

GETTING THE MAXIMUM VALUE OUT OF YOUR TECHNOLOGY PARTNERSHIPS

WHAT THE
C I O
MUST ASK

6 questions the CIO must ask before selecting a systems integrator

secure and reliable network infrastructure. Integrating them can be tricky. And staying up-to-date on the latest offerings and how they interoperate can be overwhelming. Most companies find it increasingly difficult to develop comprehensive technology solutions in-house due to staffing and time constraints.

Whether it is a high availability, high redundancy LAN solution that you are about to deploy; or a switch to Voice over IP (VoIP) from the traditional TDM telephony; whether you are looking for an end-to-end call centre solution or a 24x7 service support for your mission-critical unit, you need to spend time in building the right technology partnerships to take forward your plans. **How well you select your Systems/Network Integrator can make a significant impact on the success of your investment.**

The top question therefore that every CTO and CIO faces today is: "How do I evaluate and select my SI/NI partner?" Every CIO must answer the following questions of his SI/NI as objectively as possible.

With technology budgets tight and multitudes of solutions and vendors competing for business, making the right IT investments is a challenge. By relying on the expertise of an experienced Systems/Network Integrator [SI/NI], companies can make the most of their investments and enjoy a much smoother deployment. An ongoing relationship with the SI/NI also helps ensure that today's investments will scale to meet future business requirements.

Corporate information systems encompass a wide range of networking equipment, computing hardware, operating platforms, and software applications. These elements need to interoperate efficiently in a

1 Does your Systems/Network Integrator understand and align the technology solutions to meet your business needs?

It is no longer enough to have a technology partner who can install, configure and integrate your technology products and solutions. As having the right network infrastructure in place is important, the CIO will also need to select the right network integrator. Someone who will not only design the most appropriate network infrastructure, but will integrate the network infrastructure into the business with minimal disruptions to operations.

CIO CHECKLIST

- See if your SI/NI is helping to evaluate your TCO over a five-year period.
- Does your SI/NI tailor solutions that protect your existing investments?
- Does your SI/NI share case studies and success stories that clearly demonstrate a business case?
- Has your SI/NI given you solutions that have enabled business critical effectiveness?

2 Does your SI/NI demonstrate the necessary skills & expertise?

Today's competitive business environment has made business operations mission-critical. Whether it is high customer satisfaction, faster time to market or higher operational efficiency, much of it depends on the high availability of your network, a robustly secure infrastructure and a 24x7 support system, remotely or on site. The technologies catering to these needs are getting more and more advanced and complex. *For example, deployment of Voice over Internet Telephony (VoIP) requires a convergence specialist with high expertise in both voice and data networks.* A qualified and expert team with the highest levels of certifications makes a sizeable difference to the success of a technology investment.

CIO CHECKLIST

- Ask your SI/NI for an expertise and skills set matrix of its technical team. What percentage of the team has been trained on industry leading technology platforms? Ask for levels of certification on the technologies you are looking to deploy.
- Check to see if your SI/NI enjoys special partner status and recognition from technology vendors/principals. Highest levels of recognition from technology vendors clearly demonstrate the SI/NI's capability to provide advanced consulting and expertise, highly complex design, installation and configuration of the customer's network.
- Check to see if the SI/NI exhibits a Five 9s [99.999%] reliability and delivers highly advanced services, case tracking capabilities and on-site support.
- Ask your SI/NI if he can deliver end-to-end solutions to address the entire networking life-cycle of your infrastructure - from design and implementation to network management.



3 Is your SI/NI delivering best-in-class levels of customer service?

Almost all suppliers talk about a customer-focused outlook. However the CIO must insist on measurement and evaluation systems that ensure best-in-class levels of customer service.

CIO CHECKLIST

- Does your SI/NI adhere to stringent pre- and post-sales SLAs?
- Does your SI/NI understand your internal pressures and needs and work for a win-win result?
- Does your SI/NI have a state-of-the-art Network Operating Centre (NOC) to deliver cutting-edge service level agreements?
- Does your SI/NI support any claims with customer references and testimonials?
- How many repeat-orders does your SI/NI enjoy?

4 Can your SI/NI give you access to world-class capabilities and solutions?

When your SI/NI enjoys strong partnerships with the world's leading technology suppliers, they are well positioned to quickly understand and introduce new technologies, customising them to suit the specific needs of customers. A good SI/NI will help you prepare for the new technology landscape that is ahead of you and make the right decisions.

CIO CHECKLIST

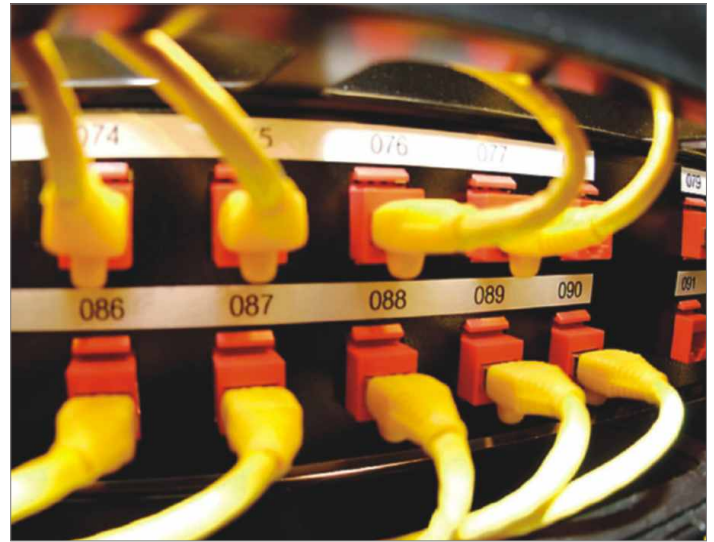
- Check for strong, strategic partnerships with industry-leading technology vendors.
- Your SI/NI should carry a multi-vendor partnership strategy to offer synergistically-related and "best of breed" solutions, customising them to meet your requirements.

5 Does your SI/NI enjoy excellent coverage?

Pan-regional customers face unique challenges and need a specialist partner to address them. The complexities and frustration of identifying and working with various integration partners is no myth. They will need an SI/NI who can become their Single Point of Contact across all phases of the networking life cycle, thereby enabling ease of operations and reduced cost of ownership.

CIO CHECKLIST

- Does your SI/NI enjoy strong pan-regional coverage? For example, offices and service/support capabilities in all the key locations of Asia Pacific region.
- Check to see if your partner exhibits a global perspective and a keen local understanding to help you with the morass of local rules and regulations.
- Does your SI/NI have the resources and infrastructure to demonstrate cross-border co-ordination of the highest calibre, allowing you to focus on your core business?



6 And finally, is your SI/NI also acting as your Long Term Ally and Trusted Business Advisor?

Technology solutions have become increasingly complex. You need an expert partner to design and implement the solution, after understanding your company's long-term goals. As a CIO you are not only driving the technology, but also carrying the enterprise along with you. In such a scenario, it pays well for the CIO to evaluate the SI/NI's ability and interest to fulfill a higher partnership role, that goes beyond a mere transactional relationship.

CIO CHECKLIST

- Check to see if your SI/NI is playing the role of a mere price/content seller or is demonstrating long-term Need Satisfaction Selling.
- See if the solutions proposed are aligned to meet your organization's long-term business goals and your company's path to market leadership.
- How many times has your SI/NI educated you about the technology in the context of your "big picture"?
- Does your SI/NI demonstrate a solid insight into your business challenges?
- Has your SI/NI demonstrated concern for your interest, which allows you to look upon him as a Trusted Business Advisor.

SUMMARY

When choosing a Systems/Network Integrator, companies should clearly define their requirements, goals, and budget realities before they assess potential candidates. While researching the market, companies should consider the best combination of people, processes and technology, and not just costs. Experience levels, areas of expertise, quality-assurance track record and project management capabilities are key parameters for evaluation & selection.