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## IT Solutions in China

### IT Issues for a new office in China

If you are establishing a new business in China, then you will need to know more about IT and how it works here. For example, internet access is not quite the same as it is in New York or London. To help, we would like to outline some of the major IT issues that you as a business manager will have to face.

Obviously, the first step for a new operation in China is to get your office setup and ready to do business. There are so many pieces that go into setting up a modern office IT system that it is probably best if we just list the most common and then follow with a few words about each.

- **Office Lines (WAN / Phone) – Structured Office Cabling**
- **Hardware / Software - Phone System (PABX)**
- **Backup – Video Conference – Office Security**
- **Email / Exchange / Hosting / IT Support**

#### 1. Office Lines (WAN / Phone)

The first thing on everyone's list is of course Internet Access. Without it, you simply cannot communicate effectively in a modern business. While the big hotels tend to have good internet connectivity to other parts of the world, local ADSL and fiber options may a bit a bit disappointing compared to what you are used to. Improvements and upgrades are out there (including MPLS / FTTB / BGP) and bit of research into what is available and where, will go a long way towards getting your office properly connected. Also, keep in mind that prices for bandwidth (2M / 4M / 10M / etc.) will be 2 / 5 times more expensive for the same amount of bandwidth purchased outside of China. Some businesses even select their office location based on the availability and pricing of particular circuits or WAN connections – Not all office buildings offer the same options.

Phone lines come into two different types – PRI and Analog. The analog lines are what most people think of when they envision a phone line in their home – just a standard “Trunk Line”. A PRI Line is a digital line that can include up to 30 trunk channels and can support advanced digital functionality when connected to a Phone System in an office. Both of these lines can support the addition of a telecom VOIP service, which can reduce the cost of international and local long distance calls by up to 80%.

#### 2. Structured Office Cabling

Office Cabling refers to the wires in an office that network / connect users to each other and to the internet line. What you should be careful of is to make sure that the cable used for your office is, and that the work is handled by a reputable cabling or IT company as opposed to a decorator. A good cabling job should include testing of the ports when finished, as well as a decent guarantee. A good rule of thumb is that if the job looks professionally done and documented, then the actual cabling should be pretty good – only a full Fluke or other network test can tell the real difference.

#### 3. Hardware & Software

I guess the most contested issue in China is the availability and pricing of Hardware & Software, There are fakes of almost everything available in the market, and it is difficult even for some IT pros to tell the difference. While the upside is that it makes for some amazingly good deals in the market, the downside is that these pieces might not work. The best way to protect yourself is to source these from reputable retailers or through direct distributors as much as possible, and insist on full China-applicable warranties.

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#### **4. Phone system**

Phone systems (PABX) are available in a wide variety and functionality and price ranges in China. While even a basic unit will provide the normal extensions and automated operator for a small office, there are also units available that can handle advanced digital functions, such as call billing, voice messaging, and even IP connectivity to other branch offices. The best approach is to sit down with an experienced systems provider and discuss the various functions to select a system that will meet your office's goals and budget constraints the best.

#### **5. Backup**

Regular and secure backups of your corporate data is an important part of risk planning to help your office continue operating when the unexpected occurs. This system should guarantee that copies of Business Critical Data are taken regularly and stored, that the data is current, and most importantly that it can be re-applied as quickly as possible when it is needed. The available options range in function and in pricing from a simple portable Dard Drive, all the way up to Tape Storage. When choosing a system, you should consider the quantity & type of data that need to be backed up, as well as how often copies will need to be made. This will narrow down the choices, but the best method is to go to an experienced systems provider and ask them to recommend a solution based on these goals, and of course your budget.

#### **6. Video Conference**

Video Conferencing is an increasingly common tool as companies require face to face communication even when clients or team members are far abroad. There are many local and international brands for these products, each having its own advantages. The performance of whichever system you choose will be greatly affected by the type and speed of internet line (WAN) that you have available and what other traffic is competing against your video stream.

#### **7. Office security**

A Security System (or Facility Access Control) is what a company uses to monitor and control the traffic and door access into or out of an office. Most systems involve an access card, key code, or in some cases even a finger print scanner. Of course you can also add in video surveillance (CCTV), recording, access alarms; and in newer systems even has remote control or viewing of the security system via the internet. Here in China, it is also common to use these office security systems for attendance monitoring for HR purposes.

#### **8. Email / Exchange and Hosting**

Email and Hosting really fall into a single category. There is a seemingly limitless supply of Hosting providers in China: for everything from simple HTML websites to full ERP system cohosting. However, you do need to remember that since most hosting providers are fairly new at this service – China has only been connected to the internet since 1998 – there is a wide variance in the services actually provided, and few will probably meet international standards of Service Level Agreements (SLA). For example, does the provider use Anti-Spam filters? How about Anti-Virus filtering? Is there an Up-Time guarantee? Is the facility environmentally controlled and secure? Another question is – Do you even NEED to host your website or email in China, or can you host it in Hong Kong, or even in the United States? If your target is Chinese users, then the answer is that it is probably best to host your systems here on the Mainland. Just be prepared to go through a few more hoops and hurdles to – such as ICP licenses and registration procedures to actually get it done.

#### **9. IT Support**

IT Support and service in China has come a long way in recent years, with several options available for a multi-national company to choose from. While it is true that “you get what you pay for” in terms of

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service quality and technical capabilities, any IT Service company should be able to offer a range of technical support options for your China office, with support in English and Chinese. Some companies even offer full Help Desk and Remote Support services for offices and facilities in outlying areas. Look for the best fit for your office in terms of cost, communication & technical requirements and you should be off to a good start.

Like almost everything else in China, IT is just a little bit different here than in other parts of the world. The imported pieces cost a bit more, local delivery may take a bit longer from overseas and the internet may not be as fast for international usage, but almost all of it is here if you can adjust your expectations slightly. The good news is that IT in China is getting very close to international standards and it never hurts to ask a provider to adapt to your business needs, rather than the other way around.