

# Business Choice Awards 2014: VoIP

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*Which VoIP service is best for your business? Our readers weighed in for our first Business Choice survey of 2014.*



Welcome to the start of second annual PCMag Business Choice Awards. For more than 25 years, we have been augmenting our hands-on, Labs-based product reviews with our Readers' Choice Awards, in which PCMag readers rate the products and services they use the most. The Business Choice Awards, which we did for the first time last year, extend the Readers' Choice Awards by garnering feedback about the hardware, software, and services our readers deploy, administer, maintain, and use in a business environment. This year, we'll be doing the awards as a series, rather than all at once.

Our surveys ask respondents to rate their overall satisfaction with the products they use or manage and the likelihood they would recommend them to others. In addition, we inquired about their satisfaction with technical support, and the overall reliability of the solution. If you select, deploy, or administer the products in our Business Choice Awards, or if you advise or manage people in these roles, then you know how critical it is to choose the right products. The results of the PCMag Business Choice Awards survey are invaluable when doing so. And the answers we get may surprise you.

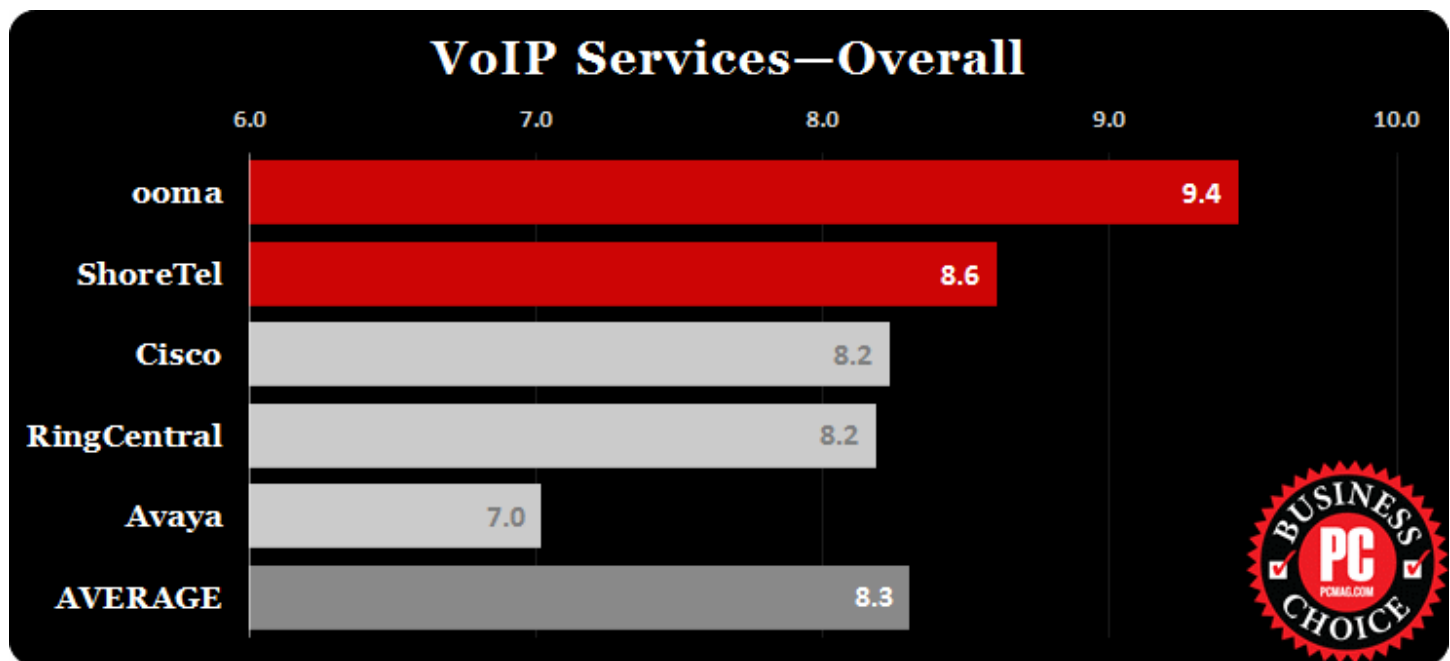
We kick off this year's Business Choice Awards with voice over IP (VoIP), a technology used to deliver voice over data networks and the Internet. VoIP encodes voice into digital form and then slices it into discrete packets that can be routed over data networks. This is much less expensive than relying on the old circuit-committed protocols of the public switched telephone network (PSTN). Many businesses have made the move to VoIP in order to save money, especially to avoid long distance charges.

We've selected two winners based on respondent company size: ooma is our VoIP business choice winner for those with 25 or fewer employees and ShoreTel is our VoIP business choice winner for those with more than 25 employees.

## VoIP Providers

Most of the VoIP products used by PCMag readers come from some of the biggest names in the business like Avaya, Cisco, ShoreTel, and RingCentral. This year the incumbents faced a serious challenge by upstart ooma, a successful residential VoIP provider that recently added business services to its portfolio.

Among the six companies that received enough responses to be included, ooma is the only one that focuses on smaller businesses. Products intended for small business tend to be simpler and more straightforward than those intended for larger enterprises. This focus is evident in a low percentage of respondents requiring technical support, 19 percent, where the closest competitor is Cisco at 40 percent (the highest was actually Shoretel with a whopping 67 percent of respondents needing help). Ooma also enjoyed high ratings for technical support at 8.7 (on a scale of 0 to 10), closely followed by ShoreTel at 8.1 down to Avaya at a distant 7.0. It is likely that ooma's high scores in overall satisfaction (an amazing 9.4) and reliability (an even better 9.5) are linked to high scores in technical support. It's clear that ooma deserves the Business Choice award for VoIP for SMBs.



Ooma takes the lead with that 9.4 overall, but for a service that handles big companies, ShoreTel is in the lead with 8.6. That's more than enough to earn it our other Business Choice Award of this round, as VoIP for big businesses. It's hard to say why respondents gave ShoreTel such high marks despite 67 percent saying they needed to call for support—but

ShoreTel's rating on the quality of that technical support is decent, as is its service reliability score of 8.9.

Cisco and RingCentral fall into place with overall scores of 8.2 each, but trailing far behind is Avaya with a 7.0. This is closely aligned with technical support scores, both the percent requiring tech support and their satisfaction with that support, where Avaya also scored a low 7.0.

Reliability, in this case the ability of the system to consistently provide dial tone and service day after day, also follows the trend of overall satisfaction. Ooma leads the way with a score of 9.5 followed closely by ShoreTel at 8.9. Then Cisco and RingCentral follow with a tied 8.3 and Avaya brings up the rear with 7.4. Avaya consistently lags behind other VoIP business phone system providers in this survey.

The critical question for any business like this is "How likely are you to recommend your VoIP business phone system to a colleague"? We again see a separation between our winners and the rest of the pack. Ooma scored a whopping 9.6, followed by ShoreTel at 8.6, then Cisco and RingCentral in a tie, and finally laggard Avaya. This question is also used to calculate the Net Promoter Score (see our Methodology on the next page for more about Net Promoter) which further emphasizes that ooma and ShoreTel customers are happy to recommend them as a solution and that Avaya customers are likely to steer colleagues away. Avaya has a lot of business VoIP customers—and a lot of them are unhappy.

## Business Choice Winners: VoIP Providers



### ooma

Ooma stood out of the pack of Voice over IP providers with amazingly high scores, earning itself a our first-ever Business Choice: VoIP award for excellent service for small-to-medium businesses. Simply put, if you've got an office with 25 or fewer people in it, you can't go wrong looking into this service.



### ShoreTel

Unified communications offerings for small and large businesses can't go wrong with ShoreTel. It's got amazing reliability and customers are ready to recommend it over the competition. With a heady mix of service, cloud-based apps, and service you can count on, ShoreTel easily earned its place as the Business Choice: VoIP solution award winner.

## Methodology

For the 2014 Business Choice series, we emailed survey invitations to PCMag.com community members, specifically subscribers to our Readers' Choice Survey mailing list. The surveys are hosted by SurveyMonkey, which also performs our data collection. This survey was in the field from March 12 to April 21, 2014.

Respondents are asked to rate their VoIP solution. They are asked multiple questions about their overall satisfaction with the solution and the bundled services (long distance, call waiting, conference calling, etc.), as well as experiences with technical support within the past 12 months.

Because the goal of the survey is to understand how the VoIP solutions compare to one another and not how one respondent's experience compares to another's, we use the average of the VoIP solution's rating, not the average of every respondent's rating. In all cases, the overall ratings are not based on averages of other scores in the table; they are based on answers to the question, "Overall, how satisfied are you with your VoIP provider?"

Scores not represented as a percentage are on a scale of 0 to 10 where 10 is the best. Net Promoter Scores are based on the concept introduced by Fred Reichheld in his 2006 best seller, *The Ultimate Question*, that no other question can better define the loyalty of a company's customers than "how likely is it that you would recommend this company to a friend or colleague?" This measure of brand loyalty is calculated by taking the percent of respondents who answered 9 or 10 (promoters) and subtracting the percent who answered 0 through 6 (detractors).

