

## Conference Calls – a cost benefit or bill shock?

### Introduction

Great audio conferencing should be both simple and cost effective. Conferencing is widely used to reduce costs in businesses, shrinking the office footprint, reducing travel time whilst increasing collaboration and productivity. Conferencing should be affordable, regardless of the size of an organisation and it should be straightforward to manage with online tools available to any user in the company. And yet, it remains surprisingly costly for too many organisations who accept the price as simply the cost of doing business. Rather than continuing to experience bill shock with additional costs and hidden charges on numerous bills, should you not be seeing the cost benefits instead?



### 0844 Conferencing – When ‘free’ doesn’t actually mean ‘free’ at all

The cost of calls to the so called ‘Free Conferencing’ numbers, that begin with 0844, or 0871 are made up of 2 parts – an access charge and a service charge. Prior to the Ofcom changes in July 2015 the Access charge was a setup fee of 10p – a one off charge – this has been increased to a 10p PER MINUTE plus the Service Charge (which the conference call company is obliged to tell you about) being another 7p per minute for an 0844 call and 12p per minute for an 0871 call. Calls from a mobile phone to an 0844 or 0871 number will be as high as 60p per minute. All these charges are included on your landline and mobile phone bill and not detailed separately in any way from your normal calls. Thus a conference call with say 5 people for 60 minutes, with half calling in from mobile phones, would cost the participants about £140!

The reality is that this charge is a multiple of what you would be paying a professional conferencing provider. The ultimate shock is when one of your clients realises that they are paying for the pleasure of conferencing with you. They may be faced with astronomical bills for accessing the conference on their personal mobile phone, therefore doing untold damage to your business relationship.

### Helping you to understand your Conferencing Bill

As you evaluate your existing and potential new audio conferencing platforms, you will benefit from understanding the following pricing mechanisms that will have a huge impact on your monthly telecoms bills. By knowing more about the hidden costs, such as toll free numbers, ‘free conferencing’, dial out rates, call bundles and additional service charges, you will be better placed to choose your next conferencing supplier. We hope that the following advice will help you decipher which provider offers the best value for money.



## What does 'Toll Free' really mean?

Toll Free numbers (historically identified by an 0800 or 800 prefix) are numbers that are free to dial by the caller and where the 'called party' pays for the caller to join the conversation. They are generally more expensive than dialling local geographic numbers and should therefore only be used when you want the caller to your service to know that you are providing the service free of charge to them.

Toll Free and International Toll Free numbers are **only** free for the caller if they dial from the country from which the number originates and a call to a Toll Free number is included in the mobile phone bundle of minutes. Certain mobile phone providers do not include toll free numbers within bundled minutes.

## Dial Out to Participants - Historical costs of this type of service may mean you are paying more than you should

Waiting for participants to join a conference is itself a costly exercise. Until recently, to avoid the host having to wait, they would use the services of a human operator to dial out to invited guests. This was understandably a more expensive option than dial in. However, with advance of technology, most providers enable the host to dial out with a click of a button.

Dial out rates were historically more expensive than dial in, but now there should not be any difference between rates. Before using the dial out function make sure you are not paying a premium to use this time saving feature.

## Call Recording – A new business essential, but a new opportunity to bill you more.

As conference calls become an increasingly important part of your day to day business operation, the recording and analysis of the content of these calls can be vital from a commercial, compliance and regulatory point of view. Call recordings, archiving and access to recordings, all provide opportunities for your conference call provider to add extra charges.

Some companies will charge separately for call recording and subsequent downloads of recordings. It may be presented as a standard charge on a room or it may be a per call recording charge. If you know call recording is an important feature for your business it is worth understanding the cost implication for both call recording and accessing your recordings in the future.

## Monthly recurring fees

As the cost of conference calls has dramatically reduced, some providers look to increase revenues by charging monthly recurring fees. Commonly, fees may be charged for the rental of each conference room, in some cases a recurring fee is charged where a room has been set up but is not being used. Ideally you should not be charged for either the creation or non-use of a room.

## Call bundles

To tie a client into a yearly contract, conferencing providers will offer a call bundle with inclusive minutes. Unless you can be confident about the number of minutes you are using, you risk losing out in two ways. Either by never using the minutes allocated to the account or alternatively paying higher than average rates on any minutes exceeding your call bundle. Unless your provider allows you to roll over unused minutes month by month, you are likely to see a lot of wasted minutes whilst being tied into a contract until the yearly renewal date. It is worth monitoring to see if your average monthly cost per minute is cheaper than a pay as you go model. In most cases, there will be no cost benefit to buying a monthly bundle and in many cases the cost per minute will average out at a much higher rate.



## Wasted Time

Whilst you may not be able to check your bill for wasted time, if you are experiencing a poor conferencing service, you will know that the amount of time spent prior to, during the call and post call can be both frustrating, time consuming and ultimately expensive. It may sound simple but if you have members of your team that are continually asking for a reminder of their conference details and PIN numbers, the issue of wallet cards with conferencing details to act as an aide memoire will help save time. Rather than users having to go back to the conference service provider for new rooms to be created, every user should be able to create their own rooms and be able to send invites to participants at the click of a button.

A provider who can guarantee the highest level of audio quality will decrease the amount of time on call, asking a participant to repeat the conversation as you weren't able to hear it. Finally, an excellent customer service is key. A well organised support function will ensure that should you have a problem, you are not having to fill in numerous online forms, wait to be put through to the right department or convey your problem 3 times before you speak to someone who can help you. A professional conferencing provider should provide all your users with an accessible and timely support function.

The Speakserve pricing module is designed to be transparent. We have no hidden charges, no recurring monthly charges for rooms, recording calls and no bridging fees. You are billed on a per minute, per line basis and therefore only billed for the minutes that you use. We encourage all users to the service to use the standard international dial-in numbers, which is the most cost effective way of conferencing, only ever dialling into the conference on a local number.

For a detailed, country by country quote, please get in touch.

### TOP TIP

Be vigilant with your conferencing bills. Many companies are coming up with new ways to charge for services and it is important to fully understand your bill and be sure there are no hidden or recurring costs that you were unaware of when signing your contract with your provider.

Perhaps it's time to do an audit of your current conferencing costs, don't forget to also look at ad hoc conferencing charges that may exist on company mobile phone bills as well.

### FOR MORE INFORMATION

[www.speakserve.com/conference-calls](http://www.speakserve.com/conference-calls)  
[sales@speakserve.com](mailto:sales@speakserve.com)  
0800 980 5155

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