



## Things to Think About When Shopping for a New Telephone System

### **1. Plan for the future –**

In planning on the purchase of a system, you need to look at your business plan for at least the next 6 years. If growth is likely, then buy a large enough platform to support the number of trunks, phones, voice mail ports etc., you're likely to need. This will be in the form of available (empty) card slots. If growth is certain, buy the cards too. It is always more expensive to upgrade later.

### **2. Voice mail is not an extravagance –**

These days most people expect to have the option of leaving you a voice mail message if you are not available. They also expect to be able to leave you a personal message if calling after hours. Voice mail is important for effective in-house communications as well. If your system has more than 3 or 4 phones, buy voice mail.

### **3. Buy the right number of voice mail ports –**

When callers are listening to greetings or leaving messages - or when users are listening to messages, recording conversations, changing options or creating new greetings, they are each occupying a voice mail port. On many systems, voice mail ports are also used for signaling and lighting message waiting lights. If you elect to use an automated attendant as your primary answering option, you will need to have more voice mail ports than if you use it only as a backup or after hours.. Order sufficient ports now because it will likely be more expensive to upgrade later. Also make sure the voice mail system is sufficiently expandable and upgradeable.

### **4. LCD Displays are not an extravagance –**

Not all LCD Displays are created equal either. A sufficient LCD display should provide you with much more than just the time-of-day and your extension number. A good display should provide you with at least 2 lines of characters and have interactive keys (keys whose functions are indicated by corresponding text in the LCD display). Even the most basic LCD Display should have at least some interactive keys. An LCD telephone should provide: Caller ID, Text Messages, Directory Dialing (internal and external), Extension name, Trunk Name, and help with feature access.

### **5. MAC's (Moves, Adds, Changes) costs –**

Because of the proprietary nature of most telephone systems, the potential exists to be held hostage to a degree, by your equipment vendor in terms of add-ons and service. Sometimes the vendor has exclusive (or near exclusive) distribution in a particular territory. Some vendors are not above exploiting this arrangement by aggressively discounting your initial investment only to charge you outrageously high prices to add phones or work on your system in the future. Get MAC pricing policies up front to avoid unpleasant surprises.



## **6. Software Upgrades –**

You will want to keep your system up to date in terms of software “fixes” and enhancements. Find out how software upgrades are accomplished, how often and what will they cost.

## **7. Buy enough Analog Ports –**

Fax Machines, voice mail (sometimes), answering machines, standard cordless phones, computer modems, standard analog phones all use analog extension ports if they are to share your pool of voice lines. Make sure you have enough.

## **8. Modem Speeds –**

If you elect to support a computer modem as an extension on your system, make sure you get a commitment on what data speed you can expect. Some systems will not be able to pass data without slowing it down because of conversions that must take place in the telephone system.

## **9. Ease of Use –**

You may have covered all your bases with a powerful voice-processing platform back in the phone room, but you cannot forget about the user interface. To most of your employees, the telephone sets on their desks ARE the phone system. Make sure they are user friendly with LCD Displays and plenty of keys for easy access to stored numbers and features.

## **10. Adequate Documentation -**

Many vendors are greedy with system documentation. They will frequently hoard anything that gives you the ability to make programming changes to your telephone system or voice mail, even when system docs are included with each system ordered. Find out what documentation ships with each system and insist on having a copy. Keep in mind, however, in some cases documentation beyond individual user guides is considered proprietary from the manufacturer and is not always available to the end user. Sometimes system hardware or software manuals are available, but at extra cost. If you want them, then you need to take any added cost into consideration in your evaluation phase.

## **11. Be realistic about your technology needs.**

There are an overwhelming number of new applications and technologies in the telecom equipment industry to choose from today. Remember not to be short-sighted when looking at your company's present and future needs, but don't be side-tracked by flashy options or expensive (and often dicey) new technologies that do not hold-up under the scrutiny of hard cost analysis.



## 12. Do I need VoIP capability?

VoIP is an excellent example of an emerging technology that may, or may not, be justifiable for your business. VoIP (Voice over Internet Protocol) technology can be implemented in many different ways and for many different reasons. Make sure you have a clear understanding of what it is you wish to accomplish with VoIP. Is it to save money on long-distance calling costs? Find more cost-effective and efficient ways to network with other branches? Or would you like to implement web-enabled Unified Messaging or telephone system administration. Maybe all you would like to do is have a few remotely located extensions for off-premise system access. There are different solutions available for these applications and the potential to be oversold (or undersold) is high. Make sure you communicate to your potential vendor exactly what you expect to accomplish in reference to your VoIP application. Maybe all you need for now is a simple VoIP gateway rather than a complete system replacement. In any case, understanding all of your options is important.