

Telecom Spring Cleaning
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Spring cleaning should not just apply to our attics, closets and garages. It should also apply to our monthly business expenses. Some business owners take the last part of a fiscal year to re-evaluate, while others don't ever look at monthly expenses until there is a situation which forces this evaluation. This situation could be a business down-turn, applying for a grant or loan, etc. Whatever the reason, review of monthly and yearly expenses should be done on a regular basis. Part of this evaluation should include the telecommunications costs. When I say telecommunications I am not only referring to telephone lines but also all base service costs and features related to these lines, data circuits, internet services, cellular phones and more.

Before undertaking this process, goals should be identified.

- Is cutting cost the primary objective?
- Should streamlining carriers be a high priority?
- Are contracts for services in need of attention?

By identifying goals, a review can be more targeted and produce outcomes in a quicker fashion. Taking them in order let's look at each individual goal.

1. Cutting costs – No matter what the outcome, this step should always begin with an inventory of current services. In reference to local lines and circuits ordering a CSR (customer service record) for each bill you pay the telephone carrier will show you what services are attached to which line. From here a plan of attack can be made. Are all features necessary? How are the rates applied? Sometimes cost savings can be achieved simply by renegotiating rates with existing carriers. Other times more in-depth study is required to see if alternate suppliers would be a greater benefit. In reference to cellular costs and long distance bills these can be reviewed to see if any extra features are added to the bill. With cellular bills one item to look for would be text messaging on phones that are not authorized for this function.
2. Streamlining carriers – If your business pays as many vendor bills as there are lines and circuits, it would be beneficial to look at obtaining some bundled packages with fewer vendors. Take this opportunity to identify what services are priced best with which carrier and bundle some of those services together. This will also help managers identify when services are about to expire and be able to manage the renewals in a better way. However, be careful that the bundle does not add exponential cost to the total package needlessly.
3. Contracts needing attention – A business should really assess a contract renewal for telecom services at least 3 months prior to the renewal (if not 4- 5 months on a circuit). By allowing this time, the business has the ability to assess the market, identify what changes may benefit them, give themselves time to make a change,

and test the change before disconnecting the existing circuit. In the world of ever changing technology be careful of signing long term (4 or 5 year contracts).

During Telecom Spring Cleaning, business managers should be careful of the “too good to be true” deals from the carriers. Assess the method of communication for your business before making radical changes. A very popular package is an all-in-one line (all local and long distance calls included). However, some lines should not be placed on this type of plan because their call volume is not high enough to justify the increased cost of the monthly service.

There is one challenge that remains for some business owners and managers. The best effort at Telecom Spring Cleaning can be flawed by the sheer nature of telecom companies. Their billing structures, terminology, employee turnover and more make it very difficult for a layman to interpret their billing let alone their offerings. Business owners that receive the CSR from the telephone company may look at the document very much like they would a foreign language. This is only good if one speaks and reads that foreign language. Customer service representatives at all companies have different answers for the same question. It can be quite frustrating. This is when a professional should be brought in to assist with the Telecom Spring Cleaning task.

Ideally this professional should have an understanding of the telecom providers in the area; both IP providers and mainstream providers such as AT&T and Verizon as there are many options available in the tri-county area at this time, have a track record of sustained savings for clients, have a record of follow-thru for clients, and an understanding of the equipment that your telephone lines and circuits are connected to. There are many ways to maximize the use of the services through equipment optimization. Further, the professional should be one that has a track record of success. This success should not be limited to rate plan savings for optimization but also process changes for the client that can be tracked over a long-term period. This is important because recommendations that lead to savings and thus payment of compensation to this professional should have a lasting effect for the betterment of the organization. Get on with your Telecom Spring Cleaning today and accomplish your business goals in 2007.