

education and training.

(b) Knowledge: The VAN support personnel subscribers will rely on must have substantial EDI experience. This includes expertise with the EDI standards, knowledge of communications systems, the EDI implementation process, application interface issues and knowledge of their subscribers' initial trading partners.

(c) Hours of Operation: Is the VAN support centre open for calls from subscribers 24 hours a day, 365 days a year? What kind of support is available, during which hours. Some companies require that some problems of an urgent nature be resolved as soon as possible, while for others it is acceptable to wait until the next day to address any problem.

(d) Toll-free Hotline: Is the support centre available by a toll-free call and do the people actually answering the telephone have the knowledge to help? Is there a queuing system to take calls? The answers to these questions are supplied by the VAN sales representative. The degree of importance placed on them by each subscriber will vary.

V Regions of Business Operation

Some VANs boast truly worldwide EDI operations with direct sales and subscriber support staff in many foreign countries and affiliate organizations in numerous others. Other VANs offer very limited direct sales and support, perhaps only North America. These usually provide network service to other countries via agreements with foreign VANs. This, in itself, can be a useful criterion in VAN selection. There is a clear advantage to the organization that can offer *end-to-end* service around the globe. Subscribers who use only one company to send and receive all their messages greatly simplify matters when queries have to be made.

The interests of trading partners must also be considered. Those who subscribe to the same VAN have a common bond that greatly enhances the likelihood of achieving EDI success. After all, foreign EDI users go through the same VAN selection process and implementation domestic users do.

VI Total Number of EDI Clients

Many VANs have thousands of network clients, but it may turn out that very few of these clients utilize EDI. They may be e-mail customers or database users. The viability of a VAN in the EDI market depends on the number of EDI subscribers it has. A company that may be an outstanding carrier of wire transfers or voice transmission or electronic mail may offer EDI service but not