have enough EDI expertise to help subscribers when they need it. There is much more to EDI then providing a "pipe" to transmit messages.

It is desirable for companies to subscribe to the same VAN that their first few trading partners use. This should simplify their initial foray into EDI and make it somewhat easier. However, this is not essential. If a would-be EDI subscriber's plans and selection criteria do not dovetail with those of their first few intended trading partners, they can communicate via interconnect. Perhaps the best tack for a company to take would be to negotiate new trading partnerships with those already subscribing to the VAN of their choice with a view to hooking up with initial trading partners at some point in the future.

4.3 What Elements are Important?

Keep it simple! Oft heard but seldom heeded advice. After going through the process of analyzing what various VANs have to offer, would-be subscribers should consider beginning with an experienced trading partner who is also in the same city -- even if it is not the most important trading partner in the scheme of things -- and a VAN that has knowledgeable local support. They should start with one transaction type to gain confidence and skill with EDI -- a process that can take up to a year. At that point, subscribers are often ready to go on to more complex implementation involving multiple transactions, standards, partners and networks.

4.4 Direct Trading Versus Using a Value-Added Network

In Chapter 3.2 we discussed the difference between direct, point-to-point EDI and the use of a value-added network. The case we made for preferring to use a VAN over direct connect included security and ease of use. And in most cases, the use of a VAN is justifiable and the most recommended path to follow. However, there is one exception worth noting at this point. This is the case of the large corporation that has decided not to use VANs because they have a fully-implemented EDI system run by an experienced staff; they have set up their own mailbox, multiple communications links and support structure.

In this situation, others probably will have to accede to their requirements, if they wish to communicate by EDI with them -- even though this will likely mean added overhead.

The only possible way for a company to avoid this cost is to use a VAN as it would be used for other trading partners and have the VAN direct connect on their behalf (see Chapter 3.2 section v). This should be acceptable to all parties and solve the