

Do A Needs Analysis before Buying Your Phone System



Written by:
John Campbell

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You own a small business that has been steadily growing for ten years. You have taken on new staff to keep up with the demands and every time a new person is hired you call your telephone service provider and get a new line installed. You realize your telephone switchboard needs to be updated or replaced but what do you buy?

Too many times I see phone systems installed that don’t suit the needs of the business. If you needed a new delivery truck you wouldn’t buy a four-door sedan. But that’s how bad it is sometimes because a business gets sold equipment that their provider just wants to get rid of.

In order to get the best system for your business at the best price you need to do a Request for Quote (RFQ). But you can’t do the RFQ until you have done a Needs Analysis. Whether you do this yourself or get an independent consultant to do it entails a lot more than just “how many lines do you need?”

There are many general questions that need to be answered such as: how many employees require their own telephone extension; do you need telephones away from desks, i.e. conference room, lunch room, copy room, etc; do you need Area code routing, plus many more.

Then there are office protocols that need to be identified such as are calls to an extension handled by an assistant?, what is the backup procedure when reception is

busy or not at their desk?, should calls go to an Auto-attendant and if someone needs help they dial ‘0’? Other requirements may include paging through telephone sets or overhead paging. Also, are internal conference calls from offices required? These only touch the surface of what should go into your RFQ.

It can be a very difficult to buy the best system for your needs if you are not aware of the advances in technology- and why would you be? It’s not as if you call in providers and suppliers twice a year to tell you what’s new.

For example, voice mail features have increased a great deal. Does your phone system require a company directory? How many branches do you want on your tree? Does the company directory give the customer the option to transfer directly to the extension? Do you require message notification from your personal mailbox to your cell phone when a message is left in your mailbox?

Pricing of telephone systems varies greatly. Rather than get one price from one supplier you should get quotes from a variety of sources. You can save as much as thirty to fifty per cent which more than pays for the cost of hiring an independent agency to do everything for you.

In your RFQ you need to ask your bidders to specify the amount of training they will provide after implementation. You also want to know what their guarantee provides and for what period of time. A

very important question is to ask them to specify what their guarantee does not provide.

Your telephone system is a critical tool in the operation of your business. Make sure you apply the same diligence to an upgrade or new system as you would for any other major purchase.

John Campbell is a Strategic-Partner with Schooley Mitchell Telecom Consultants, North America's largest independent telecom consulting company.

john.campbell@schooleymitchell.com

902-435-4578

www.schooleymitchell.com/jcampbell