

TELECOMMUNICATIONS (A CHANGING ENVIRONMENT)

Computer and communication systems were previously designed, installed, and maintained by IBM and AT&T. Two events occurred which created a new communication environment. The personal computer showed that decentralized computing, in many situations, works better than large monolithic data processing centers. In addition, the breakup of AT&T showed that competition in telecommunications leads to increased innovation.

Although these events received a lot of attention, a subtle trend is taking place and the effects are equally dramatic. The gradual convergence of telecommunications and computing is blurring the distinction that was once very obvious. Today, computing involves telecommunications and conversely, telecommunications resembles computing. The merging of technologies and the disappearance of single source providers of systems and services is having a monumental effect on the cabling (physical) layout of the office and building environment.

What Was Once A Non-Issue Is Now A Major Responsibility:

Cabling was once installed in a building with little, if any, customer or owner involvement. The "telephone" or "mainframe computer" company was responsible for all wiring/cabling installations and maintained all records. This approach was impossible to manage, and was very costly. Industry changes led to changes in the wiring system. The wiring system is no longer "someone else's problem", but the concern of every owner. If properly structured, the wiring system can be managed and problems can be effectively addressed.

What Is Needed To Cope:

An organization's communication requirements should be identified early on. The plans must be dynamic and flexible enough to accommodate the rapid technological advancements taking place in our environment. A planning cycle of two or three years may be the best that anyone can hope to achieve.

Steps To Address When Installing A New Communication System:

- ◆ Arrange a meeting with users to discuss the following issues: Does the current system meet the user's needs? If not, what is needed? What changes are occurring that will have an impact on communications? What impacts will communications have on the strategic goal of senior management, and what impact will the goal or vision have on communications?
- ◆ Communication requirements should be discussed with an independent consultant to get a sense of the latest products and services needed to accomplish the desired result.
- ◆ Prepare a budget for the project; allow for provisions for any modifications and additions as the project progresses.
- ◆ Determine if the existing infrastructure can accommodate the existing and/or new systems.
- ◆ Develop a System Application Requirement Solution document. This document should define the system's configuration, function, growth, goals, time frame, and the responsibility of each party involved.
- ◆ Send the System Application Requirements document to qualified providers as a Request for Proposal.
- ◆ Carefully review the responses for completeness, responsiveness, and accuracy.
- ◆ Finally, have the construction process managed independently.