

# Preparation is key

How to be prepared when selling and installing a new IT system **Interviewed by Dale W. Hlaves**

**A**s information technology continues to improve and evolve at break-neck speeds, it is important for IT providers to make sure they are well prepared for anything a business asks of them.

Still, there are a number of things that can go wrong when a provider sells a new system or upgrades an existing one. Sometimes, IT groups have so much going on that they miss some of the small details, such as the amount of space available or the fact that they're still waiting to order another card.

But with proper due diligence, providers can greatly reduce the chances of something going wrong.

"It is important that providers work with customers to find out what their needs are, what's the handoff to them and whether it will be a fiber-based multimode connection or an actual Ethernet port handoff," says Eric Knott, senior project manager for InsightBusiness.

*Smart Business* talked to Knott about the ways providers can ensure an efficient installation of IT services.

## How can providers work with companies to make sure their services work with the clients' networks?

First of all, you need to coordinate their equipment. How will you hand it to them? Where's their equipment located? Do they have proper AC power and rack space? Where will you enter the building?

Next, develop project plans and set up meetings with the customer. Try and think of all of the points that they typically aren't thinking of, and then, of course, talk about any kind of issues that they may or may not have. Do they need any special routing done? What are their protocols?

Finally, you need to get on their timetable. Construction typically takes anywhere between 60 and 90 days, and you need to coordinate getting the equipment in place and then handing it off to them.

## Should IT contracts be tailored to individual clients?

Typically, each client has its own set of circumstances, especially when you're dealing directly with the IT director. Usually the person who signs the contract is not the same person who will be at the property, so you have to tailor the con-



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tract to each customer.

Start off with a standard list of questions, and after the deal is signed, call the customer and make sure that everyone is on board. Then set up a project plan and give it to the customer. This works out really well because the plan ensures that you and your customer know what is going on throughout the process.

Also, not all customers will want a meeting, so just give them the plan once you develop it. On the other hand, some clients will want weekly or biweekly meetings just to get an understanding of what's going on.

## How important is it for the project managers to play a role in coordinating all aspects of delivering services to customers?

In my opinion it's one of the single most important things because if they don't get everything lined up, something's going to fall through the cracks. Typically, there is a time frame when the customer needs the services. And you might have to play catch-up if they've let a contract expire, they're about to lose their services or they're just moving in to a new location.

So, it's crucial that you coordinate with the customer, schedule the engineers and make sure the construction gets pushed

along. It's also important to coordinate the customer's needs with your internal time frames.

And then, of course, there's the billing. Sometimes customers have different billing needs, so be sure to discuss those during the kickoff call. There's times that the client will have to test the system for a few days before they can accept it, which makes billing a totally different part of the business.

## What goes into delivering Ethernet services to customers?

Once a contract has been established and the deal is done with the customer, the project team has to allocate resources, see how soon it can get a construction crew to the site and open up project authorizations, which basically allocates the company's resources to a specific project.

Then, a kickoff call is conducted with the customer to learn their needs and their time frames, along with whether or not all the necessary permits have been secured. Once construction is completed engineers go in to actually set up the services. Finally, a packet is created specifically for each customer. This packet contains a welcome letter, all of their test results, a list of contacts and a survey to rate their services.

## What issues might come up?

Perhaps customers changed their equipment, such as their interfaces, and now they need two ports instead of one. Or maybe you thought you needed an Ethernet handoff and instead you need a multimode handoff. Or they might need a different protocol setup. A changed time frame can also be a problem. Customers are either losing their circuit or there's a deadline in getting something set up.

But with careful planning and a strong project plan, the challenges and issues that come up can be identified and resolved. <<

*Information in this article is general in nature. The requirements of each business will vary according to its specific needs.*

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