

Asking the Right Questions

By Eric Hill

Sometimes, the hardest part about making a big purchasing decision is that feeling that we may have missed something. We're pretty sure we know what we want, but what if the direction we're headed in is not influenced by asking all the "right" questions? What are the right questions anyway?

For consumer items, fortunately, there are many handy guides available in print and online that help us better understand our intended purchase. By going the more social route, we can seek out both personal reviews from friends and family and online reviews from people with similar preferences. With this information available to us, it's actually hard to make a consumer purchase and not have some semblance of reliable input from others.

What about purchases for your business, and specifically wireless solutions? A few months back in *Transportation Leader*, I mentioned that the Enterprise Wireless Alliance was building a new online resource to help, called the Enterprise Wireless Solutions Center™. This program will offer businesses like yours an education-focused resource for discovering information about different wireless applications and technologies, products and solutions, and suppliers and manufacturers. Solution vendors from every market segment, including experts in transportation, will have an opportunity to supplement this industry library with educational content. Leads will come to vendors from qualified buyers looking for information on wireless applications like fleet management and vehicle tracking, messaging and mobile payments, and other wireless data and voice solutions.

As with most procurement projects, you'll decide what degree of involvement you and your staff will have in the solution research, purchase and installation. If you want to outsource the entire project, consultants and wireless sales and service providers can help. EWA is a great source for referrals, and the Enterprise Wireless Solutions Center will help even further. If you don't already have a relationship with a local sales and service provider, EWA can help you find one, as they can be key: they know your service area, they know how to work with different coverage challenges, they are aware of other wireless systems and users in your area, they know about local wireless spectrum issues, and they have access to a broad range of solutions to fit your budget. Their knowledge of your wireless system and your business will allow them to properly maintain your equipment and provide you with the right upgrades to keep you competitive. If you'd like to take a more hands-on approach in terms of researching and better understanding the technologies available, the Enterprise Wireless Solutions Center can help further, by walking you through those necessary decisions.

From fully-outsourced to completely hands-on solutions and every level of involvement in between, there are certain fundamentals you'll need to decide beforehand. For example, suppose you'd like a mobile payments or automatic vehicle location system that better suits your driver, back-office, and security requirements. Questions to ask include: who are the vendors, and once you choose one, what is their technical capability, their proven expertise in the transportation industry, their ability to execute on your requirements and schedule, their quality of work and installations, and long term availability to help you grow?

Then there are the fundamentals of your wireless system: the spectrum which your valuable voice and data information uses for transmission. Is your FCC license current and does that license suit your business needs now as well

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as for the future growth you envision? Whether you have the capacity now or need more in the future, who will you turn to for help? EWA can complete a license analysis that will answer all of these questions. Once we have ensured that your license is current we will work with you on your future spectrum needs. This might include transitioning your license from a wideband emission to one of the narrowband emissions, which is an FCC requirement by January 2013. EWA can manage your spectrum needs from FCC application preparation to frequency coordination to final FCC submittal.

In moving forward with your wireless system, you'll want to perform a business analysis to determine benefits and costs for each possible solution. For example, what are your coverage requirements; do you want an analog or digital system; what are your must-have features; what degree of employee control do you want, and on the flip-side, what security requirements do you have; how scalable do you need the solution to be and how reliable must it be; what are the fixed and recurring costs; and what are the recommended maintenance tasks and intervals? EWA's Enterprise

Wireless Solutions Center can help answer these questions.

Did you ever have a teacher in school tell you or hint as to which questions would appear on the upcoming test? Remember how much easier it made your job of studying? Having the right questions in today's business world when considering wireless purchases can also make your job a whole lot easier. It can be a great time-saver in the process of upgrading, deploying, and managing your wireless assets. Knowing where to go can be the first step: contact EWA at 800.482.8282, CustomerService@EnterpriseWireless.org, or visit us at www.EnterpriseWireless.org. ■



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EWA is also an FCC-certified frequency advisory committee that provides FCC licensing, frequency coordination, and spectrum management services for land transportation, industrial, and business entities. EWA represents TLPA on communications issues before the U.S. Government.

The opinions and recommendations in this article are those of the author, and not those of TLPA or its transportation company members.

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