

4.2 Recommended Network Characteristics and Services

I Industry Knowledge

When we speak of the right VAN we mean the VAN that has the most appropriate products, services and support for a particular corporate and computing environment, as well as for the industry at large. Industry experience can be very important in choosing a VAN. While all VANs can sign subscribers up and connect them to their network operations, some may already have many current customers active in the same industry sector. This means they can put new subscribers in touch with similar companies who use their services, and who are quite eager to help and give friendly advice -- even to competitors. Occasionally, VANs have an official user group whose meetings will attract companies with similar interests and concerns.

VANs that have emphasized a particular vertical market for their EDI services may also offer their clients access to other industry-related products or services, such as databases or catalogues, that would be of great interest. In addition, their knowledge of the industry makes them more sensitive to the needs of companies in that industry and more responsive to those needs.

II Communications Capability

Local or toll-free access becomes increasingly important as transactional volumes through the network increase. New subscribers should make certain that the actual hook-up to the VAN incurs no volume-related charges or connect charge. They must also decide on the preferred communications method (i.e. protocol, line speed) that will be used (part of the company profile exercise discussed in "How to Prepare for EDI" above), and which VAN is best equipped to handle their needs.

Note: Subscribers should choose the EDI communications solution that best meets their particular EDI needs, not those of other businesses.

Part of this process is also a decision on what communications software to install. New subscribers who already have such a package need to find out if it is also suitable for your EDI traffic. If not, they will need to examine other alternatives. As was mentioned before, some VANs offer inexpensive, if somewhat limited, communications software. Also, some EDI translation packages come with built-in or add-on communications capability. If this is available, it may be the easiest approach.

Readers are advised that some VANs require proprietary communications software to access their network. They should ask about this!