



Microsoft Teams

Operator Connect or Direct Routing: Which is Right for You?

Microsoft Teams has transformed workplace collaboration, but unlocking its full potential as a complete business phone system requires connecting it to the Public Switched Telephone Network (PSTN). Two primary methods for achieving this are **Operator Connect** and **Direct Routing**. While both enable external calling from Teams, they offer distinct experiences in management, deployment, and scalability.

CallTower provides both solutions, but for most organizations, Operator Connect stands out as the superior choice due to its seamless integration, simplified administration, and enhanced reliability. Direct Routing, however, remains a vital option for specific use cases, such as serving government clients in GCC High environments. Understanding the differences is key to choosing the right path for your business.

This guide will compare Operator Connect and Direct Routing, breaking down their **features, benefits, and ideal applications**. You will learn why Operator Connect is often the preferred solution and in which scenarios Direct Routing is the necessary alternative.



What is Operator Connect for Microsoft Teams?

Operator Connect is a cloud-native solution that allows businesses to enable PSTN calling in Microsoft Teams with minimal effort. It creates a direct peering relationship between Microsoft's network and approved telecom operators like CallTower. This model simplifies the process of acquiring phone numbers and managing your phone system directly within the Microsoft Teams Admin Center.

Think of it as the "plug-and-play" option for Teams voice. Instead of complex backend configurations, you simply select CallTower as your provider, assign numbers to users, and start making calls. The entire experience is managed through a familiar interface, reducing the need for specialized IT expertise in voice services.

Key Benefits of Operator Connect

Simplified Management and Deployment

The most significant advantage of Operator Connect is its simplicity. Because CallTower's infrastructure is directly integrated with the Microsoft Teams ecosystem, administration is streamlined. You can manage phone numbers, users, and calling policies from the Teams Admin Center you already use. This eliminates the need for managing separate hardware like Session Border Controllers (SBCs) or learning complex PowerShell commands. Deployment is faster, allowing you to get your team up and running in hours, not days.

Enhanced Reliability and Call Quality

Operator Connect provides a direct, managed connection between CallTower and the Microsoft cloud. This tight integration ensures a higher level of service reliability and superior call quality. With a shared Service Level Agreement (SLA) between Microsoft and CallTower, you benefit from a resilient and monitored network path. This translates to fewer dropped calls, less jitter, and a more consistent user experience.

Cost-Effective and Scalable

By removing the need for on-premises hardware (SBCs) and specialized IT staff for telephony management, Operator Connect reduces both capital and operational expenses. Scaling is also effortless. As your organization grows, you can easily add new users and phone numbers directly from the Teams Admin Center without worrying about infrastructure limitations. This flexibility makes it an ideal solution for businesses of all sizes.



What is Direct Routing for Microsoft Teams?

Direct Routing is the original method for connecting Microsoft Teams to the PSTN. It offers a high degree of flexibility by allowing organizations to use virtually any approved telecom provider and connect them to their Microsoft 365 tenant via their own certified Session Border Controller (SBC).

This approach gives you granular control over your telephony infrastructure. You are responsible for procuring, deploying, and managing the SBC, which acts as the bridge between your provider's network and Microsoft Teams. While this offers customization, it also introduces significant complexity and management overhead.

When is Direct Routing the Right Choice?

Despite the advantages of Operator Connect, Direct Routing remains essential for certain scenarios where its flexibility is a requirement.

Specialized Government Environments (GCC High)

For government contractors and agencies operating within the US Government Community Cloud High (GCC High), security and compliance are paramount. Microsoft restricts Operator Connect in these highly secure environments. Therefore, Direct Routing is the only approved method for enabling PSTN calling in Teams for GCC High tenants. CallTower specializes in providing compliant Direct Routing solutions for these clients, ensuring they can leverage Teams voice while meeting strict federal requirements.

Complex, Hybrid Deployments

Organizations with existing investments in legacy PBX systems or complex, multi-vendor communication environments may need Direct Routing. It allows for gradual migrations and integrations with other systems that Operator Connect's streamlined model does not support. If you need to connect Teams to an analog device, a third-party contact center platform, or an on-premises phone system, Direct Routing provides the necessary control.

Geographies Without Operator Connect Coverage

While Operator Connect's global footprint is expanding rapidly, there may still be regions where approved providers are not yet available. In these cases, Direct Routing allows businesses to connect with a local carrier, providing a global calling solution where Operator Connect is not an option.

Operator Connect vs. Direct Routing: A Side-by-Side Comparison

To make the choice clearer, here is a direct comparison of the two solutions across key areas:

Feature	CallTower with Operator Connect	CallTower with Direct Routing
Management Interface	Microsoft Teams Admin Center	Requires management of SBC and PowerShell
Infrastructure	Fully cloud-based; no on-prem hardware	Requires a customer-managed or hosted SBC
Deployment Speed	Fast; can be set up in hours	Slower; requires SBC configuration and testing
Technical Expertise	Minimal; managed within a familiar interface	Requires specialized voice/telephony expertise
Best For	Most businesses seeking simplicity and reliability	Organizations in GCC High or with complex needs
Reliability	Enhanced; direct peering with Microsoft	High, but depends on SBC configuration and management
Customization	Standardized, streamlined experience	Highly customizable for complex integrations



Why CallTower Recommends **Operator Connect**

For the vast majority of businesses, CallTower's Operator Connect solution is the clear winner. It delivers a superior user experience by simplifying administration, ensuring high reliability, and lowering the total cost of ownership. You get all the benefits of a robust enterprise phone system without the traditional headaches of managing complex voice infrastructure. By handling the technical heavy lifting, we empower your IT team to focus on strategic initiatives instead of telephony maintenance.

Our Direct Routing solution is a powerful and necessary tool designed to fill critical gaps. We are proud to be a trusted provider for organizations with specialized needs, particularly within the demanding GCC High environment. It serves as a testament to our flexibility and technical expertise. However, for mainstream business use, the operational simplicity and seamless integration of Operator Connect provide unmatched value.

Making the Right Choice for Your Organization

Choosing between Operator Connect and Direct Routing comes down to your organization's specific needs:

- If your priority is ease of use, rapid deployment, and a reliable, cost-effective phone system integrated directly into Teams, Operator Connect is your solution.
- If you operate in a specialized environment like GCC High, require deep integration with legacy systems, or have unique routing needs, Direct Routing is the necessary path.

CallTower is one of a select few providers globally that offers the expertise and capability to deliver both solutions. We can help you assess your requirements and guide you to the platform that best aligns with your business goals, ensuring you unlock the full power of voice in Microsoft Teams.

Let's Connect