

Your technology partner

How the right provider helps your business thrive **Interviewed by Clare DeCapua**

You may not think much about the technology that keeps your organization operating until something goes wrong. As companies increasingly rely on technology, having the right provider becomes imperative.

“The right technology partner can actually advance your business processes,” says Mary Rodino, Chief Marketing Officer at CIMCO Communications. “Providers are core to the business’s ability to make money and to keep clients satisfied.”

Smart Business spoke to Rodino about due diligence when selecting a technology partner.

Why is it so important to choose the right technology partner?

Technology operations are really the lifeblood of the company, and if you don’t have a reliable technology partner, you really can’t sell, provision or even bill your customers properly. A technology partner is an extension of your brand. It can really make or break your brand reputation and how it’s perceived in the marketplace.

What should a business look for in a partner?

First, a partner needs to have really strong financial stability. You have to know that the partner is going to be around and that it has not had financial issues. Another very important criterion is trust. Does the partner actually take the time to understand your business? How does the partner follow up on concerns? If you’re not sure you can trust the partner and you experience some integrity issues even during the sales process, there is a higher probability for problems later.

We like to look at a technology partner’s client list to see not only who the clients are but also the longevity of those relationships. We always ask for three to five references. References are key because you can ask them specific questions that are pertinent to your business.

How do you measure customer service?

Take a close look at the partner’s entire customer service model. A lot of business-



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es, including ours, need 24-7-365 capability and guaranteed response time. Not every business needs that, but it’s very important to make sure a partner’s customer service model is going to match yours.

Make sure the partner you choose has expert knowledge and experience in your particular niche of the industry. Sometimes a company will be good in one area, but it’s not going to be good for your company. Meet the staff members who will be working on your account to make sure you are comfortable with their level of expertise.

Look at the ability of companies to be adaptable. Can they change as your business changes? Does the partner offer dedicated account management, so you know exactly whom to call? Is there a backup? Does the partner provide any type of proactive or preventive maintenance?

The technology partner should have a model that allows it to scale its business to meet your growth needs. If it’s a small business, it needs to demonstrate that it can bring in outside experienced contractors. If it’s an application that’s growing, you may want a partner who you know already has staff in place and will be able to scale for your business.

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What should business owners know about their own company before choosing a partner?

The number one thing to look at is your business plan. You have to make your revenue and EBITDA commitments, so it’s imperative to look at what you need to do to grow. Secondly, know the new products and services on your product road map that will be introduced to the marketplace. Who is going to be the technology partner to give you the most efficient and effective way to bring those products to the marketplace? Third, you have to look inside your own business. Do you have the ability to continue to service your customers effectively as you grow?

What are some indicators that a business needs to seek out a new technology partner?

Responsiveness to questions and to business needs is absolutely a first indicator. Imagine that there’s equipment or software you have ordered and you need it to meet a certain timeline. If there are delays or the partner keeps missing deadlines, those are big red flags to indicate you need to look elsewhere.

Lack of scalability is another indicator. Is your business growing but your partner can’t keep up with your needs and requirements? Then it may be time to do a full review of the relationship and your contract.

How else can a business choose between prospective partners?

It’s very important to read the service level agreements. It’s great when everything goes well, but what will happen when things go wrong? And if it’s at all possible, do a site visit to the partner. You’ll learn the intangibles about its value system, how it really operates and the professionalism of its people from visiting its offices and meeting its team. <<

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