing to check is whether there's room for growth. For us, Operator Connect is often just the start of a journey with clients. That journey could lead into a lot of different things within the Microsoft ecosystem. It could lead to workloads through Dynamics or Azure communication services, or using Operator Connect across mobile devices.

You may be looking to move your Direct Routing practice to Operator Connect – or have just done so – but may not yet have considered what those next steps may be. This becomes important if you start seeing Microsoft Teams as a platform or Microsoft Teams as an automation tool. You want to be able to leverage these services with the same Operator Connect contract with that same vendor.

So, yes, you might just start with replacing your PBX, but later, you might soon be building bots, or building platforms, and you'll still want to leverage all those service numbers and user numbers to be able to support your users.

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6. How much Microsoft support will you get?

The next important aspect is Microsoft support. How much does the Microsoft seller support this carrier? Microsoft sellers have targets to activate calling users and will work closely with certain operators, down to the number of projects they do together and the experience they have.

You should therefore check in with your CSM or account manager. You want to be sure that your vendor works closely with the engineering Microsoft Teams for Operator Connect, but also has a great relationship with Microsoft. When it really matters, you need to know that you have trusted experts with good access to the support you need.



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7. Are they in the Operators Program?

The next check is about the Operators Program. This is an elite program run by Microsoft for telco operators and with digital CPOR (Cloud Partner of Record) status, vendors can access statistics from your actual Microsoft Teams usage – and advise you as need be, and help ensure the environment is always healthy.

More than this though, the Operators Program allows you to benefit from funding and dedicated engineering resources. So, from incentives and paid-for workshops, paid-for professional services and analytics benefits, there's lots to gain. There'll also be future programs that'll allow you to expand your partnership with your vendor and make lots of savings. Has your partner got with the Program?

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8. How professional are they with Professional Services?

When you look closely at a potential vendor, take a good look at how their practice works, particularly around Professional Services. This will be of great importance, depending on how big your IT team is – and how much you may need this kind of support. We'd recommend you avoid partnering with a vendor that cannot offer Professional Service support and simply offers you a call plan with no options for help. This could leave you in a difficult situation as and when you need to do something new.

Yet, we'd also suggest you don't work with a provider who then adds on Professional Service charges wherever they can. Many vendors have offered Direct Routing because it tends to require a lot of Professional Services support – manually configuring users on the SBC layer. It takes a lot of work and the charges end up being passed on to you. What you want to avoid is a vendor where the Professional Services add-ons seem more important than the main service they're providing.

At NTT, we have a fantastic Professional Services team, but we only recommend them when needed.

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9. Can your provider support both telephony and network?

Next up, are you working with a provider that can support both your telephony and your network? And do they have a mature support organization and portal strategy around that? This is vital, because your provider is responsible for a business-critical service that's integrated with Microsoft Teams. You really need to feel confident that it's backed by a robust monitoring system. It needs to have robust architecture behind it and you want the provider to have solid, in-depth network experience.

At NTT we can provide a private 5G managed campus but also a Managed Service for Microsoft Teams with analytics. What's more, on the back of our platform we have a global multi-tenant platform that's being permanently monitored. This means we can have Direct Routing and Operator Connect in the same environment, with the same SLAs and same support.

In this way we can support those clients – and you may be one of them - who have both Direct Routing and Operator Connect in just the same way.

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10. What does their Microsoft Teams roadmap look like?

We're almost through this checklist. But this one still matters as much as all the others, so be sure to ask any potential provider about their Microsoft Teams roadmap. It matters, because once you have a contract with them - whether for 10 numbers, 100 numbers, or 100,000 numbers, you want to be able to use it to do things in the future. You don't want to keep having different contracts to deal with and manage.

What are they working on next? Look at their Microsoft Teams practice. Are they building power apps and do they have a mature M365 practice? After all, Microsoft Teams is attached to Exchange, SharePoint, OneDrive, Intune, Yammer, and Stream and you may well want to leverage that support system in the future. So, look at their Microsoft Teams roadmap, alongside that of M365 and Azure overall. How mature are they? How well developed?



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11. How important is Microsoft Teams and Microsoft Teams Voice to their business?

The last thing to consider – but by no means least – is how important is Microsoft Teams and Microsoft Teams Voice to their business? How important is their Microsoft partnership? On our part, we’ve gone to great lengths to show how seriously we take our partnership. We have the people, the investment and the support, and we’re very clear about how important Microsoft Teams is, to our CEO and to our whole business strategy.

You want to be sure you’re not about to partner with a vendor that is somewhat reactive, and not able to evolve, nor staff up to give you the levels of support that you need. So, read the website, talk to Microsoft, talk to your potential vendor about their business and gauge for yourself how important Teams and Microsoft Teams Voice is to them. You’re going to be signing a contract and you need to be confident that you’re in the right hands.

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So that's it.

Eleven things to not just think about, but to check. And they're all important.

We've not mentioned call plans so far, but rest assured, we offer amongst the most competitive calling plans of any provider, and we'll be delighted to let you check those with us too. We know that when people choose the NTT logo for Operator Connect, they do it not just because of our call plans, but because, in addition, we have a very strong pedigree that resonates with large businesses and enterprises with scale and ambition. We offer many years of experience, a very close partnership with Microsoft, and a superb support mechanism. With NTT, you can also enjoy a free trial and test the service for yourself.

Do check before you choose.

Additional resources to learn more about Operator Connect:

Blog:
[Operator Connect vs. Direct Routing](#)

[Read our blog](#)

Blog:
[Why choose NTT for Operator Connect?](#)

[Learn more](#)

Get started and free trial:
[Operator Connect Provided by NTT](#)

[Try the free demo](#)



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