



TELEPHONE SYSTEM BUYING GUIDE

When your company is ready to purchase a new telephone system, where do you start? There are so many questions to be answered:

1. How do I compare proposals, telephone systems, and companies?
2. Are all proposals comparing equally in configuration, features and functionality?
3. I want the best value for my money.
4. What about service after the sale?
5. Will you train our staff on the new system?
6. Is a Hosted IP Solution a better choice for my business?

Do any of these questions sound familiar?

These are all valid questions we will answer in this buyers guide. It is designed to provide you with information on purchasing a new digital telephone system. By following these guidelines, you should be able to gather the proper amount of information to make an educated decision on who can provide the best product solution at a reasonable cost for your business. We hope you find this information useful in your search.

Who do I call?

The first thing to consider is who to call for a quote. You should limit yourself to no more than three companies to interview. As the number of vendors grows, so does your confusion. Personal experiences are the preferred method for choosing or eliminating companies. Solid references from trusted friends or fellow workers are also a great source to help you choose companies to talk with.

Meeting with Vendors

In the first meeting with all bidding vendors, you should inquire about their company, and ask some tough questions. After all, this is a decision that will hopefully provide you with a solid solution for many years to come, and you want to make sure you are making the right choice! Critical questions to ask include:

1. Tell me about your company.
2. How long have you been in business?
3. How many certified, trained technicians work for your company?
4. Finally, the most important question to ask:

Is your company a **licensed, authorized dealer** for the equipment you sell and service?

Why is this important? There are many grey market unauthorized resellers and/or business partners selling equipment throughout the U.S. Many of these companies are in violation of distribution agreements (selling to unauthorized resellers or selling outside their authorized territories). This can result in you the customer finding out later that the products have been altered, outdated, or manufacturer discontinued, or that the manufacturer warranty is no longer valid.

The bottom line is this: Call or look on the manufacturer's website for licensed, authorized dealers in your area. This protects your interest and investment. It is worth your time to validate companies for dealer authorization BEFORE problems occur and you have to scramble for answers and service. Don't take them at their word. Check them out before signing contracts and then discovering that you are stuck with a company that is unable to provide timely, proper service or worse yet, gone out of business.

If you require other services such as voice or data cabling, linking remote sites, LAN or WAN (local or wide area networks) advanced networking applications, you will need to ask further questions to qualify the company. Ask for specific company



references for these applications. Make sure to see a demonstration of these applications prior to making a commitment.

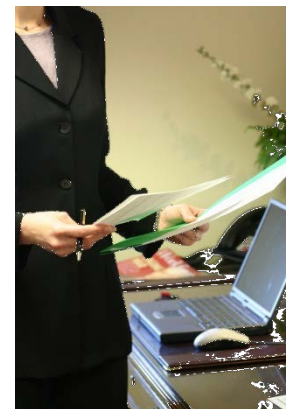
The last question is to ponder? Is this a company I can trust and work with for the next 5 to 10 years as my telecommunications partner?

Product Demonstration

Take the time to visit each finalist **at their facility** for a "hands on" demonstration of the equipment. Do not settle for a demonstration at your office. Why don't they want you to come to their office? Maybe they work out of their garage. If you are part of a committee, it is important to bring all the members for the demonstration. Everyone needs to have all the information to make an educated decision. You can tell a lot about the company by walking through the office, meeting people, observing work habits and their office environment for neatness and professionalism. You probably would not buy an automobile without a test drive demonstration, and you should do the same with your telephone system purchase.

Allow plenty of time for each demonstration, to make sure all your questions are answered to your satisfaction.

This is also a great time to learn how the implementation of your new system will be handled. Is the system programmed specifically for your business, or is it installed defaulted (as is) from the manufacturer? You may not want GENERIC programming for your business. It will be up to you to make



sure the company you select provides this type of initial programming service. Typically, low cost solutions provide limited training time, default programming set up, or hidden added costs for a total solution. The bottom line: Don't get shortchanged!

Customer Service

This is a critical piece of the equation to consider. The company you choose should have licensed, experienced, certified service technicians available for service calls. Inquire about the number of local available technicians, the response time for urgent calls, and how after hour calls are taken and handled. Moves, additions, and changes (MAC's) are simply what they imply; a telephone move, an addition of features, or a programming change of the system for functionality purposes. MAC's can sometimes be programmed remotely or may require on site technicians. Most companies charge a service fee for these services. Check with all of your potential vendors to see if there are charges for remote programming.

Training

What about training? Most companies will train new users initially during the install. How much training time is allowed? Do they offer training after the install? Is there a charge for additional training sessions? If there is a charge for additional training, how much is that charge? Who performs end-user training? Is there someone dedicated to this task besides the sales representative who is motivated to sell rather than train?

Inventory

If parts are needed for service, are they readily available locally, or are they shipped in from the manufacturer? What is the turnaround time for service on parts?

Behind the Scenes

Is the salesperson responsive? If not, this might be an indication of the company and their approach to business in general. If they are not responsive to you when they are trying to get your money, what kind of service will you receive after they have your money? Next, we know all companies will give you good references. When talking to reference lists, you might inquire if there are any they would not do business with, and why. Beware of proposals not written in plain

English and that are hard to understand. There may be a reason it appears that way! Finally, trust your feelings, if it appears too good to be true, it normally is!

The Final Decision

Now that you have all your information, you can evaluate all areas important to your company. Make a PRO and CON list on each company. If all of the company's proposals compare apples to apples, look at the pricing, however, don't just look at the INITIAL cost, but at the true cost of ownership. While you always want the best value for your money, this does not necessarily mean the cheapest initial cost. Cost and Value are two totally different definitions. The initial price or cost paid is never the total cost over the life of the telephone system. Evaluate customer service, MAC charges, extended maintenance costs, down time costs (what you lose in business if your system is not working properly), response time costs, etc.

Remember, it is unwise to pay too much, but it is much worse to pay too little and not get what you require for effective day to day business operations! A common law of business prohibits paying a small amount of money and getting a lot. It almost never happens if you choose to do purchase for price rather than value. However, if this is your choice, it would be wise to budget extra money for the risk you run! It's simply less complicated to buy value in the first place. There is another old rule of business that always applies to purchasing equipment. Keep in mind that if PRICE, RELIABILITY AND SERVICE are the most important buying criteria for your purchase, you will generally only get two of the three. The hard part is deciding which two you will be getting. Take time to analyze your information, make the right decision, and in the long run, you will most likely be happier with your final decision, experience less stress with minimal down



time, and have an acceptable solution for your telecommunication needs.

Choose The Ideacom Network. Here's why! The Ideacom Network is a national organization of telephony resellers joined together to promote each other's success. Each member undergoes a thorough examination of its business practices prior to joining. The Ideacom Network only admits those companies who demonstrate their commitment to customer care, financial stability, and community leadership. Consequently, end-user customers seeking voice and data equipment and services can rest assured that an Ideacom member has attained elite status in their respective communities.

Telecommunications trends change daily if not hourly. Ideacom members are part of a network that stays abreast of the very latest technologies whether they are VOIP (Voice over Internet Protocol), data communications or converged solutions (a combination of the two). A strong emphasis is placed upon insuring that each Ideacom member maintains the latest technical certifications for the products they represent and that sales personnel are more than adequately trained.

The Ideacom Network is a close knit group of business professionals who lean on each other in times of need. Because of their unique relationships, they can assist each other in the event of local calamities (such as power outages, etc.) by sharing technicians and parts. No other group of dealers in the United States can work together as effectively as the Ideacom family of professionals. Because Ideacom members share best practices culled from decades of experience, Ideacom members are truly "thought leaders".

An Ideacom professional will custom-build a solution for your business and install it on time and under budget. And they will maintain it 365/24/7. The Ideacom Network has agreements in place with some of the leading vendor partners in the telecommunications field. Ideacom representatives

undergo extensive sales and product training; always staying atop of the latest products and services.

In summary, by purchasing from an authorized Ideacom member you are buying from a company that is dedicated to excellence! For more information on Ideacom or to locate a member near you, visit www.ideacom.org or call 1-866-433-2266.

