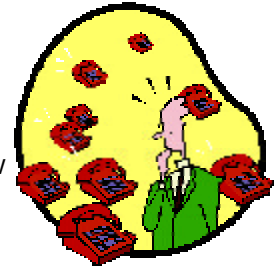




Choosing a Partner in Telecommunications Planning

Computer systems may become obsolete in two to three years, but your telephone system should last at least seven years. With that thought in mind, the task of choosing a telecommunications system becomes even more daunting. There is a vast array of new technology available that can increase efficiency. To choose the right phone system for your business, you need to be able to predict what features you don't need now, but might want later. Your prospective growth plans will be as much a factor in your decision as will your current needs.



With all the planning involved in making the right choice, you will need assistance from a dealer that will be there for you from the selection process, through installation, service and for the entire life of your system. This means that your choice of a provider is vital in the process of buying a phone system.

We offer the following suggestions:

Choose an established Company with experience in designing, installing, and maintaining systems.

You want to be able to count on the all-important service after the sale. Choose a company that has been in business at least five years. Determine the nature of the company's support staff. Find out who will be helping you design your system. The vendor you select needs to be a great deal more than a parts supplier. In order to provide the best plan for your business, they must take the time to understand your business and its needs - current and future. Look for a designated design department, as salespeople who are asked to customize a system for their customers are focused on selling and may not have the time that is required to find the best configuration for you.

You may choose to purchase your equipment from one supplier and have another company facilitate installation and maintenance. For instance, Main Resource primarily sells equipment to be installed by an interconnect chosen by the purchaser. However, we remain committed to providing quality technical support on all our products and we will recommend qualified installers. Get references for prospective vendors. Ask their current customers how their design process went. It is usually safe to assume that your employees and fellow workers are not looking forward to the phone system change, particularly the phases of design and installation, which will disrupt normal business

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procedure to some extent. To limit the impact, find out what you can expect and plan accordingly. Ask your vendor if they plan to quote a refurbished system as well as a new system. Refurbished systems can give you all of the features and benefits of a new system at a fraction of the cost, with comparable warranties and like-new appearance.

Your installer should ask for a detailed floor plan of your office, showing where each phone is located, along with the person's name, extension number, phone type, modem/DID lines, etc. Meet the technician in charge of your job before the installation date. That individual should provide a comprehensive installation plan and be available to answer all your questions throughout the process.

System installation is just the beginning of your relationship with your chosen vendor. Find out from the company (and confirm with references) details of their service procedures, maintenance options, how many technicians they have and what emergency procedures they have in place.

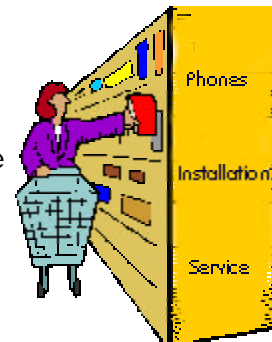
Maintenance and Warranties

Vendors commonly pass on the one-year warranty on equipment that they get from the manufacturer to their customers. Recently, many companies have begun to offer a multiple year warranty. Maintenance plans usually cost around \$25 per phone and/or line annually with an additional charge for voice mail and other peripheral equipment. Depending on the plan, this expenditure can be an excellent investment in protecting your phone system. Some plans also include remote maintenance, a great savings, especially for larger systems. Often a service contract will give you a discounted labor rate on expansion costs.

Continuing Commitment

Once again, utilize references to find out what the vendor does to continue the relationship after the design, sale and installation of a system are completed. A representative should be in touch with customers at least once a year to see what is happening with their business and offer suggestions as to how their phone system may be better able to accommodate growth.

Your vendor should keep you informed of manufacturer updates to the software that runs your system, notifying you of when they become available and what features they offer. Ask if they publish a newsletter (such as Main Resource's "[TalkPath](#)") or hold [classes](#)* on systems and what their capabilities are. If a certain feature was not important to you at installation, but has become so now, you need to know if it is available to you. The company should be proactive with suggestions on new technology as it becomes available.



Shopping Convenience

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When there is static on your line, you may need to have your long distance carrier, local line carrier, and equipment vendor all involved in determining the cause of the problem. If your vendor is an authorized agent for a local line provider and partner with your long distance company, you may only need to make one phone call for all your telecommunication needs, including service, ordering new lines, analysis of your current lines and recommendations for alternative options. Be sure to inquire as to whether that option is available.

Determine whether or not the company you are considering carries peripheral equipment such as voicemail, off-site extension equipment or the latest in computer/telephony products. While you might not need to utilize such equipment now, you may wish to in the future. Buying all related equipment from your primary vendor will ensure that you have product compatibility and will make the greatest use of available features.

Finding the right partner in telecommunications will save you time and a good deal of aggravation. Time invested in researching potential providers will be more than compensated by ensuring a smooth-running, maintenance-free telephone system that will enhance your business's operation for years to come. ***Main Resource offers classes periodically; call Kristen Watters at 207-797-8410 x133 for details or check out our [Training page](#).**