

## SOLUTIONS FOR SMALL BUSINESS

# Selecting a telecommunications solutions provider

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Today's business environment has never been more competitive. Companies in virtually every industry are working overtime to increase profits and outperform the competition. To aid them in their efforts, they are looking at a variety of ways to enable their employees to increase customer service. One such way is to take advantage of the quantum leaps in technology being offered by today's telecommunications systems.

Ignoring your company's rapidly becoming obsolete telecommunications system can mean lost revenue and wasted time for your staff. It is imperative that your company make every effort to control costs and increase productivity. And a state-of-the-art telecommunications system, over the long-term, can pay for itself.

One thing to remember — a telecommunications system is a major investment that should be able to grow with the company. Furthermore, your system should be purchased from a reputable provider who will consult with you to select the right system for your company, install the system, provide training and long-term assistance with any problems and install future system upgrades.

The following is a list of considerations to take to heart when selecting a telecommunications systems provider:

- **Manufacturer Authorized or Accredited.** Is the telecommunications provider authorized or accredited by the system's manufacturer? Beware of providers that say they are authorized by the manufacturer, and are not. The firm may be able to install the system, but will not be able to provide the ongoing support, including upgrades to the system and software enhancements. Because the provider does not have access to the manufacturer for the resolution of these issues, it places you, the customer, at a high risk. To determine if the provider is authorized or accredited, start by asking for a comfort letter from the manufacturer or call to the manufacturer's regional office for a provider reference. It is also a good idea to visit the vendor's office to take a look at the inventory, facility and day-to-day business operations.

- **Voice and Data Experience.** In today's rapidly evolving telecommunications marketplace, you will need to select a provider that has a significant amount of both voice and data experience. This is critically important, because the convergence of voice and data has happened. Your company needs to work with a provider that has the technical expertise in computer telephony integration (CTI).

- **Full-Service Telecom Provider.** The company should provide a single point of contact for consultation, design, sales, installation, implementation, training and maintenance of voice, data and video communications cabling and equipment. Is the provider simply going to sell you a piece of equipment, or provide your company with a solution with an application orientation to it? Once the system is installed the company should periodically provide knowledge of the latest features and services that can be implemented to further enhance the original configuration.

- **Provider Reputation.** The provider's reputation is as significant as the product you buy. In addition to checking with

other business associates about the companies and systems they selected, check with the Better Business Bureau for references. You should ask the provider for a least five customer referrals. Then call each one of those referrals. Ask how long have they had the system? How is the providers' ongoing support? Has the company demonstrated an ability to resolve any problems as they arose?

- **Understanding Of Your Business.** Does the company have an understanding of your business? Are they able to translate that understanding into adapting the technology to most benefit your company? For example, a mortgage banking firm is going to have a different system application from a manufacturing company. You need to select a provider that has a full-scope of business knowledge and understanding.

- **Entrepreneurial Approach.** In today's business environment you need to select a provider that brings an entrepreneurial approach to conducting business. The most significant aspect of a telecommunications system purchase decision is that a dynamic partnership will be formed between your company and the provider. Therefore, it is vital that the two understand each other and that the provider be responsive, flexible and competent to effectively handle your needs. Many large

telecom providers have not adapted quickly to technology changes in the marketplace, and have limited local support if you have a problem with the your system. In addition, entrepreneurial providers empower their customers with new systems and features needed today, ahead of expectations, then show them how these can be applied in their business.

- **Purchase Options.** Does the provider offer you flexible financing options for the new system? Does the solution allow you to implement the technology you require while minimizing the overall financial impact to your firm today and over time?

- **System Warranty.** What type of warranty does the company offer? It is critical that you understand your warranty options

and determine whether they cover just parts, parts and labor, or parts, labor and services. The latter certainly provides large and small businesses with a combination of security, comfort, value, dependability and peace of mind.

- **Remote System Access.** Make sure

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## Newsmakers

### DUTCHESS COUNTY

**Michael J. Quinn**, President & CEO of Rhinebeck Savings Bank recently presented a check for \$20,000 to Steven Cook, Director of Starr Library and \$5,000 to Michael Berg, Executive Director of the Family of Woodstock, Inc. The \$20,000 was part of a multiyear pledge of \$100,000 to the Starr Reborn Campaign to help with the design, renovation and expansion of the library's facilities. In addition, Rhinebeck Savings aided the libraries efforts by providing flexible financing to the library to meet their unique needs. The \$5,000 check was donated in part to help with the construction of the Darmstadt Shelter for the Homeless, located in Midtown Kingston. Upon completion, these shelters will accept and aid those who are homeless and in need of respite, supervision and case management services.

**Denise Doring VanBuren** and **Michael P. Murphy** are the honorees for the Community Foundation of Dutchess County's 2007 Garden Party scheduled for Sunday, October 7 from 3:00 p.m. to 6:00 p.m. The tented event is presented to recognize these two local residents for their community service, while demonstrating the work of the Community Foundation in our area. The location will be announced shortly.

**Dutchess Community College** will salute its Curriculum Advisory Committees at a dinner on campus and honor several members for their long-time commitment. One Curriculum Advisory Committee member - Architect **John C. Morgan** - will be honored for 35 years of service to the College and community. The Curriculum Advisory Committees are key partners in the delivery of educational programs at DCC. Fifteen advisory committees meet twice a year - once in the fall and once in the spring - providing a vital link between the community and DCC's vocational and technical programs. As the College's programmatic caretakers, the committees have the

responsibility for program oversight. Working with a faculty chair, committee members review curricula and recommend improvements and new courses. Advisory Committee members are also necessary for DCC to maintain its Middle States Accreditation.

**Joan Pagonis** will receive the first ever Fishkill "Good Scout" Award. More than 150 Southern Dutchess business leaders are expected to attend a cocktail reception tomorrow recognizing The Honorable Joan Pagonis, Supervisor for the Town of Fishkill with the Hudson Valley Boy Scout Council. Diego Aviles, Director of Development for the Hudson Valley Boy Scout Council stated, "We are delighted about the opportunity to honor and recognize Joan Pagonis for her wonderful achievements and commitment to the community. Joan personifies all the values of a Good Scout through her tremendous leadership and service to the community."

### ULSTER COUNTY

**Diane M. LeFever** of Ryan Insurance, a subsidiary of Ulster Savings Bank has been awarded her designation as a member of the 2007 Class of LUTC (Life Underwriter Training Council) Fellows by the National Association of Insurance and Financial Advisors (NAIFA) in partnership with The American College. Ms. LeFever, a Life & Health Insurance Specialist, spent over 2 1/2 years participating in specialized life & health insurance training and testing in conjunction with The American College, a leading educational institution for financial advisors for nearly 80 years. The designation marks an agent's long-term commitment to professionalism on behalf of clients, establishes the agent's competence and business

expertise, marks a commitment to The American College's and NAIFA's Code of Ethics and fosters additional professional development. In addition to the successful completion of five courses within a 10-course curriculum, LUTCF candidates must also complete an ethics course and be a member in good standing of NAIFA.

**Stephanie Bassler**, a New York State registered architect, and **Simon Stein** of Ashokan Architecture and Planning PLLC (AAP) have been recognized as LEED® Accredited Professionals (designated as LEED® AP). They join AAP principal, **Brad Will, R.A., LEED® AP**, in expanding the firm's commitment to environmentally responsible architectural design.

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### HUDSON VALLEY

**Roher Public Relations of Chappaqua** announces winning four accounts in technology and one in social services. Merchandising Technologies Inc., a leading provider of interactive merchandising displays for retailers, named Roher for b-to-b PR and other marketing communications. Real Times Services, a designer and installer of commercial A/V systems, appointed Roher for media relations and marketing, including the launch of its new residential installation company, Cosmopolitan Entertainment Systems. St. Christopher's, a private, not-for-profit residential treatment center for youth and teens, named Roher to handle media relations and online communications. Teradici, a "fabless" semiconductor company, and XLR8, a broker of mobile device content and developer of web-to-mobile technology, also named Roher for PR and other marketing communications.

## Westchester Medical Center

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Center's business operation would be put back on its feet and it would eventually match the level of its world class health services. The County Board provided the Medical Center with over \$100 million to keep the doors open and to buy time for the turnaround plan to take hold," Ryan said. "Michael Israel and Gary Brudnicki have done an excellent job leading the hospital to fiscal recovery. The naming of these two as permanent senior executive management is a key step to ensuring continued improvements and operating stability at the Medical Center."

Israel brings 30 years of healthcare experience to Westchester Medical Center. Having served as President and CEO of WMC since August 2005, he was formerly the COO of the North Shore Long Island Jewish system based in Great Neck, NY, where he was responsible for the operational performance of system hospitals. From 1993 - 2002, he was with Duke University, where he served as the CEO of Duke University Hospital, the Vice Chancellor for Health Affairs, and as Vice President of the Duke University Health System. Prior to Duke, he served in operational and financial leadership positions at St. Luke's Episcopal Hospital / Texas Medical Center in Houston, TX, and hospitals and healthcare organizations in Pennsylvania and New Jersey. Brudnicki has over 24 years of progressive executive management experience, in multi-facility health care systems where he focused on linking operations and finance for quality delivery of patient care in a fiscally responsible manner. As a member of PMA's interim management team, he served as CFO for a number of multi-facility healthcare organizations where he oversaw development of financial turnaround and strategic plans, physician relationships and insurance contracts. Prior to PMA, Brudnicki served in financial leadership positions with hospitals and healthcare systems in Connecticut and New York.

### Choosing a telecommunications company

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you are given the option for remote system access. This option may be used to not only notify the provider that you are experiencing an issue, but also provide an immediate link to make corrective actions. Remote access also enables your provider to make adds, moves or changes to your telecom system from off-site. This feature can reduce costs over the long-term.

- Local Support and Service. Does the telecom system provider have a local technical assistance center staffed by highly-trained, certified technicians? Will the company come back to your business after time has passed; assess what has changed, and make recommendations to improve your system? Your previous telecom provider may have recommended a technology that was great for your business five years ago, but the environment has changed, there are better solutions today, and there will be tomorrow.

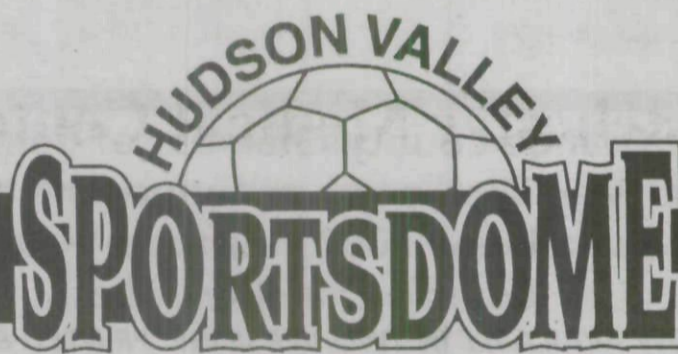
- Customer Employee Certification. To some providers the less the customer knows, the better. Reality is the more you know about your system, the better off you will be over the long-term. Will your telecom provider offer administrator training programs on the system? Once

they have been trained, they can have access to your system switch to do add, moves and changes. This will enable you to control service costs and enhance flexibility. In addition, a trained employee will be able to "talk the talk" with a certified technician if a problem ever arises.

Remember that you are shopping for a solution, not a product. Many companies make the mistake of simply buying the equipment rather than solving their telecom problems. It is important that the provider you select performs an audit of your existing system and either design a totally new system or integrate more efficient equipment into the current system.

The technology must, first of all, increase your profitability and, secondly, give your company a competitive advantage. The bottom line is to save money with cost-effective ways to improve the communications capabilities of your company.

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