

Other Services

Integrated Solutions

Many of the VANs have assembled translation and communications software that works off-the-shelf with their network. These integrated solutions are aimed primarily at PC users who are looking for simple, easy-to-use solutions. For mid-range and mainframe systems, they are of lesser value; buying the best software for use with multiple networks is a better purchasing decision.

The majority of VANs offer integrated off-the-shelf PC software.

5.4 Pricing Information

The methods used by some of the EDI VANs for pricing their services is complex and variable. This makes it difficult to develop a quick comparison of VAN prices. It also perplexes to users who are new to EDI VANs. In analyzing the pricing information provided by these vendors, we classified the charges by type (see Section 5.4.1), then commented on the clarity of the information (see Section 5.4.2), and then built two pricing models to demonstrate *apples-to-apples* comparative pricing (see Section 5.4.3). Section 5.4.4 provides the results of the domestic and international pricing comparisons separately.

5.4.1 Pricing Concepts

Across the VANs there are similar charging concepts and categories of charges. All VANs charge for services based on the types and amounts of services used; they then apply either minima, maxima or volume discounts, depending on what agreements are in place. The typical classes of service charges are as follows:

Set-Up Fees

Most VANs have set-up or initiation fees. These will typically vary by the type of access used and what the customer receives in return for the fee (i.e. network manuals, training, etc.). A few VANs have annual fees.

Mailbox Processing

A charge based on the size of the message (usually thousands of characters or "KCs") which is charged when the EDI message is sent to the mailbox and when the EDI message is retrieved from the mailbox.